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Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ: The Holistic Connotation of the term ‘Righteousness’ and its Implications for Social Service

Abstract:
The concept “righteousness” is weighty and indispensable in the biblical tradition and understanding the concept has changed and developed through the centuries. The current article explores the topic from the ancient to modern canonical and non-canonical literature on the concept of righteousness to seek its wide range of meanings. Traditionally, the term “righteousness” has forensic, and religious connotations, but this paper argues that alongside these, the legal and social aspects of human beings i.e., the aspect of fulfilling communal obligations and the acts of philanthropy to those who are poor, oppressed, and deprived are standard expectations connoted into the term “righteousness.”

Keywords: righteousness, Hebrew, Greek, Paul, communal obligation

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Introduction

The concept of the “righteousness [Hebrew צדק and Greek δικαιοσύνη] of God” in the Bible is deep and profound. Many scholars have explored and researched this topic because it is one of the central themes of the Bible, especially in the writings of Paul. The understanding of “righteousness” has changed and developed through the biblical tradition. Paul’s teachings on the concept differs from Jewish perspectives; for Paul, righteousness is through faith alone, unlike the Jewish concept. Does this exclude “works” in the lives of Christian believers? In this paper, I will explore the topic of the “righteousness of God,” focusing predominantly on the links between divine and human righteousness and the implications for ethics. I will present the way in which this concept developed through the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Intertestamental Literature, and the NT writings and times. I will also briefly explore the Qumran and Rabbinic teachings in order to see the progression of the concept. The topic of “righteousness” is huge, and there are various aspects involved in its meaning. As this paper deals merely with one of the aspects of righteousness, the other aspects are not detailed in the paper due to limitation of space. The aspect of fulfilling communal obligations, in other words, the act of being merciful to those who are poor, oppressed, and deprived is an essential part of “righteousness” underscored in this paper.

The Meaning of the Hebrew Root צדק

Before looking at the different aspects of “righteousness” in the OT, I will look at the lexical meanings for the Hebrew word צדק. Lexicons give these basic meanings for the root צדק: “to be just,” “right,” “innocent,” “justice,” “loyalty,” and “salvation.” Both HALOT and DCH differentiate masculine and feminine usage of the root word: the masculine noun צדק has a collective meaning. צדק denotes a single proof of uprightness, an act of justice.” HALOT gives the meanings of the feminine form צדק in some of the Semitic languages. The Jewish Aramaic form צדקה means “justice, piety, charity, alms.” In Syriac, צדקה means “good deed, alms.” In Arabic, צדקה means “alms; voluntary contribution of alms.” In North-West Semitic languages, the word carries a variety of meanings including “proper conduct, order, righteousness, legitimacy of succession, loyalty, favor, concession, grant.” One of the first meanings DCH gives for the root צדק is “righteousness, (moral) uprightness, right conduct, godliness, i.e. what is right in the Lord’s eyes; specifically, charity, act of charity, generosity,
almsgiving, kindness toward the poor.”6 One of HALOT’s definitions is “just cause, God’s deeds of justice, deeds of loyalty to the community, or covenant, man’s deeds of loyalty to the community, honesty.”7 Thus, the aspect of communal relationship—consisting of obligation, duties to fulfill towards the community, charity, and good deeds towards others, especially those deprived—is one of the common aspects of the meaning of “righteousness” in all the above mentioned Semitic languages and in Biblical Hebrew.

The Concept of “Righteousness” in the Hebrew Bible

The particular meaning of community obligation based in the topic “righteousness” is a common aspect in the OT/Hebrew writings. There are different opinions as to the way the term needs to be understood in the OT. For both J. A. Ziesler and Charles Lee Irons, the majority of the significance of “righteousness” resides primarily in the legal aspect and secondarily in the ethical. Irons adds a third section: “correctness.” He says “legal righteousness” “[pertains] to the realm of the judicial court, whether it is a human king or judge, a messianic figure, or God himself who is depicted as judging, administering justice, executing judgement, or vindicating someone who has been falsely accused or oppressed.”8 This reference is made frequently in the Writings and Prophets.9 In the OT, the obligations of doing justice and giving just judgments to the poor, needy, widow, and oppressed belonged mainly to the king who employs the judicial language (Lev 1:15; Ps 6:13; Deut 1:12-17; Ps 72:1-4, Prov 2:14; 31:4-5; Prov 31:8-9; Jere 22:3; 22:15-16 115).10 The ethical category applies mostly to humans, because it refers to righteous conduct as usually it appears with verbs of doing or applies to the status of righteousness before God; thus, right conduct is righteousness before God.11 The third category “correctness” refers to the content/context of speaking the truth, doing justice, weighing and balancing justly, and doing things correctly.12

In the Psalms and Prophets, especially Isaiah, righteousness is God’s saving act which leads to peace, well-being, and prosperity.13 The biblical authors do not refer to idea of righteousness abstractly; rather, they always refer to it in the context of actions of God.14 When the authors refer to the righteousness of the people, they are referring to mispat justice, which is to do justice, to observe fairness, and to be impartial to one another (Ps 37:6; 72:2; 106:2; Isa 1:27; 28:17; 56:1; Deut 16:18; Ps 72:1; 99:4; Isa 5:16; 33:5; 58:2; Gen 18:19; Deut 33:11; 2 Sam 8:15).15 Righteousness for
the Israelites involved proper worship and proper community leadership, including doing justice to the poor/oppressed; when these were not kept, God reacted with just judgment. Justice and righteousness in the prophets involves social justice. Those who oppress the widow, the oppressed, and the poor are condemned (Isa 1:17; Jer 22:3; Ezek 18; Amos 5:4–8, Is 9:7; 42:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15). Henning Graf Reventlow, quoting K. H. Fahlgren, says that, for the Israelites, religion and ethics were part of each other and went hand in hand. “Faithfulness to the community” was considered righteousness according to K. Koch.

One of the important meanings that scholars attribute to the concept “righteousness” in the Old Testament is covenant relationship. The reason for such consideration is primarily because of the many appearances in the covenant passages (e.g. Gen 15; 18; Ps 15; Ezek 18). The Hifil form of the term connotes “restoration to relationship,” especially the covenant relationship. Additionally, Ziesler says, “righteousness is neither a virtue nor the sum of the virtues, it is the activity which befits the covenant. Similarly, on God’s side it is not an attribute but divine covenant activity.”

In covenant relationship, God’s righteousness takes different forms: he is gracious, saving, and merciful. However, when needed, his righteousness requires him to punish the people when they sin against him or break the covenant (Judg 5:11; Isa 5:16, the wrath of God against the Canaanites is considered as righteousness). Whatever God did towards the Israelites was in keeping with the covenant relationship that he had with them; he acts and speaks all in accordance to his own holiness (Pss 22:31; 40:10; 51:14; 71:15–24; Amos 5:21–24). The covenant language becomes clear when talking about human’s righteousness—a human is considered righteous when he obeys the rules of the covenant and God’s will. However, Mark A. Seifrid does not favor covenant-faithfulness as righteousness. He says, “although the Lord might be said to act out of covenant-faithfulness to his people, his action itself cannot properly be called covenantal.”

Righteousness involves “the concept of a norm, an order within the world, which God graciously acts to restore,” and so it should not be confined to the idea of “proper relation.” For Seifrid, God’s righteousness lies between his vindication over the world and his saving
acts for the salvation of the world. Righteousness is moral and creational. It has to do with “God’s re-establishing ‘right order’” in the sinful world. Righteousness connotes the right relationship between the creature and the world (Isa 45:8, 23; Pss 85:4–13; 98:1–9). Thus, the ruling and justice aspects of righteousness relates to bringing “right order and re-establishing them in creation.”

However, whether righteousness refers to covenant relationship or, as Seifred says, establishing right order in creation, humans are required to fulfill righteousness towards the community or creation. Peter Toon mentions that the people of the covenant are expected to receive the gift of salvation and behave as holy people; as Hosea says, righteousness is through mercy, love, justice, and kindness (2:19; 10:12). Thus, the people are to maintain right order in the community. God is just and righteous, and he wants his people to be just and righteous. (Isa 5:16 [cf. Isa 30:18]). Micah 6:8 states, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Tamar is considered more righteous than Judah in Gen 38:26 because she, unlike Judah, fulfilled the requirement/obligation of the community. Thus, fulfillment of community obligations is ethical. This aspect of righteousness and justice determines the norms of just weighing and measuring (Gen 18:23; Exod 23:7; Ezek 33:12; Ps 11:4–5). When rulers establish justice, they are called righteous (Gen 7:1; Ezek 14:14, 20; Prov 8:15–16, 22–31). In Wisdom Literature, like Prov 10:2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 30, 31, and 32), wisdom is considered righteousness; a human ought to manage his/her life properly, do helpful things within the community, do justice to others, and trust in God. Ziesler calls this “practical wisdom.” Thus, community obligations of doing justice and showing mercy is as important as personal and communal worship in the concept of righteousness in the OT.

The Meaning of δικαιοσύνη, the Greek Translation of צדק

The above presents the concept “righteousness” used in OT Hebrew writings, now I will explore how it was used in the Greek translation of the OT. In most of the places, the OT has different forms of δικ-/δικαιοσύνη for the translation of the root צדק. BDAG defines the noun δικαιοσύνη as “the quality of being upright.” Derived from the OT and Greco-Roman cultures, δικαιοσύνη could mean “a sense of equitableness combined with awareness of responsibility within a social context.” BDAG defines the
adjective δίκαιος, according to Greco-Roman tradition, as “one who upholds the customs and norms of behavior, including esp. public service, that make for a well-ordered, civilized society.” Whether it is monotheistic or polytheistic, both societies connect righteousness with a behavior towards humans and faithfulness to the duties to their families and God. Thus, the root δικ- has the basic meaning of to vindicate, upright, justice or just for. It refers to legal-judicial, social, and religious duties.

The Concept of “Righteousness” in the Septuagint

The translators of the LXX use different forms of δικ- for translating שרי. The various forms of δικ- are used 1,293 times in the LXX. Irons compares both the OT and the LXX and provides a percentage of “legal,” “ethical” and “correctness” usage of “righteousness” in each. He finds that the reference to the legal righteousness in the OT is 44.6% and 42.4% in the LXX. When it comes to ethical righteousness, 41.3% of the OT references and 46.3% of the LXX references belong to this category. Reference to “correctness” appears in 9.4% of the OT cases and in 5.3% of the LXX cases. Δικ- is also used for translation of the Hebrew words ד(pdf) (justice), ר שת (lovingkindness), תמא (truth), בוט (good) and so on. The LXX uses the term δικαιοσύνη in a positive way, to “acquit, vindicate, restore to a right relationship,” which ranges the Greek forensic significance with a personal aim, that is to “do to a person what is necessary to correct an ... injustice.” In some instances, שרי is also translated as ἐλεημοσύνη. This is the second most common translation for the word שרי in the LXX. ἐλεημοσύνη means mercy, compassion. With the rabbinic influence, the meaning is “benevolence, charity, almsgiving.” Jean Maurais states that the concepts of mercy and pity overlap in the LXX, which could denote righteousness as a intervention in favor of the poor and oppressed. Maurais points out a new meaning that influenced the term righteousness in late Hebrew– “mercy or deeds of mercy.” This could have combined into the meaning of the word ἐλεημοσύνη, which includes not only the meaning of “mercy” and “pity,” but also “charity,” or “alms.” Maurais concludes that there is shift from focusing on Israel’s obedience (דיקaisal) to God’s mercy (ἐλεημοσύνη). However, here we see that the focus on mercy, pity, and charity becomes an important aspect in the LXX, along with the ethical aspect and legal features. Thus, in both the Hebrew Bible and in the LXX, the term “righteousness” refers to right standing with God by doing his will, maintaining or establishing right order with the creation, and fulfilling
the obligations to the community. There are overt implications, therefore, requiring mercy, pity, charitable giving, and doing good deeds to the people in the LXX. The Septuagint uses κρίνω (to judge) as well to translate the Hebrew word צדק. 55

The Concept of “Righteousness” in the Apocrypha, Qumran, and Rabbinic Literature

Before I jump into the New Testament use of the term “righteousness,” I will briefly mention how the term was used in the Apocrypha books, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Rabbinic literature. In the Intertestamental Apocrypha writings, ethical righteousness is widely mentioned.56 There are also references to forensic/judicial aspects, but mostly the authors are concerned with ethics.57 There is a relational aspect where the righteousness is related to God.58 God’s righteousness is connected with his mercy, truth, and his role as a judge (Tob 3:2; 2 Mac 12:6, 41; 3 Mac 2:22; 2 Esd 14:32). ἐλεημοσύνην, mercy and almsgiving, is also referenced many times in these books; Tobit and Sirach are especially well known for this.59 The acts of charity are considered righteousness (Tob 1:3; 12:8). In 2 Esdras 10:39 sorrowing for people and mourning for Zion is called righteous conduct. There are references to the expected Righteous Messiah in the apocryphal books (1 En 38:2; Wisd 2).60

Qumran preserved the ethical and judicial aspects of the term “righteousness” in the Dead Sea Scrolls.61 Most references are made to God’s saving act, vindication, and punishment of the people who oppress God’s people as in Isaiah.62 As the Qumran community was fully spiritualized and extended, the enemies they were referring to were Satan and sin. This spiritualized righteousness is prevalent in Qumran.63 They prioritized doing all things correctly, with integrity, and according to God’s word, as manifested in the OT. Such was not the case with Jewish literature, including non-Pauline texts in the NT.64 John Reumann says,

While there is considerable emphasis on righteousness as involving certain traits of pious behavior, the forensic and salvific aspects in what God does or will do continue, especially in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Qumran community’s radical, apocalyptic outlook stressed election, sin, grace, and God’s righteousness as saving activity as well as judgment. The priestly Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran taught righteousness (CD 6:10–11; 1QpHab 8:1–3) in terms of a rigorist
The Qumran community added demands to the Mosaic law. The Torah was a major part of their lives. The Dead Sea Scrolls also attest to the deeds of mercy and almsgiving as righteous acts.

In Rabbinic literature, righteousness is obedience to God and his law/Torah which leads them to ethical and relational righteousness. Rabbinic literature has a strict command around “justice, mercy, purity, equity, liberation, benevolence and especially almsgiving.” They even say that God’s righteousness refers to his “true unchanging, reliable justice.”

Quoting from Przybylski, Reumann says that, in the Tannaitic literature, the term is the “norm of righteousness,”—which is “the demand upon men rather than the salvific gift of God for man.’ To this extent, ṣēdāqâ comes primarily to denote almsgiving, while ṣedeq more broadly refers to ‘all aspects of teaching which are normative for man’s conduct.’ Thus, the implications of compassion, charity, and kindness is vital in Rabbinic literature. They put forward the importance of mercy and grace.

Therefore, as in the OT, there are many references to the ethical aspect of righteousness. Both the Apocrypha and especially Rabbinic literature emphasize merciful acts, charity/almsgiving, and benevolence as one of the major aspects of the theme “righteousness.” On the other hand, Qumran describes most of it as spiritual.

The Concept of “Righteousness” in the New Testament Excluding Paul

Toon says the NT meaning of righteousness has two basic sources. First is the Hebrew understanding in the OT which includes the various meanings of צדק. This refers particularly to God’s gracious relational acts towards his covenantal people and the apt behavior of the people who are in the covenant. Second is from the perspective of the Greek world: their meaning followed the standard laws of the societies, so it was related to legalism, honesty, etc. In Greek, according to the wider Graeco-Roman world, the semantic range of the term δικαιοσύνη is associated with the fulfillment of one’s duties toward the public and family (Plato, Republic, 433a). “A distributive justice [gives] each their due” (e.g., Aristotle, Rhet., 1.9). For Theognis of Megara, it is about virtue; he said, “All virtue is summarized in justice’ (Elegiae, 1.147). Thus, the NT carried over the ethical, forensic, moral, and law-court aspects of righteousness (Ps. 9:4; Isa.
There is a view that the term “righteousness of God” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3; Phil. 3:9; Matt. 6:33; Jas. 1:20; 2 Pet. 1:1) is a technical term going back to Deut 33:21; it was later developed in the apocalyptic literature as well as in Qumran. The NT uses both δικ and κρίνω to talk about righteousness. Generally, δικ is used when expressing positive judgments such as legally being righteous or innocent. κρίνω is used when expressing negative judgments.

In the NT Jesus is known as the “righteous one” and as “righteous judge” (Isa 53; Wis of Sol 2:12–20) (Matt 27:19; Luke 23:47; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 2:1; Jn 5:30; 7:24). God is called “righteous” in John 17:25, and the Holy Spirit is the one convicting the world of righteousness (John 16:8, 10). In John 16:8, 10 “the spirit identifies the true righteousness in Jesus, not only as a standard but as a source.” When God is mentioned as righteous, it usually denotes his salvation, judgment and vindication. In Matthew and Luke, there is a new covenant. Matthew calls for two kinds of righteousness—one as a divine gift but another as a need for human response. Jesus teaches his followers to exceed the righteousness of Pharisees. Jesus is set as an example in Matthew; right conduct is emphasized here. Matt 5:20 is not in opposition to the law-righteousness; rather, it is the fulfillment. Righteousness in Matthew is “inward, more throughgoing, more demanding.” The Mathew tradition has a particular way of righteousness—the kingdom eschatological righteousness is seen (5:6; 6:33). Matthew 6:1 is especially important for this paper. To many scholars, it is moral, compassionate, and religious activity in general. Some interpreters understand it as almsgiving, but it should refer to compassion in general. Ben Witherington in his commentary on Mathew points to this when commenting on the concept of righteousness in Matt 6:1-4. He says that Jesus is not banning good deeds in public, but rebukes their motivations. The motivation to do good works should not be to be seen by others, rather their audience should be God alone. Jesus’ teachings were against self-righteousness; this is obvious with the parable of the Pharisee and Tax-collector.

Doing the will of God, fearing God, and doing good deeds is righteousness in Acts 10:35. Jesus died for our sins so that we can live for righteousness (1 Pet 2:24). God watches over the righteous. Righteous men like Lot and Noah are appreciated in Peter’s works. John wants the believers to know that God is righteous, and he says that everyone who
does right is righteous (1 John 2:2; 3:12). In the Johannine literature, Jesus is the Righteous One– his righteousness involves vindication and a forensic setting. He was sacrificed for the sins of the world, and those who follow him need to have ethical righteousness: “do righteousness” (John 16:8, 10; cf. 5:30; 7:24; 1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10). Hebrews 5:13 and 11:7 refer to the moral/ truth righteousness. Noah’s example confirms the ethical aspect of the righteousness, because Noah’s righteousness was not forensic or relational, but rather his righteousness came through faith, thus commending Christians to have righteousness through faith. James stands out in his teachings because he considers faith to be dead if it comes without deeds. Abraham acted righteously by offering his son as a sacrifice; thus, his faith is reckoned as righteousness (Jas 2:23).

Accordingly, there are many references to Christian behavior as righteousness (Mat 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1,33; Acts 13:10; 24:25; Heb 5:13; 11:7; 12:11; Jas 1:20; 3:18; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:14; 2 Pet 2:21; 3:13; 1 John 2:2; 3:7, 10; Rev 22:11). All these references mean that a human should live in accordance to the will of God, according to a righteousness that fulfills God’s commandments. Hence, as Ziesler says “righteousness in its full ethical-relational sense is seen in the literature variously as a gift of God, as arising through Christ’s righteousness, and as arising from faith.” He denies the mere religious and moral meaning in it, but says that “Christian righteousness is of the same order of reality as that of the Scribes, and elsewhere in Matthew there are indications that righteousness largely meant loving activity, especially Mat 25:37, 46. It is fraternal charity which characterizes the righteous.” It is not mere intellectual faith, but the faith complimented with one’s life and deeds. “Righteousness itself is that conduct or way of life which is the prerequisite for acceptance with God.”

The Concept of “Righteousness/Justification” in Paul

Reumann mentions how interpreters talk about “justification” and “righteousness” when using the terms ‘צדק’ and ‘δικαιοσύνη’. Justification declares a person righteous in court and righteousness also implies moral transformation. There is a distinction between righteousness from law and righteousness through faith in Christ which shaped Jewish-Christian reflections in Phil. 3:9; Rom. 9:30–31; 10:5–11. The phrase “righteousness of God” expresses both the character of God himself and also what he does. Rom 3:26 expresses both of these aspects together: his character...
and his act, “that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.”104

Paul does not continue merely the salvation and eschatological aspects. There is a new aspect in Paul’s theology— “intensification of the Torah’s demands, extreme consciousness of sin, and righteousness of God as a salvation concept.”105 There is contention between whether it is from the Torah or Christ. 106 Paul denies the doctrine of ethnic election— the descendants of Abraham are no longer the elect ones of God; rather, it is now through Christ alone.107 Paul denies two of the major Jewish doctrines—the election of Israel and the essentialness of faithfulness to the Mosaic Torah—and instead affirms the importance of the universal Church.108 God’s grace is for all, both for the Gentiles and Jews. The justice of God and the salvific righteousness are both given through the death and resurrection of Christ.109 Paul teaches in Phil 3:9 that righteousness is not from the law—i.e., the achievement of humans and their own righteousness—but is from Christ.110 A person never possesses nor gains righteousness, but it is attained by his participation through faith in Christ.111 His righteousness would cease if his faith in Jesus ceases because righteousness is possible only through him and having faith in him.112 Thus, there is no value in self-achievements and pride for obeying the law, but all are justified in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile (Rom 3:5–26, 28–30; 4:11–12, 23–24; 9:23–26; 10:5–13; 15:8a, 9–12; 1 Cor 1:29–31).113 Paul develops the doctrine of righteousness/justification from a missionary and apocalyptic viewpoint, so that Gentiles are included by faith in Christ, as this is God’s plan.114 Alongside there are references to ethical and moral behaviors. First Thessalonians 2:10 talks about the behavior of the apostles– there are duties toward God and other humans.115 The language of righteousness in Ephesians is ethical (6:1, 14; 4:24; 5:9)– the new person is characterized by holiness and righteousness.116 In 1 Corinthians, the concept is also ethical, it contrasts righteous behavior and unethical character (1 Cor 4:4; 6:11).117 Good deeds are possible through the fruit of the Spirit, through his indwelling and not through commandments.118

Thus, overall, Paul’s understanding of righteousness is “righteousness-in-Christ-by-faith.” However, there are ethical and moral aspects involved as well. As Ziesler says, “Paul has also a doctrine of righteousness though faith, in Christ. The believer enters not just a private relationship to Jesus, but a new humanity, in which he becomes a new kind of man. Thus, there are not only social or corporate implications, but also
God himself is just and righteous by acting justly towards his people. Thus, his children are expected to do the same to be just and righteous in everything they do. Paul refers to righteousness in a similar way that the rabbis referred to צדק in the sense of benevolence or charity (2 Cor 9:9–10). The righteousness of the community is part of God’s order for everyday life, wherein proper social order means justice for the poor, helpless, widow, and oppressed. The true inner circumcision is important. The body of Christ has no boundaries—no Jew or Greek, no slave or free. All are one in Christ. Michael F. Bird says, “justification is equally social and soteriological in Paul... [it] possesses obvious corporate dimensions... the vertical and horizontal aspects of justification need to be appropriately described and weighted in order to provide a thorough rendering of justification in Paul’s letters.” Paul emphasized righteousness by faith in Christ because the Jews had built their salvation based on their works and their status as heirs of Abraham. Therefore, Paul had to teach that even the Gentiles were justified through their faith in Christ.

The Concept of “Righteousness/Justification” According to the Modern Theologians

Martin Luther

Craig L. Nessan makes an important point from the works of Martin Luther. Employing the theology of Luther, he points to two of the theses in Luther’s “The Freedom of a Christian.” Luther was opposed to the concept of justification by merits, trades, and good works. For him, according to Paul, the only way of justification is:

...since faith alone justifies, it is clear that the inner man cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any outer work or action at all, and that these works, whatever their character, have nothing to do with this inner man. On the other hand, only ungodliness and unbelief of heart, and no outer work, make him guilty and a damnable servant of sin. Wherefore it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus... No other work makes a Christian.
Faith in Christ is the exclusive needed for justification. However, this does not exclude good works. Nessan rightly points to the second thesis in the same work of Luther.

Lastly, we shall also speak of the things which he does toward his neighbor. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself....Therefore he should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and advantage of the neighbor.125

Thus, we see that Luther does encourage good works.

**John Wesley**

John Wesley, who is the founder of Methodism, says that all believers are completely forgiven and accepted, not for the sake of anything in them or anything they did, but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ has done and suffered for them.126 The righteousness of Christ is the only and single foundation of all our hope, but if the believers remain unrighteous and do not live a holy life then the righteousness of God will not profit anything to them.127 Wesley argues the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believers so that they may live righteously, godly, in the current era.128

John Wesley argues for a two-fold sermon i.e., gospel and law: “gospel” is preaching the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and preaching the “law” is applying the commands of Christ, which is summarized in the Sermon on the Mount.129 Watson says, unlike Calvin who put good works to secondary importance “by grounding justification in an imputed status,” Wesley “by restricting the doctrine of justification to pardon, and consigning the fulfilment of the law to the doctrine of sanctification, he gave faith and works equal importance—something which the Calvinist position failed to do.”130 As Timothy Tennent puts it, for Wesley “alien righteousness must became native righteousness; imputed righteousness must became actualized righteousness; declared righteousness must became embodied righteousness.”131

Wesley underscores God’s work to have a two-fold purpose: “to will and to do” . . . “First, ‘to will’ may include the whole of inward, ‘to do’
the whole of outward religion. “To will” is the inward holiness which is towards God and the “to do” is the outward holiness, to do things for others. Wesley says that Christianity is a social religion, and to make it a solitary one is to demolish it; and “to conceal this religion is impossible, as well as utterly contrary to the design of its author.” He comments:

It is also true that bare, outside religion, which has no root in the heart, is nothing worth; that God delighteth not in such outward services, no more than in Jewish burnt offerings, and that a pure and holy heart is a sacrifice with which he is always well pleased. But he is also well pleased with all that outward service which arises from the heart; with the sacrifice of our prayers… of our praises and thanksgivings; with the sacrifice of our goods, humbly devoted to him, and employed wholly to his glory; and with that of our bodies.

Thus, as Watson puts, Wesley believed that good works were essential not only for sanctification, but to even preserve the grace of justification. Levi Jones notes that Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification does not let believers be idle, rather the works of God calls for a response in one’s life.

Theological Implications

Having seen the Old Testament and New Testament views, especially Pauline teachings on righteousness and justification, what are the implications for a contemporary audience? One is not saved through works, but the Christian should not be exempted from good works towards one’s neighbors. One of the meanings that BDAG gives for the future of the verb δικαιοω is “to cause someone to be released from personal or institutional claims that are no longer to be considered pertinent or valid, make free/pure.” I would like to underscore two passages from both the OT and the NT: Ezek 18:5-9 and Matt 25:31-46. In Ezekiel, the writer describes a righteous person as— the one who does not worship idols, who does not favor wickedness, who executes true justice, who gives bread to the hungry, and covers the nakedness with a garment, and so on is the righteous person (צַדִיק v.9). We see a similar kind of passage in the New Testament. The acts of the righteous person in Ezekiel are repeated in Matthew 25. Jesus gives a speech concerning the judgment of the nations in which he describes οἱ δίκαιοι (the righteous v. 37, 46) who will inherit eternal life. They are those
who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed a naked, and visited the sick and prisoner. These are the ones called righteous. In both of these passages, the clear acts of a righteous person are named. The communal obligations of being merciful to the needy, poor, and deprived are part of being a righteous person.

Thus, critical to the understanding of righteousness are the concepts of fulfilling community obligations and being merciful to the poor, oppressed, and deprived. As mentioned above, E. R. Hayes suggests that when God is just and righteous by acting justly towards his people, his people are expected to do the same.\textsuperscript{139}

The care towards the community should be given priority more than our individual desires and lifestyles.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The term “righteousness” has forensic and religious connotations. But the legal, social, and judicial aspects of one’s righteousness are standard expectations built into the term “righteousness.” One strand of meaning of the concept “righteousness” includes the fulfillment of communal obligation, being merciful, and doing benevolent acts for others, especially the poor, oppressed, and deprived.

\textbf{End notes}


\textsuperscript{2} The meanings are taken from three different lexicons having similar word categories: \textit{HALOT, DCH, BDB}.

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{HALOT צֶדֶק} and \textit{DCH צֶדֶק}. [Also “צדק refers to the correct order, צְדָקָה refers to proper behavior which aims at order.”]
HALOT צְדָקָה


6 *DCH* צדק

7 HALOT צְדָקָה. The biblical references provided by HALOT with the definition are: Jer 51:10; Ju 5:11 1 Sam 12:7 Isa 45:24 Mi 6:5 Ps 103:6; Isa 33:15 64:5 Ezk 18:24 (with עשׂה).


10 Irons, *The Righteousness of God*, 115. Irons mentions that this legal category is commonly used, and it amounts to 44.6% in the OT.

11 Ibid., 118.

12 Ibid., 119.


17 Reventlow, “Righteousness as Order of the World,” 164.

18 Ibid.

19 Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, 40. In many passages there is a good connection between the words “righteousness” and “covenant” relationship.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.
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24 Ibid., 41.

25 Ibid., 42.


27 Ibid., 40. For Seifrid “‘Covenant’ is related regularly more with the legal terms; one ‘keeps’, ‘establishes’ ‘remembers’, ‘breaks’, transgresses’, ‘despises’, ‘forgets’ or ‘profanes’ a covenant, and not, “act righteously or unrighteously with respect to it.” Furthermore, “‘covenants’ establish and maintain ‘familial’ relations. The obligations of those ‘in’ a covenant are love and faithfulness, not merely a general rectitude (Hos. 6:6).” Seifrid, “Righteousness, Justice, and Justification,” 741–42.

28 Ibid., 40-41.

29 Ibid., 45.

30 Seifrid, “Righteousness, Justice, and Justification,” 741–42.

31 Ibid.


33 Hayes, “Justice, Righteousness,” 471.

34 Ziesler, The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul, 43.

35 Seifrid, “Righteousness, Justice, and Justification,” 741–42.

36 Ibid.


38 Ibid.

39 BDAG δικαιοσύνη.

40 BDAG δίκαιος (“hospitality and fear of God mark an upright person; Dem. 3 o 21: a δίκαιος πολίτης gives priority to the interest of the state”).

41 BDAG.
42 Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, 49. Ziesler says “as early as Theognis, it is not only the judicial virtue rather it became the proper behavior of a person with the social relationship.”


44 Ibid., 130.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.


49 BDAG ἐλεημοσύνην.


52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 112.

54 Ibid., 117.


57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Maurais, “Righteousness and Mercy in Greek Deuteronomy,” 112.


61 Ibid., 270.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.


69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., 114.

71 John Reumann, “Righteousness,” 739.


73 Toon, “Righteousness,” 687.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.


77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Reumann, “Righteousness.”

80 Ibid.

81 Garrett, “Justice.”

82 Ziesler, The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul, 143.

83 Ibid., 135.

84 Toon, “Righteousness,” 688.

85 Reumann, “Righteousness.”

87 Ibid.

88 Reumann, “Righteousness.”


91 Ibid.

92 Reumann, “Righteousness.”

93 Ibid.


95 Ibid.

96 Ibid., 133.

97 Ibid., 143.

98 Ibid., 142.

99 Reumann, “Righteousness.”


101 Reumann, “Righteousness.”

102 Ibid.

103 Nebe, “Righteousness in Paul,” 144.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 135–36.

106 Ibid.


108 Ibid., 208.

109 Reumann, “Righteousness.”


111 Ibid., 149.

112 Ibid.
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113 Reumann, “Righteousness.”

114 Ibid.


116 Ibid., 153.

117 Ibid.

118 Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, 208.


120 Hayes, “Justice, Righteousness,” 471.

121 Ziesler, The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul, 162.


124 Ibid.

125 Ibid., 56.


127 Ibid., 20.

128 Ibid.


130 Ibid., 44.


133 Jones, “John Wesley’s Practical Theology.”

135 Ibid., 201.


138 *BDAG* Δικαιόω.

139 Hayes, “Justice, Righteousness,” 471.

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Lexicons
BDAG  
DCH  
HALOT