

What does it mean “God is righteous?”
A Series on the Character of God: Part 4

Knowledgeable of Israel's future infidelity (Deut 31:19-22), God instructs Moses to write the song that would be taught to the whole nation and passed down the generations. Known as the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43), the nation of Israel would sing it at the ceremony renewing their covenant with God in acknowledgment of their obligation to obey Him and the righteousness of His judgment when disobedient.

When Moses opens with God's song, God's righteous is one of the first characteristics mentioned:

Moses in his Song of Moses
The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He. (Deut 32:4)

Because this is the song that God has Moses write, it is God Himself who reveals that He is righteous. Although it is not clear what the character of righteous meant, it is associated with a behavior of fidelity (“faithfulness”), justice (“without injustice”) and honor (“upright”).

To explore this further, it may be helpful to see how righteousness applies to human beings. When the Ten Commandments were first presented to all of Israel (Deut 5:1-5), Moses taught them the importance of obeying them:

You should diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. You shall do what is **right and good in the sight of the Lord**, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken. (Deut 6:17-19)

Here, for the nation of Israel, righteousness is understood to mean doing what is “right and good in the sight of the Lord.”

“Doing right” meant obeying and following God's word as stipulated in the Ten Commandments which summed up the Mosaic Law. “Right” behavior was living in accordance to the Law.

The moral standard by which godness was determined was whether one obeyed and followed God's word.

God's word, an objective standard which is outside of and an authority above a human being, is the means by which a person is evaluated for moral goodness. It is not a subjective standard in which God chooses who is righteous or not.

In consideration of God, there is no moral standard or authority outside of or above God. God's word demonstrates that God Himself is the moral standard and authority of moral goodness.

Of all of His attributes, God's holiness is singularly repeated and emphasized (Rev 4:8). God Himself is a consecrated Being set apart from sin and anything profane.

It is from this perfect moral Being that the only behavior that could be expressed is righteous.

Just as God's word is the objective means of determining moral goodness, the judicial process is objective; God does not judge capriciously or subjectively. This is why God's judgment is considered righteous (Deut 4:6-8; 16:18; Ps 19:19; Rom 2:5; Rev 16:7; 19:2).