



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 007: Righteousness

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Righteousness

1. What is it? One definition is God's way of thinking and doing things. Another is a right standing with God.

2. How does it work? Not by human effort. Read Genesis 15:1-6 and Romans 3:21-23. On what basis was Abraham (Abram) declared as righteous by God? It was through faith in what God says and in who God is. Read Romans 4:13.

Righteousness in men, i.e. right action and fair dealing, is a requirement of God, for God is the righteous judge. The prophets declare this truth, e.g. Amos 5:24: *"But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream."* But the prophets also recognise that man's righteousness is insufficient for God's standard, Isaiah 64:6: *"But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."*

This is where the righteousness of Christ comes in (read 2 Corinthians 5:21, and 1 Corinthians 1:30). The Apostle Paul recognises that righteousness cannot be found in the law, or in ourselves, but only through faith in Christ (read Philippians 3:8-9). The good news of the Gospel is that God, knowing our need, has given us righteousness as a gift, through faith in Jesus, who alone lived a wholly righteous life (Hebrews 4:15). (The theologians call this gift of righteousness "imputed righteousness.")

3. What does it look like? Read Matthew 5:20. The common expectation in Jesus' day, as in our day, is that those who have positions of religious leadership have a greater understanding of the subject than the man in the street. However, this does not seem to have been a case with the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. Their behaviour might have looked righteous to the common people, but continue reading the chapter and it becomes clear that Jesus is addressing the attitudes of the heart, not outward behaviour. However behaviour is not unimportant (read 1 John 3:7). In many of his letters St. Paul spells out for us what righteous attitudes and behaviour look like (see Ephesians 5:1-7, Colossians 3:12-17). Read Matt 15:19 then think of some of the heart attitudes that will result in better, good behaviour.

Jesus encourages His disciples not to be anxious about our daily needs, for our Heavenly Father knows our need, but to *"seek first the kingdom of God **and His righteousness**."* As we seek to obey the Word of God first and foremost, as Jesus Himself did, we are choosing to use the gift of righteousness He has given to live righteously, but doing so by faith and not self-reliance.

To think about: When Paul wrote to Timothy he encouraged him to meditate on these things. God has given the believer the gift of righteousness. How conscious am I of having received it? What difference is it making in my behaviour, interaction with others and how I see myself?

To dig deeper: Read about righteousness in a Bible dictionary.