

Ideas of “Righteousness,” Briefly Stated

The explanations of righteousness given in the examples presented in this section are not exhaustive of every way that theologians, pastors, preachers and religious teachers attempt to explain righteousness and what it means to man. Rather, it is the majority teaching of the fundamentals of righteousness as it is understood today. Though it is tedious to examine the definitions of the various words, it is nonetheless essential for our understanding. If we are to understand where we are, we have to know what the teachers of the doctrine understand and what they impart to those who are taught by them.

In beginning, we examine the dictionaries before all else, as they record how words are commonly used in a language. Since we are a generation that does not know a time when there were no dictionaries, it is imperative that we understand: Dictionaries come about as a written record of the employment of words in a language. Thus, word entries in a dictionary come about after words are used in certain senses by a significant portion of the population. Logically, this reveals the understanding of a society concerning certain concepts. Of concern here is the concept of righteousness and what English speakers conceive as constituting righteousness.

The following definitions are the easily available definitions one can find anywhere. It is important to use them, rather than some archaic or esoteric definition that only few would know or understand, as the bulk of society will understand a concept by the generally accepted and commonly used definitions, rather than the esoteric. The Wikipedia entry also reflects the common understanding of the subject. There are also two examples excerpted from religious teachers which reflect how they attempt to teach about righteousness. Finally, there is a passage from the King James version and

the Strong's Concordance word references and definitions for that passage.

These should give a reasonable understanding of how righteousness is viewed in modern English-speaking society.

The basic dictionary definitions ((Regarding this particular subject, even the vaunted Oxford English Dictionary on a Historical Basis does not do any better than these basic definitions.))

righ·teous (adjective \ 'ri-chʔs\) ((“Righteous.” Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/righteous.](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/righteous)))

1: acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin

2 a: morally right or justifiable <righteous decision>

b: arising from an outraged sense of justice or morality <righteous indignation>

mor·al (adjective \ 'mo'r-əl, 'mär-\) ((“Moral.” Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral.](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral)))

1 a: of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior: ethical <moral judgments>

b: expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior <moral poem>

c: conforming to a standard of right behavior

d: sanctioned by or operative on one's conscience or ethical judgment <moral obligation>

e: capable of right and wrong action <moral agent>

2: probable though not proved: virtual <moral certainty>

3: perceptual or psychological rather than tangible or practical in nature or effect <moral victory>
<moral support>

eth·i·cal (adjective \ 'e-thi-kəl\) (("Ethical." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethical.>))

1: of or relating to ethics <ethical theories>

2: involving or expressing moral approval or disapproval <ethical judgments>

3: conforming to accepted standards of conduct <ethicalbehavior>

4of a drug: restricted to sale only on a doctor's prescription

Righteousness (("Righteous." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/righteous.>))

1: acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin

2a: morally right or justifiable <righteous decision>

b: arising from an outraged sense of justice or morality <righteous indignation>

From Wikipedia (("Righteousness." Wikipedia.com. Accessed August 28, 2014. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Righteousness>))

Righteousness (also called rectitude) is an important theological concept in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism (Dharma), and Zoroastrianism. It is an attribute that implies that a person's actions are justified, and can have the connotation that the person has been "judged" or "reckoned" as leading a life that is pleasing to the god/s portrayed in these belief systems.

William Tyndale (Bible translator into English in 1526) remodelled the word after an earlier word rihtwis, which would have yielded modern English *rightwise or *rightways. He used it to translate the Hebrew root צדק (TzDYQ), tzedek, which appears more than five hundred times in the Hebrew Bible, and the Greek word δίκαιος (dikaios), which appears more than two hundred times in the New Testament.

Hebrew definition

The Hebrew word for righteousness is tseh'-dek, tzedek, Gesenius's Strong's Concordance:6664—righteous, integrity, equity, justice, straightness. The root of tseh'-dek is tsaw-dak', Gesenius's Strong:6663—upright, just, straight, innocent, true, sincere. It is best understood as the product of upright, moral action in accordance with some form of divine plan.[citation needed]

One teacher's explanation (“What is Righteousness?” Word of Faith blog. Accessed August 25, 2014. <http://word-faith.blogspot.com/2009/05/righteousness.html>)

What is righteousness? That question has baffled scholars and intellectuals for decades. Some men came up with many religious exercises so that they could become righteous according to their standards. Others clung to one verse in the Bible that they took out of context. People want to jump all over Romans 3:10 and say, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” But you have to understand this in context. In Romans 3:9 Paul is talking about Jews and Greeks that are under sin. After this passage, in Romans 3:19, he talks about these people being under the law. So then, those that are just under the law are not righteous. What we do see though, is a man who was under that law, was counted as righteous. James 2:23 says, “‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.” So then, even though Abraham was under the law, he believed God, and because he believed God, God treated him like he was righteous, even though he wasn't.

Now, to fully understand what this means, we need to define righteous. Righteousness is defined as without guilt or sin. We could also define it as right standing with God. So even though Abraham was under the law, and was not able to obtain this righteousness, because he believed God, God treated him like he was righteous.

The Meaning of God's Righteousness – John Piper ((“The Freedom and Justice of God in Unconditional Election” 01/12/2002, John Piper.” [desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Accessed March 24, 2014.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/the-freedom-and-justice-of-god-in-unconditional-election>))

That is the first key to understanding the argument of Romans 9:15 – the context of the quote from Exodus 33:19. Now the second key is the meaning of God's righteousness. What does Paul mean by righteousness, when he says, “There is no unrighteousness with God”? If I had time I would love to develop a long argument from the Old Testament, and from Paul's use of the “righteousness of God,” to show you where I get the answer to that question. But all I have time for is to give you my conclusion and say that I will come back in three weeks with support for it.

God's righteousness is essentially his unswerving allegiance to his own name and his own glory. God is righteous to the degree that he upholds and displays the honor of his name. He is righteous when he values most what is most valuable, and what is most valuable is his own glory. Therefore God's justice, his righteousness, consists most fundamentally in doing what is consistent with the esteem and demonstration of his name, his glory. God would be unrighteous if he did not uphold and display his glory as infinitely valuable.

Usages and definitions in a single passage. Definitions from Strong's Concordance

Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. (Psalm 112:1-4) ((The Holy Bible :

King James Version., electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version., Ps 112:1-4 (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995).))

English: "upright" ((Strong, James. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test (sic) of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence(sic) of Each Word in Regular Order., H3477. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.))

3477 yashar { yaw-shawr' } from 3474; TWOT – 930a; adj
AV – right 53, upright 42, righteous 9, straight 3, convenient 2, Jasher 2, equity 1, just 1, meet 1, meetest 1, upright ones 1, uprightly 1, uprightness 1, well 1; 119

GK – 3838 { יָשָׁר } 3839 & { יָשָׁר } }

1) straight, upright, correct, right

1a) straight, level

1b) right, pleasing, correct

1c) straightforward, just, upright, fitting, proper

1d) uprightness, righteous, upright

1e) that which is upright (subst)

English: "righteous"

6662 tsaddiyq { tsad-deek' } from 6663; TWOT – 1879c; adj
((Ibid.H6662))

AV – righteous 162, just 42, righteous man 1, lawful 1; 206

GK – 7404 { צַדִּיק } }

1) just, lawful, righteous

1a) just, righteous (in government)

1b) just, right (in one's cause)

1c) just, righteous (in conduct and character)

1d) righteous (as justified and vindicated by God)

1e) right, correct, lawful

English: "righteousness"

6666 ts^edaqah { tsed-aw-kaw' } ((Ibid. H6666))

from 6663; TWOT – 1879b; n f AV – righteousness 128, justice 15, right 9, righteous acts 3, moderately 1, righteously 1; 157

GK – 7407 { □□□□□□□□ }

1) *justice, righteousness*

1a) *righteousness (in government)*

1a1) *of judge, ruler, king*

1a2) *of law*

1a3) *of Davidic king Messiah*

1b) *righteousness (of God's attribute)*

1c) *righteousness (in a case or cause)*

1d) *righteousness, truthfulness*

1e) *righteousness (as ethically right)*

1f) *righteousness (as vindicated), justification, salvation*

1f1) *of God*

1f2) *prosperity (of people)*

1g) *righteous acts*

In examining the given examples, the desire is for the reader's understanding that I am not being flippant, but making a point when I state:

Considering the fore-going, we might actually get further if we played "Ring Around the Rosie."

The reason for the comment is this:

With the exception of the explanations addressing a "divine plan" or "divine law," all the above is circular.

Nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, in the above actually puts forth a measurable, objective standard for what righteousness is. If we note, righteousness is defined as being moral and/or ethical. Moral and ethical are defined as "conforming to a standard of right behavior" or "conforming to accepted standards of conduct," where "right behavior" and "accepted standards" are defined as "morally right or justifiable."

If we abandon the circular logic of the definitions and elect "in accordance with divine law" or the "divine plan," we fare

no better. Electing the route of “in accordance with Divine law,” leaves us with the problems of determining the “divine law” or “divine plan,” which may or may not be knowable and/or understandable. Moreover, which version of events constitutes the “divine plan” and which set of commandments coming from which “God” constitute the “divine law?” Electing this route, we are left with John Piper’s convoluted idea of God’s righteousness (which is essentially self-worship), the “whatever God says, that is right” idea, or “being without guilt or sin,” (whatever that means) depending upon whoever is interpreting whatever passage they think applies. Surely we can see that we get nowhere going this route, and therefore effectively remain at square one.

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