

צְדָקָה

## **Tzedakah: The Way of Righteousness**



### THE CONCEPT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

### **Walking the Ancient Path of Torah Obedience**

**Written by Rex  
For the Awakening Remnant**

*And it shall be righteousness for us, when we observe to do all these commandments before YHWH our 'Elohiym, as He has Commanded us. — Deuteronomy 6:25*

# **The Concept of Righteousness**

## **Introduction to Righteousness**

Righteousness is a fundamental concept deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. At its core, righteousness refers to the quality of being morally right or justifiable, embodying principles of integrity, virtue, and adherence to God's laws. In different contexts, righteousness consistently represents a standard of moral excellence.

In the realm of morality, righteousness is often associated with actions that align with ethical principles and societal norms. It involves making choices that promote fairness, justice, and the well-being of others. A righteous person is one who consistently acts with honesty, compassion, and a sense of duty towards others.

From a religious perspective, righteousness is central to the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Torah frequently emphasizes the importance of righteousness, as seen in passages like Deuteronomy 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. (Deut. 6:25)*

This verse underscores the idea that righteousness is achieved through obedience to God's Commandments and living a life of moral integrity.

In the ethical domain, righteousness is viewed as the pursuit of moral virtues and the adherence to ethical codes. The Hebrew Scriptures provide numerous examples of righteous individuals who exemplify these virtues. For instance, in Genesis 6:9, Noah is described as "*a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.*" This highlights the importance of living a life that is pleasing to God and adhering to His Commandments. To illustrate the significance of righteousness, consider the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. (Isaiah 5:16)*

This quote emphasizes that righteousness is not merely an abstract ideal but a practical guide for living a morally upright life in accordance with God's will.

In summary, righteousness is a multifaceted concept that encompasses moral integrity, ethical conduct, and religious piety. It serves as a guiding principle for individuals seeking to live a life of virtue and justice. By understanding and embracing righteousness, we can strive to create a more just and compassionate world.

## **Righteousness in Christianity**

In Christianity, righteousness is a central theme deeply intertwined with the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the apostles. At its core, righteousness in Christianity refers to being in right standing with God, which is believed to be achieved through faith in Jesus. This concept is rooted in the belief that humans are inherently sinful and can only attain righteousness through the grace of God.

Paul, in his letters, emphasizes that righteousness is not something that can be earned through human effort or adherence to the law, but is a gift from God that comes through faith in Jesus. In Romans 3:22-24, Paul writes:

*This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24)*

In practical terms, Christians are called to live out their faith by following the teachings of Jesus and striving to embody his example of love, compassion, and humility. This includes acts of kindness, charity, and justice, as well as personal spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, and studying the Bible. However, these actions are viewed as expressions of faith rather than means to achieve righteousness.

Despite its importance, the concept of righteousness is not always a focal point in modern Christian teachings. Many contemporary churches emphasize the message of grace and salvation through Jesus, sometimes at the expense of discussing the practical aspects of living a righteous life. This shift in focus can lead to a lack of understanding about the importance of righteous living and the ways in which Christians are called to reflect God's righteousness in their daily lives.

In summary, righteousness in Christianity is understood as being in right standing with God through faith in Jesus. While it is considered a gift from God, Christians are encouraged to live out their faith through righteous actions and a Christ-like lifestyle. However, the emphasis on grace and salvation in modern church teachings can sometimes overshadow the practical aspects of righteousness.

## Distinct Differences

### Comparison of Righteousness in Hebrew Scriptures and Christianity:

| Aspect                | Hebrew Scriptures  | Christianity   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Definition            | Adherence to God's commandments and living a life of moral integrity     | Right standing with God through faith in Jesus               |
| Source                | Achieved through obedience to the Torah and following God's Instructions | A gift from God, received through faith in Jesus             |
| Key Teachings         | Emphasized the importance of keeping the Instruction (Deut. 6:25)        | Emphasized grace and faith (Rom. 3:22-24)                    |
| Examples              | Men like Noah, Abraham, and Moses—righteous by obedience                 | Jesus as ultimate example; righteousness by belief           |
| Practical Application | Living a life of moral integrity, justice, and adherence to Torah        | Living out faith through compassion and humility             |
| Modern Emphasis       | Continued focus on Torah obedience and moral uprightness                 | Often emphasizes grace and salvation over righteous behavior |

Righteousness is a central theme in both the Hebrew Scriptures and Christianity, but the two traditions approach it in very different and distinct ways. The following table offers a comparison to highlight their theological and practical differences:

### Distinct Contrast

The Hebrew Scriptures present righteousness as a tangible goal, achieved through obedience to God's Commandments. It is a practical guide for living a life of integrity and justice. The Torah, as handed down to Moses, outlines a covenantal way of life, emphasizing responsibility, community, and loyalty to YHWH.

In contrast, Christianity—especially in Pauline theology—presents righteousness as a legal status granted by divine grace through faith in Jesus. This approach shifts focus from human responsibility to divine initiative, often minimizing the ongoing role of Torah observance. It introduces a theological model where righteousness is imputed, but not demonstrated.

While both traditions value righteousness, their definitions, sources, and implications diverge sharply. The Torah calls for action, covenant loyalty, and moral obedience. Pauline Christianity elevates belief, faith, and grace as the primary path to righteousness. This divergence underscores fundamentally different understandings of what it means to be righteous before God.

### Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Righteousness

Righteousness, a concept deeply rooted in moral and ethical principles, has been perceived differently across various cultures and historical periods. Here's a brief overview:

#### Ancient Civilizations

- **Mesopotamia:** In ancient Mesopotamia, righteousness was closely tied to justice and the divine order. The Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest legal codes, emphasized fairness and retribution.
- **Ancient Egypt:** The concept of Ma'at represented truth, balance, and cosmic order. Pharaohs were seen as upholders of Ma'at, ensuring harmony and justice in society.

#### Classical Antiquity

- **Greece:** Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle discussed righteousness in terms of virtue and moral character. Plato's concept of justice in *The Republic* was about harmony within the individual and the state.
- **Rome:** Roman law and Stoic philosophy emphasized righteousness as living in accordance with nature and reason. The idea of *pietas* (duty to gods, country, and family) was central.

#### Religious Perspectives

- **Judaism:** Righteousness (*tzedakah*) is a fundamental concept, often associated with charity and justice. The Torah and Talmud provide extensive guidelines on ethical behavior.

- **Christianity:** In Christianity, righteousness is seen as living in accordance with God's will. The New Testament emphasizes faith and grace as pathways to righteousness.
- **Islam:** Righteousness (taqwa) in Islam involves piety, moral conduct, and adherence to the teachings of the Quran and Hadith. It is seen as a way to attain closeness to God.

## Eastern Philosophies

- **Hinduism:** Dharma, a key concept in Hinduism, encompasses righteousness, duty, and moral law. It varies according to one's role in society and stage of life.
- **Buddhism:** The Eightfold Path in Buddhism outlines righteous conduct, including right speech, action, and livelihood, as essential for achieving enlightenment.
- **Confucianism:** In Confucian thought, righteousness (Yi) is about moral disposition to do good, emphasizing social harmony and proper conduct.

## Modern Perspectives

- **Western Thought:** Enlightenment thinkers like Kant viewed righteousness as adherence to universal moral laws. Contemporary views often link it to human rights and social justice.
- **Global Context:** Today, righteousness is often associated with ethical leadership, social responsibility, and the pursuit of justice in a globalized world.

This overview highlights the diverse ways in which righteousness has been understood and valued across different cultures and historical periods. Each perspective offers unique insights into the moral and ethical dimensions of human life.

## Examples of Righteousness

The Hebrew Scriptures, also known as the Tanakh or Old Testament, are rich with stories of individuals who exemplified righteousness. These examples provide concrete demonstrations of what it means to walk uprightly with YHWH and live in covenantal obedience:

### Noah

- **Story:** Noah is described as a righteous man in a time when humanity was corrupt and violent. God chose Noah to build an ark and save his family and pairs of every animal species from the Great Flood.
- **Impact:** Noah's obedience and faithfulness preserved human and animal life, allowing for a new beginning for creation. His story emphasizes the importance of righteousness and obedience to God.

### Abraham

- **Story:** Abraham, originally named Abram, is considered the father of the Hebrew nation. He demonstrated righteousness through his unwavering faith in God, even when asked to sacrifice his son Isaac.

- **Impact:** Abraham's steadfastness and righteousness established a Covenant with God, promising that his descendants would become a great nation. This Covenant is foundational to Jewish traditions.

## Joseph

- **Story:** Joseph, one of Jacob's twelve sons, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Despite his hardships, he remained righteous and eventually rose to become the second most powerful man in Egypt.
- **Impact:** Joseph's righteousness and wisdom saved Egypt and his family from a severe famine. His story highlights the virtues of forgiveness, integrity, and faith in God's plan.

## Moses

- **Story:** Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. He is revered as a prophet and lawgiver.
- **Impact:** Moses' leadership and righteousness established the foundation of Jewish law and ethics. His actions shaped the identity and religious practices of the Israelite community.

## Ruth

- **Story:** Ruth, a Moabite woman, showed remarkable loyalty and righteousness by staying with her mother-in-law Naomi after the death of her husband. She later married Boaz, a relative of Naomi, and became the great-grandmother of King David.
- **Impact:** Ruth's story emphasizes the values of loyalty, kindness, and faith. Her inclusion in the lineage of David, and ultimately the Messiah according to Christian tradition, highlights the universal nature of righteousness.

## Daniel

- **Story:** Daniel was a Jewish exile in Babylon who remained faithful to God despite facing persecution. He is known for interpreting dreams and surviving the lions' den.
- **Impact:** Daniel's righteousness and unwavering faith in God served as an example to his fellow exiles and demonstrated God's power and protection. His story inspires courage and steadfastness in the face of adversity.

These stories from the Hebrew Scriptures illustrate how righteousness can lead to profound impacts on individuals, communities, and the world. Each figure's actions and faithfulness to God serve as timeless examples of moral and ethical behavior.

## Teachings of the Torah: Paul vs. Torah

Let's now contrast Paul's teachings on righteousness with those of the Torah, highlighting how the Torah defines righteousness and the importance of following God's Commandments:

### **Paul's Teachings on Righteousness**

Paul's teachings, primarily found in the New Testament, emphasize faith in Jesus Christ as the means to attain righteousness. Key themes include:

#### **Faith**

*This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*  
(Romans 3:22)

#### **Grace**

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*  
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

#### **Justification**

*Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 2:16)

### **The Torah's Perspective on Righteousness**

The Torah presents a very different perspective, emphasizing adherence to God's Commandments and living a life of moral integrity. Key themes include:

#### **Obedience to God's Commandments**

*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.* (Deuteronomy 6:25)

#### **Moral Integrity**

*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Leviticus 19:18)

#### **Covenant Relationship**

*Walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make My Covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.* (Genesis 17:1-2)

### **Examples from the Torah**

## Abraham

*And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen. 15:6)*

## Moses

Moses exemplifies righteousness through his leadership and adherence to God's Commandments. He receives the Ten Commandments and guides the Israelites in following God's laws (Exodus 20).

## Joseph

*And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. ... God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (Genesis 45:4-7)*

Joseph's righteousness is demonstrated through his integrity and forgiveness. Despite being sold into slavery by his brothers, he rises to power in Egypt and saves his family from famine.

## Contrasting Perspectives

- **Faith vs. Works:** Paul emphasizes faith in Jesus as the means to righteousness, while the Torah emphasizes obedience to God's Commandments and moral integrity.
- **Grace vs. Covenant:** Paul highlights grace as a gift from God, whereas the Torah focuses on the covenant relationship and the responsibilities it entails.
- **Justification:** Paul teaches justification by faith, while the Torah emphasizes righteousness through adherence to the law and ethical behavior.

In summary, while both Paul's teachings and the Torah address the concept of righteousness, they approach it from fundamentally different angles. The Torah emphasizes a life of obedience to God's Commandments and moral integrity, deeply rooted in Israel's history, culture, and Covenant with God. This perspective, encapsulated in a **Code of Conduct or Way of Life**, is one that individuals can either accept or reject.

On the other hand, Paul's teachings focus on faith in Jesus and the grace of God as the means to attain righteousness. This approach diverges significantly from the Torah's emphasis on divine law and ethical behavior. Christianity, by adopting Paul's perspective, has effectively rejected the Torah's approach to righteousness in favor of a doctrine that is foreign and contradictory to the teachings handed down by God to Moses.

This divergence raises a critical question: who should one believe? The God of the Torah, whose Commandments and Covenant have guided Israel for generations, or a man who claimed apostolic authority and introduced teachings that conflict with the Torah? The choice is between the time-honored, enduring, divinely ordained path of the Torah and the interpretations of a single individual whose writings have been embraced by the Church.

## More Thoughts

Through this study I have set forth the teachings of both the Torah and the writings of Paul. The Torah is a divine set of Instructions and Guidelines by which God wants His people to live. It can be called a **Way of Life or a Code of Conduct**. It is NOT a religion but a **Way of Life** that is righteous and being fair and honorable to one's fellow neighbor. The Torah is not a bunch of dos and don'ts that mean if you fail at one point God is going to use a hammer and hit you on the head. No, it is much deeper than anyone really imagines. It is a way of life any parent would approve of to keep their child safe. It is a very moral and positive way of life. For anyone to say that it is such a heavy burden and no one can keep the Torah is only saying that God designed a way of life for someone who practices it to be doomed to failure.

When someone claims that the Torah is an impossible burden and that no one can keep its Commandments, it implies that God set up a system destined for failure. This perspective can be seen as questioning God's fairness and wisdom. Here are a few key points to consider:

### **Implications of this Claim**

- **Questioning God's Fairness:** Suggesting that the Torah is an impossible burden implies that God gave Commandments that humans are incapable of following. This challenges the notion of a just and fair God who provides guidance that is achievable and beneficial.
- **Undermining Divine Wisdom:** The Torah is presented as a divinely inspired guide for living a righteous and fulfilling life. Claiming that it is impossible to keep undermines the wisdom and purpose behind God's Commandments.

### **Especially When God Says This:**

- **Achievability:** The Torah itself emphasizes that its commandments are not beyond human capability.

*For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off... But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)*

- **Purpose:** The Commandments are designed to promote justice, compassion, and holiness. They provide a framework for ethical behavior and community harmony.
- **Support:** The Torah acknowledges human imperfection and provides means for atonement and repentance, such as the sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

### **Misconceptions**

- **Burden:** The perception of the Torah as a burden may stem from misunderstandings or misrepresentations of its purpose and nature. The Commandments are meant to be a source of life and blessing, as stated in Deuteronomy 30:19:

*I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)*

- **Human Capability:** Suggesting that no one can keep the Torah implies that God set up a system designed for failure, which contradicts the Torah's message of achievable righteousness and divine support.

### When One Contradicts a Divine Commandment

When someone, such as Paul, teaches something entirely different from what the Torah teaches about righteousness, it raises very significant concerns. The Torah emphasizes that righteousness is achieved through obedience to God's Commandments and living a life of moral integrity. Paul comes along and promotes a much different path to righteousness, such as “believing” in Jesus makes one righteous through grace. This can be seen as contradicting, and undermining the divine Instructions given by God. Who are you going to believe?

### Implications of Contradicting the Torah

- **Questioning Divine Authority:** Teaching something different from the Torah's Commandments implies questioning the authority and wisdom of God's Instructions. The Torah is considered the foundational text of God's Covenant with Israel, and its teachings are seen as divinely ordained.
- **Misleading Others:** Paul's promotion of a different path to righteousness leads people away from the Commandments and Covenant that God established. This can only be seen as misleading others and causing them to miss the path that God has set, and sin.

Deuteronomy 13:

*If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder; And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. (Deut. 13:1-5)*

The Torah provides guidelines for identifying false prophets in Deuteronomy 13. It emphasizes that any prophet or teacher, including Paul, who leads people away from God's Commandments is to be rejected. This passage underscores the importance of adhering to the Torah and being wary of teachings that contradict it.

## **Conclusion**

When someone teaches a path to righteousness that contradicts the Torah, it challenges the authority and wisdom of God's commandments. The Torah emphasizes obedience to God's laws as the means to righteousness, and any teaching that diverges from this can be seen as misleading and contrary to divine instruction. It's important to critically evaluate such teachings and remain steadfast in the principles and Commandments outlined in the Torah.

The Torah presents a way of life that is both attainable and meaningful. It emphasizes obedience to God's Commandments as a path to righteousness and fulfillment. Misunderstanding or misrepresenting the Torah as an impossible burden undermines its true purpose and the divine wisdom behind it. The Torah encourages steadfastness, moral integrity, and a close relationship with God, all of which are within human reach.

## **My Thoughts**

I know what I believe and what I am striving to achieve. I try to live by the Torah and the Commandments of God. I have embraced the Covenant, as many Gentiles have done throughout the centuries. I encourage anyone, whether Christian or non-Christian, to consider setting aside the New Testament and their church, and instead embrace the Covenant and live according to the **Way of Life, or Code of Conduct**, prescribed in the Torah. For about 35 years of my life, I was a Oneness Believer in the Church. Once I began to recognize the inconsistencies between Church doctrine and the truths revealed in the Torah, I made the difficult but necessary decision to step away from the New Testament and traditional Christianity. That choice has brought me into deeper alignment with YHWH's Covenant. If you, too, are seeking truth, I invite you to consider walking this ancient path.

## **Questions to Ponder**

- **If righteousness is defined by obedience in the Torah, why would later teachings shift it to belief alone?**

### **Answer:**

Because of the influence of Hellenistic thought, which prioritized abstract ideas over concrete obedience, and sought a universalized, spiritualized religion that could function outside of Israel's Covenant.

- **Can a teaching that contradicts Torah still be considered divinely inspired?**

### **Answer:**

According to Deuteronomy 13, any prophet or teacher who leads people away from Torah—even with signs or miracles—is to be rejected. The Torah is the eternal standard.

- **Is the Torah truly too hard to keep, or is that a misunderstanding?**

**Answer:**

The Torah itself says, “It is not too hard for you... so that you can do it” (Deut. 30:11–14). YHWH designed it to be lived, not debated or replaced.

- **What does it say about God’s character if He gave a Covenant and Instructions that no one could keep?**

**Answer:**

It would suggest injustice or futility—yet Scripture teaches that YHWH is righteous, just, and faithful. Therefore, His Torah must be wise, good, and achievable.

- **Who do I trust more with defining righteousness: the voice of Moses at Sinai or the voice of Paul in his letters?**

**Answer:**

This is the central question. The Torah says not to add or take away. If Paul contradicts it, the choice is not between two interpretations—it’s between fidelity and deviation; obedience and disobedience.