

# ZOOM BIBLE STUDY: KEY TERMS OF SCRIPTURE

## RIGHTEOUSNESS

### Defining Righteousness

As with many words in Scripture “righteousness” has several shades of meaning depending on the context. It is always used in a moral and declaratory sense to mean “one who is upright, who has kept the law”. When we come upon this word, we must ask ourselves a series of questions to properly identify its sense:

- 1.) Whose righteousness is being spoken of—the LORD’s or a person’s?
- 2.) If the LORD is the subject, is the passage describing the intrinsic righteousness God possesses or the righteousness that he gives?
- 3.) If a person is in focus, is it describing the righteousness that God gives sinners by faith or the righteous acts that flow from God’s gift of faith?

### The Righteousness God Gives

1.) Describe Abraham’s life, the challenges he faced and overcame with the Lord. How does that make the following verse stand out all the more emphatically?

**Genesis 15:6** Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

2.) What was God communicating to Israel and to us by way of Abraham’s example?

**Habakkuk 2:4** (Quoted in Galatians 3:11) The righteous will live by his faith.

**Romans 4:5-8** However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

3.) How is the righteousness from God made one’s own?

**Romans 1:17** In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

**Romans 3:22-24** This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

4.) Why is this righteousness essential for salvation?

**Psalms 143:2** Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

**Isaiah 64:6** All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

**Romans 3:20** No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

**Galatians 3:21-22** Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the

Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

5.) How has Jesus won righteousness for the entire world?

**2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Romans 5:19** For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

6.) Evaluate based on the above passages: Old Testament people were saved by keeping God's law, but New Testament people are saved by faith in Jesus' merits.

7.) Why didn't the majority of the Jewish people receive God's gift of righteousness? Why did the Gentiles receive it instead?

**Romans 3:30-32** What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

### The Righteousness That Flows from Faith

1.) Those who have been made righteous through faith in Jesus also strive with the help of the Spirit to live righteous lives. However, what must we never forget about this righteousness?

**Titus 3:4-5** When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

**Galatians 2:21** I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

2.) If we are saved by faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sins and neither do our good works earn us heaven nor our sins deny us eternal life, how do we make sense of the following passages?

**Romans 2:13** For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

**James 2:20-24** You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

**1 John 3:7** Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

## Putting it into Practice

Identify how “righteousness” is being used in the following passages:

**Isaiah 45:21** “There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.”

**Jeremiah 23:6** “In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”

**Psalms 103:17-18** From everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

**Genesis 7:1** The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.”

**Deuteronomy 6:25** “If we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.”

*Closing Prayer: Jesus Christ, you are our righteousness. Thank you for winning the declaration of innocence for us before God’s judgment throne. Cause us now to lead righteous lives, rich in good deeds, in order to thank you for your great mercy to us. Amen.*