

CAN GOD EXPECT US TO BE RIGHTEOUS?

JAMIE MCNAB

14.10.23

Can you be righteous before God?

Too weak? We have got far too much human nature? Too carnal?

Is it even worth trying to be a righteous person? Doesn't the Bible itself say all of our righteousnesses is as filthy rags to God? If that's the case ... what's the point?

When I first came into the Worldwide Church of God ... I heard quite a lot about my human nature — **all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ... the heart is deceitful above all things ... there is none that doeth good ... no ... not one ... and of course ... your righteousnesses are as filthy rags to God.**

It doesn't do much for one's self-esteem? Though fair enough — if it's Biblical ... we can't argue with it??

Since then ... I have heard **many TV evangelists and others say** much the same. **No one can be righteous in God's sight — so Jesus came ... lived a perfect life ... on your behalf — and now His righteousness is imputed to you.**

So you may still be a disgusting sinful rotter — but God sees you as righteous in Christ.

Such beliefs can have knock-on effects — unintended. I've seen quite a few where almost it's accepted there's no real need to even try to live a physically righteous life — you won't succeed. Just rest in your imputed righteousness. That's a fairly popular view.

Despite the popularity of this view ... I believe it is in error. We can live righteous lives — and should. People did before us. People will live righteous lives in The World Tomorrow.

Let's look at the offending verse.

Isaiah 64:6

6 But **we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;**

We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.

This is Isaiah speaking to God.

There it is. You can't argue with the Bible. But is that the whole story?

Questions:

- **Can fallen humans ever be considered righteous by God?**
- **If we could do acts of righteousness — how would God view them?**
- **How do we harmonise any apparently contradictory verses?**

Let's look at one more scripture that tells us we're "no good".

Romans 3:10-12

10 As it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;

There is none who does good, no, not one."

The scripture tells us there is none righteous. So ... no one can ever be righteous?

Is this correct? It sounds fairly damning. **IS IT ACCURATE?** If so ... then there's a problem.

But ... what about the next verse?

Luke 1:5-6

5 **There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias**, of the division of Abijah. **His wife was** of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was **Elizabeth**.

6 **And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.**

That's odd. **They were both righteous before God.** Maybe the word for "righteous" is different? No. It's the same word.

Greek: Dikaios — the same word as Romans Chapter 3 (the same word used throughout the New Testament — often translated into English as "just").

Luke called them righteous. But ... does God see them as righteous?

Matthew 13:16-17

16 "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;
17 **for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see**, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Jesus says there are "many righteous men". He refers to righteous men in the past tense?! This isn't just Luke's perspective.

Matthew 23:33-36

33 **Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?**

34 "Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,

35 "that on you may come **all the righteous blood** shed on the earth, **from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah**, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

36 "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Abel was righteous says Jesus. Implies that Zechariah was righteous and many prophets in the past. (**Dikaios**)

Just to show that we're talking of "real" righteousness ... consider:

John 17:24-26

24 "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

25 "**O righteous Father!** The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.

26 "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

"O righteous Father" — the same Greek word — Dikaios.

Some Old Testament examples:

The equivalent to Dikaios in Hebrew: Tsaddiyq — "righteous" or "just".

Used more than 200 times in the Old Testament ... the same root word as in Isaiah 64:6.

Genesis 6:5-9

5 Then **the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** (*generally true*)

6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. (*it was bad*)

7 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for **I am sorry that I have made them.**" (*God rejected the Creation at this point in time*)

8 **But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.**

9 This is the genealogy of Noah. **Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.** (*Just = Tsaddiyq*) (*ESV: righteous*)

Was that just Moses' opinion about Noah?

Genesis 7:1

1 Then the LORD said to Noah, "**Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.**"

GOD says to Noah: "You are righteous"!

If all our righteousnesses is as filthy rags ... how come Jesus and God are calling people righteous?

We can be righteous!! Therefore ... it's not true to say that no one can be righteous.

Ezekiel 18:20-26

20 "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. **The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself**, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (*Righteous people doing righteous. Hebrew: Tsaddiyq*)

21 "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

22 "**None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.**"

23 "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"

24 "But when **a righteous man** turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? **All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.**

25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"

26 "**When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies.**"

God watches righteous men ... fairly common? **Righteous people doing righteous deeds.**

Ezekiel 18:30-32

30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "**Repent, and turn from all your transgressions**, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.

31 "**Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.**

For why should you die, O house of Israel?

32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "**Therefore turn and live!**"

The Book of Proverbs talks about the comparison of righteous versus unrighteousness more than 50 times.

Job 1:1

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; **and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.** (*A righteous man*)

Job 1:8

8 Then the LORD said to *the Satan*, (*in Hebrew: "the Satan" — the adversary*) "**Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?**"

So ... can we say people like Abel ... Noah ... Job ... Zacharias and Elizabeth ... Joseph and Mary — are inherently evil ... **when God Himself and Jesus call them righteous and upright?**

There are many righteous people. **The answer is ... that God is not looking for perfection in us. He doesn't expect it.**

What God saw in Abel ... Noah ... Abraham ... Job ... Daniel ... David ... Zacharias and others — were people:

- Who were loyal to Him — Faithful to Him
- Who walked with Him — Obedient ... Humble

- **Who loved Him**
- **Who had a relationship with Him**

That's what God is looking for. This is what a righteous person looks like in God's eyes.

We know people are not perfect. Think of Noah — getting drunk. Or ... Abraham — “lying” about Sarah being his sister — because he feared for his life. What about King David — what about Uriah and Bathsheba!! The Apostle Peter — denying Jesus 3 times. At the most vulnerable point of Jesus' life.

None of God's men and women were ever perfect. None had God's level of absolute righteousness.

But all had an obedient faithful heart — and were loyal to God.

Of course God doesn't want us to deliberately sin — there are often consequences if we sin (think of David's life after Bathsheba) ... and we can give Satan a foothold.

We can't afford to be careless about sin ... neglectful about our walk with God ... “easy come, easy go”.

But God wants us to be as righteous as the Saints of old — by at least having a loyal ... obedient ... loving heart.

And that — we can do! Even more easily than the Saints of old ... since we also have the Holy Spirit!

But we shouldn't condemn ourselves ... if we occasionally “fall” from perfection. We're human! God is not surprised. Forgiveness is available to us as the sacrifices were to those of old.

What God would not want is disloyalty. Turning our back on Him ... going after our own ways ... choosing to have a different “Master”.

Noah ... Abraham ... Job ... Daniel ... Peter ... were imperfect ... made mistakes (to varying degrees) ... but were loyal and faithful. We can be too!

So ... what about scriptures such as Isaiah 64:6?

For such a so-called “key scripture” ... it is odd that it’s not quoted anywhere in the New Testament? More than that — it is not quoted in any writings from the first 325 years of “Christian” authors.

It wasn’t seen as an especially relevant verse?!

Context is important. Isaiah 64:6 is Isaiah speaking — not God. It is part of a long section beginning in Isaiah 63 where Isaiah is expressing sorrow and penitence for the sins of the nation of Israel — their rebellion and idolatry.

IT IS NOT A UNIVERSAL TRUTH!!

God has even accepted the conduct of Gentiles being righteous on occasions.

Acts 10:1-4

- 1 **There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius**, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,
- 2 **a devout man and one who feared God with all his household**, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.
- 3 **About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"**
- 4 **And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?"** So he said to him, **"Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God."**

Cornelius’ prayers and his deeds were a memorial ... not “filthy rags”.

Acts 10:34-35

- 34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.
- 35 "But **in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.**

God demonstrates His acceptance of Cornelius' righteousnesses!
Cornelius was not perfect — but it seems he was loyal ... faithful ...
endeavoured to walk with God to the best of his ability.

God accepted him. Isaiah 64:6 was not applicable.

For us ... **the lesson is that we can be righteous in God's sight ...
even if not perfect.**

We shouldn't "rely" on some dubious Heavenly Accounting System
where God pretends we're righteous even though we're choosing to live
a life-style that's sinful or overly worldly.

God is pleased with righteous living — righteous deeds.

No need for us to be defeatist — "all my righteousness is as filthy rags"
so no need to try to keep His laws and do good things.

1 John 3:7

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. **He who practices
righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.**

1 John 3:10

10 **Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God
...**

**You can be righteous ... I can be righteous. And we should make
some effort to be righteous!**