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## QUESTION

# What is righteousness?

## ANSWER

Dictionaries define *righteousness* as “behavior that is morally justifiable or right.” Such behavior is characterized by accepted standards of morality, justice, virtue, or uprightness. The Bible’s standard of human righteousness is God’s own perfection in every attribute, every attitude, every behavior, and every word. Thus, God’s laws, as given in the Bible, both describe His own character and constitute the plumb line by which He measures human righteousness.

# RIGHTEOUSNESS

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The Greek New Testament word for “righteousness” primarily describes conduct in relation to others, especially with regards to the rights of others in business, in legal matters, and beginning with relationship to God. It is contrasted with wickedness, the conduct of the one who, out of gross self-centeredness, neither reveres God nor respects man. The Bible describes the righteous person as just or right, holding to God and trusting in Him ([Psalm 33:18–22](#)).

The bad news is that true and perfect righteousness is not possible for man to attain on his own; the standard is simply too high. The good news is that true righteousness is possible for mankind, but only through the cleansing of sin by Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We have no ability to achieve righteousness in and of ourselves. But Christians possess the righteousness of Christ, because “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). This is an amazing truth. On the [cross](#), Jesus exchanged our sin for His perfect righteousness so that we can one day stand before God and He will see not our sin, but the holy righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

This means that we are made righteous in the sight of God; that is, that we are accepted as righteous and treated as righteous by God on account of what the Lord Jesus has done. He was made sin; we are made righteousness. On the cross, Jesus was treated *as if* He were a sinner, though He was perfectly holy and pure, and we are treated *as if* we were righteous, though we are defiled and [depraved](#). On account of what the Lord Jesus has endured on our behalf, we are treated as if we had entirely fulfilled the Law of God and had never become exposed to its penalty. We have received this precious gift of

righteousness from the God of all mercy and grace. To Him be the glory!

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

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