

# The Truth about Righteousness

Mathias Bavay

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## Abstract

In religion, we often talk about *righteousness*. But what does it really mean? How can we recognize righteousness and practice it?

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# 1 What is righteousness?

## 1.1 definition:

- equity, justice, doing what is right
- moral meaning as well as legal and as natural law
- Syn: Uprightness; holiness; godliness; equity; justice; righteousness; integrity; honesty; faithfulness.
  - It pleases God
    - \* Ps 11:7, 45:7, Heb 1:9
    - \* Is 11:5, 59:16-17, Mt 3:15
    - \* God looks for it: Is 5:7
  - It is an attribute of God
    - \* Ps 99:4, Jer 23:6
    - \* Ps 35:24, Ps 36:6, 45:7

## 1.2 How to achieve righteousness?

- It is obedience to God's law (De 6:25; Rom 10:5; Lu 1:6; Ps 1:2)
- by being doers of the Law: Rom 2:17-25

We must practice righteousness, we must walk in righteousness<sup>1</sup> (this is a commandment).

# 2 Nazareth, we have a problem... Jerusalem, we have a Good News!

See Rom 1:29, Rom 3:10, Is 41:26.

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<sup>1</sup>Let them give examples of what to do. Go through the 10 commandments, have them silently evaluate which ones they consider they keep and which one they think they break. Briefly talk about each one, explaining what they mean according to a wide definition. Then imagine a life situation into which we are able to break most of them within a couple of minutes/hours

## 2.1 Problem: none is righteous!!

- None, by nature have righteousness (Job 15:14; Ps 14:3; Rom 3:10)
- the purpose of the Law is not to save, but to condemn! Rom 3:19
- don't confuse "righteousness" and "self-righteousness"!
- Unregenerated man seeks justification by works of righteousness (Lu 18:9; Rom 10:3 "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.")
- Pharisees: self-righteous  $\Rightarrow$  God hates that kind of behavior (cf the Pharisee and the tax collector, cf Christ's love toward people rejected by the society because considered unrighteous, plus this is *pride* which is sin (Pr 21:4), hateful to God (Pr 6:16,17; 16:5, Ja 4:6), hateful to Christ (Pr 8:12,13), often comes from self-righteousness (Lu 18:11,12). Satan rebelled because of pride!)
- plus, self-righteousness tends to judge others, which is very unrighteous (Rom 2:1)
- if you have the feeling you are "doing pretty good", this is not because you are better than everyone else, this is because you never had the opportunity to let your sinfull nature express its full (and awfull) reality! No "big sins" in your life is not a sign of personal succes against sin, this is a sign of the grace of God not allowing you to be tested too hard... Prisons are not full of monsters, there are so many people who were simply tempted and who got caught! If I would give away my password/login at church for my e-banking, allowing anybody to take money from it anonymously, do you think I would still had money on it at the end of the month?? (yes, it would be leading my brother/sister into temptation for him/her to fall!)

## 2.2 Righteousness can *only* come from God, through faith!

- not coming from us:
  - Cannot come by the law (Ga 2:21 "for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."; 3:21)

- No justification by works of righteousness (Rom 3:20; 9:31,32; Ga 2:16)
- No salvation by works of righteousness (Eph 2:8,9; 2Ti 1:9; Tit 3:5)
- given by God, we receive it by faith!
  - Is 61:10, Ps 24:5 -1Jo 2:29; 3:7
  - Rom 4: Faith gives us salvation, as an act of Grace.
  - it is a blessing to receive it without works: Rom 4:6

### 3 So, how does this all works?

#### 3.1 Rom 3 & 4:

- Righteousness is an attribute of God
- We can *not* be righteous as He is, all our efforts are only pride and self-righteousness: our efforts are us trying to earn our relationship with God.
- Like God promised under the old covenant to cover the sins if a sacrifice was made, He promises us under the new covenant to cover our sins with the sacrifice of Christ.
- So, real righteousness is our faith: by believing Christ died for us, by trusting His sacrifice (and understanding that it is needed for we are unrighteous), we are righteous (ie: we are doing what is right, just). (like Abraham was righteous in trusting the sacrifices he made covered his sins).
- Then, obeying the Law (ie: being righteous) is not a mean of having the favors of God, this is a sign of having been chosen by God (like circumcision: Rom 4:11). This is a sign of faith, and the expression of the renewed heart.

#### 3.2 How to be more righteous?

- first, we have to glorify God, that means showing His attributes, including:
  - love

- purity, holiness (ie: "set apart", that is different)
- righteousness
- do not try to impose yourself to follow more closely the Law: the Law is death, the Law is the condemnation, the Law is here to break the proud heart!
- draw closer to God (you can not long for the light if you have never seen it/experienced it):
  - learn His Glory and Power
  - learn His attributes
  - see Him as He is (through the Scriptures)
  - know Him better (by the Word, by prayer and by opening your eyes and your mind to the living Word of God in your life: look at how God is shaping you through your life, how He is making His Word alive in your heart thanks to the circumstances of your life, reply positively to His calling, see how He is answering your prayers)
  - rely on Him, submit to Him, be humble before Him, give everything back to Him at every single moment of your daily life (ie: "life attitude").
- open your eyes on your true nature
  - by trusting what the Bible says about it
  - by asking God to open your eyes (it hurts!)
  - by looking at yourself without complacency
  - do not be complacent: an "excuse" for a sin does not change its true nature!
  - face every single sinfull roots in your life:
    - \* see and define it
    - \* look for what the Bible says about it
    - \* look for its fruits
    - \* seek the attribute of God that is not visible in you and that leads you to sin (stealing could be a lack of love for a neighbour, it could be by not enough trusting God to provide for our **real** needs, ...)

- \* pray that God would teach you these spiritual things that are too weak in you.
- by acknowledging that we **really** are sinners undeserving of any blessing (humble repentance, see John the baptist, see Christ going to people considered lost BUT humble in their self-image, see humility in Ja 4:6)
- ask God to change your heart, to break your heart of stone and make it a heart that is truly regenerated.
- then, you are not imposing yourself to follow the Law, but your heart is naturally thirsty for doing what is right. You are not encaging a rebellious, dark and hard heart into a prison of Law, but your are having a renewed, bright and loving heart expressing his love and compassions in full freedom.
- true righteousness does not come from the outside to prevent our bad nature from expressing itself, but instead this is from the inside out, a pure heart longing for what is right.

In one word: feed the new nature, starve the old man in order to have your inner being filled with holy desires that can rightly be expressed and fulfilled!

## 4 Conclusion

As in every part of the christian life, the "easy way" is to follow rules... But the truth is to be renewed from the *inside*. This is much harder, because we can not simply change the facade, we need to change in our deepest inner being. We need God to work in us, to challenge us, to transform us. It can be painfull, tedious, unpleasant. But this is the way to become like Christ and to really be *free* in Him. The light of Christ, the freedom from the Law come at that price: submitting to God, looking for what He is telling us at every moment of our daily life and seing/facing our real condition before Him: sinners.

If you more or less skipped repentance in your christian life, it is not to late! Pray for God to bring you to the place of repentance, and He will show you the depth of His Grace after you will have seen the misery of your sins (cf: the NT needed centuries of OT to really know how precious is the salvation offered to us in Christ).

## A Biblical references

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### A.1 What is righteousness?

**Ps 11:7** For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

**Heb 1:9** You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

**Is 11:5** Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

**Mt 3:15** But Jesus answered him, Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he consented.

**Is 5:7** For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

**Ps 99:4** The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

**Jer 23:6** In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: The Lord is our righteousness.

**Ps 35:24** Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness, and let them not rejoice over me!

**Ps 36:6** Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord.

**De 6:25** And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.

**Rom 10:5** For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

**Lu 1:6** And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

**Ps 1:2** but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

**Rom 2:17–25** But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

## **A.2 Nazareth we have a problem. . . Jerusalem we have a Good News!**

**Rom 1:29** They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,

**Rom 3:10** as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one;

**Is 41:26** Who declared it from the beginning, that we might know, and beforehand, that we might say, He is right? There was none who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words.

**Job 15:14** What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?

**Ps 14:3** They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

**Rom 3:10** as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one;

**Rom 3:19** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.



**Lu 18:9** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

**Rom 10:3** For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

**Pr 21:4** Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.

**Pr 6:16** There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him:

**Ja 4:6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

**Pr 8:12** I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.

**Lu 18:11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

**Rom 2:1** Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

**Ga 2:21** I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

**Rom 3:20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

**Ga 2:16** yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

**Eph 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

**2Ti 1:9** who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

**Tit 3:5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

**Is 61:10** I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;my soul shall exult in my God,for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

**Ps 24:5** He will receive blessing from the Lordand righteousness from the God of his salvation.

**1Jo 2:29** If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

**Rom 4:6** just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

### **A.3 So how does this all works?**

**Rom 4:11** He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,

**Ja 4:6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.