

Righteousness

What Is “Righteousness” in the Bible?

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it **the righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."
(Romans 1:16-17)

<https://tinyurl.com/RightWithGod>

Expanded Discussion Questions

Why is it dangerous to define righteousness by culture or personal experience? (“Man” becomes the measure of all things.)

Why does God’s righteousness expose both our sin and our hope? (God is thus recognized as the measure of all things.)

Why This Matters for the Whole Study

- If we misunderstand righteousness at the start, everything else breaks.
- If righteousness starts with man, we end in pride or despair.
- If righteousness starts with God, we end in humility and trust.

This sets up the entire contrast of the study:

- **The righteousness of man** is self-made and unstable.
- **The righteousness of God** is revealed, given, and life-giving.

Rom 3:9-26 What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. (10) As it is written: "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE; (11) THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS; THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD. (12) THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE; THEY HAVE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE." (13) "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN TOMB; WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY HAVE PRACTICED DECEIT"; "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; (14) "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS." (15) "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD; (16) DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR WAYS; (17) AND THE WAY OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." (18) "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." (19) Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. (21) But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (22) even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (25) whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the

sins that were previously committed, (26) to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Behold the Man!

John 19:5



"I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing." Paul the Apostle, Galatians 2:21

Ecce Homo ("Behold the Man") by Antonio Ciseri, 1871

The title comes from John 19:5: "So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Look, here is the man!'"

John 19:4-6: "Then Pilate went outside again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no reason for an accusation against him.' So Jesus came out... When the chief priests and their officers saw him, they shouted out, 'Crucify! Crucify!'"

This reflects Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth."

Connection to this Study Theme

This image visually captures:

the righteousness of God standing silent

the righteousness of man expressed through law, crowd pressure, and political calculation

Pilate represents system-driven order.

The crowd represents fear-driven morality.

Jesus represents God's righteousness without control.

John 18:36: "My kingdom is not from this world."

That contrast is the heart of the painting.

Lesson One Summary

Foundations of Man's Righteousness

- Uncertainty drives fear.
- Fear demands control.
- Control creates systems.
- Systems produce human righteousness.
- Social contracts, theology, and ideology all become substitutes when they replace **trust** in God's righteousness. Social contracts replace trust in God with trust in consensus.
- The gospel does not remove uncertainty. It relocates **trust**.

Jeremiah 17:5 *"Cursed is the one who **trusts** in human beings... and whose heart turns away from the LORD."*

Proverbs 3:5 *"**Trust** in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding."*

Hebrews 8:10 *"I will put my laws in their minds, and I will inscribe them on their hearts."*

The Root Issue Is Trust, Not Knowledge

Human righteousness is not created because people lack information.

It is created because people fear dependence.

Trust feels risky.

Systems feel secure.

But only trust leads to life.

When certainty replaces trust, Christ becomes unnecessary.

Pharisaic Righteousness

Managing Uncertainty with Religious Systems

Matthew 23:23 *"You give a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you neglect what is more important in the law - justice, mercy, and faithfulness."*

- Pharisaic righteousness did not start with rebellion. It started with fear. Israel feared losing identity, purity, and God's favor. So, they built layers of rules to protect themselves. Jesus exposes this.
- The Pharisees were not rejecting righteousness. They were trying to control it.

How uncertainty shaped their system...

- Fear of disobedience led to rule expansion
- Fear of impurity led to separation
- Fear of judgment led to performance-based assurance
- Their system promised certainty:
 - *If I do this, I am righteous. If I avoid that, I am safe.*
- Jesus shows the flaw.

Luke 18:9 *"Jesus also told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else."*

- Confidence replaced trust.
- Comparison replaced repentance.
- This is the righteousness of man wearing religious clothing.

Pharisaic Righteousness: Managing Uncertainty With Religious Systems

In Contrast, God's Righteousness is His Character

God is righteous because that is who He is. He defines righteousness.

"The Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no dishonesty in him."
(Ps 92:15 NET)

"Your righteousness is like the highest mountains." (Ps 36:6 NET)

God is always consistent with His holiness, justice, and goodness.

He never acts unfairly. He never lies. He never bends the standard.

Modern Church Culture

New Systems, Same Instincts

Galatians 3:3 *“After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?”*

Uncertainty drives this...

- Fear of being wrong. Fear of being excluded. Fear of losing control.

Common modern versions include...

- Moral performance as spiritual proof.
- Doctrinal precision as righteousness.
- Political alignment as holiness.
- Ministry output as faithfulness.

None of these are evil on their own...

- They become dangerous when they provide identity and assurance.

So, systems form...

- Behavioral codes. Examples?
- Cultural expectations. Examples?
- Unspoken social contracts. Examples?

You belong if you comply. You are “righteous” if you align.

This is not covenant. It is managed morality.

Modern Church Culture: New Systems, Same Instinct

The forms change.

The instinct stays the same.

Modern churches often rebuild Pharisaic righteousness without realizing it.

In Contrast, God’s Righteousness Is His Faithful Action

God’s righteousness is not only a moral quality. It is also His **actions** that uphold His covenant promises.

“I am the Lord who demonstrates loyal love and justice and righteousness on the earth.” (Jer 9:24 NET)

Early Christians saw this as God keeping His promises to Israel and to the world through Christ.

Faith-Based Obedience vs System-Based Morality **Scriptural Contrast**

Romans 4:5 *“But to the one who does not work but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*

Key traits:

- Faith-based obedience flows from trust.
- It begins with God’s action, not ours.
- Obedience grows from covenant relationship.
- Repentance stays central.
- Humility remains possible.
- Love fulfills the law.

Galatians 5:6 *“The only thing that matters is faith working through love.”*

- Faith does not remove obedience.
- It roots obedience in trust.

Romans 10:3-4 *“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

Faith-Based Obedience vs System-Based Morality (Scriptural Contrast)

God’s Righteousness Revealed Through Jesus

Paul teaches that God’s righteousness is revealed in the gospel.

“For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith.” (Rom 1:17 NET)

And it is given through Christ.

“Christ is the end of the law, with the result that there is righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Rom 10:4 NET)

So, the righteousness of God is not only **what God is** but also **what God gives**.

Faith-Based Obedience vs System-Based Morality Scriptural Contrast

Colossians 2:20–23 *“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world... Why do you submit to them as if you lived in the world? ... They have the appearance of wisdom... but they are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”*

Key traits:

- System-based morality flows from fear.
- It begins with control.
- Obedience replaces trust.
- Rules replace conscience.
- Conformity replaces transformation.
- Pride or despair results.

Systems can shape behavior.

They cannot produce righteousness.

Phil 3:8-9 *“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, **not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith...**”*

Faith-Based Obedience vs System-Based Morality (Scriptural Contrast)

Col 2:20-23 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— (21) "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," (22) which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? (23) These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

God's Righteousness Is a Gift, Not a Wage

Paul stresses this repeatedly.

“A righteousness from God has been revealed... the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” (Rom 3:21-22 NET)

“This righteousness is not from the law.” (Phil 3:9 NET)

Early Christians saw salvation as God making sinners righteous through Christ's sacrifice, not through human effort.

Faith-Based Obedience vs System-Based Morality

Scriptural Contrast

Jesus' Summary of the Difference

Matthew 5:20 *"Unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Key points:

- "Beyond" does not mean *more rules*.
- It means a *different source*.
- One comes from man upward.
- The other comes from God downward.

Pharisaic righteousness, modern church systems, and moral ideologies *all share the same root...*

- Uncertainty without trust.

So, humans...

- Build systems, form contracts, enforce conformity, *call it righteousness*.

But God offers something else...

- God's righteousness is not negotiated.
- It is revealed (Romans 1:17).
- And it is *received by trust*, not managed by systems.

Faith-Based Obedience vs System-Based Morality (Scriptural Contrast)

Jesus' Summary of the Difference

Romans 1:17 *"The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith."*

Human Righteousness Is Limited and Flawed

The Bible says human righteousness is inconsistent and corrupt.

"There is no one righteous, not even one." (Rom 3:10 NET)

"All our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in your sight." (Isa 64:6 NET)

Human righteousness fails because it comes from:

- pride
- self-reliance
- selective obedience
- ignoring God's standards

Human Righteousness Often Turns into Self-Righteousness

Jesus confronted this with the Pharisees.

“They were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on others.” (Luke 18:9 NET)

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus shows the problem clearly.

The Pharisee says:

“God, I thank you that I am not like other people.” (Luke 18:11 NET)

The tax collector simply cries for mercy:

“God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am!” (Luke 18:13 NET)

Jesus concludes:

“This man went down to his home justified rather than the other.” (Luke 18:14 NET)

So, the “righteousness of man” often means **trying to justify oneself**.
This never stands before God.

Righteousness Starts With God, Not Man Who is the standard?

Romans 10:3 *They sought to establish their own righteousness and did not submit to God's righteousness.*

Psalms 119:142 *Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness*

Deuteronomy 32:4 *He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*

- In the Bible, righteousness does not begin with human behavior.
 - It begins with who God is.
- God does not measure Himself by a standard outside of Himself.
 - He *is* the standard.
- God is righteous because His nature is righteous.
 - He does what is right because He is right.
- Human ideas of goodness change.
 - God does not change.

Righteousness Starts With God, Not Man

Regardless of God's display of righteousness, mankind, throughout history has sought to establish himself as the measure of all things. Why?

Human Righteousness Tries to Earn God's Favor

Paul warns against trying to create one's own righteousness.

"They sought to establish their own righteousness, and did not submit to God's righteousness." (Rom 10:3 NET)

This is the heart of the difference.

Human righteousness says:

"I can make myself right."

God's righteousness says:

"You cannot make yourself right, but I will make you right through Christ."