

How Do YHWH'S PEOPLE BECOME RIGHTEOUS BEFORE HIM?

By Ya'acov N'tan Lawrence of Hoshana Rabbah Messianic Congregation
503-570-3376 • hoshanarabbah@earthlink.net

In God's Sight No Man Is Righteous.

Man's righteousness is as filthy or menstruous rags—ritually unclean (tameh) like a nidah woman. (Isa. 64:6). Romans 3:10 (quoting Psa. 14:1-3) says that there is no one righteous, not even one...Isaiah 53:6 says that “all we like sheep have gone astray; every one to his own way...”

How Do God's People Become Righteous Before Him?

Romans 3:20 says, “For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous [a quote from Psa. 143:2] on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands...” Romans 3:21 says, “But now, quite apart from Torah, God's way of making people righteous in his sight has been made clear...” If God's people are not made righteous before God through the works of legalistic Torah observance how are they made righteous then and does this mean that Torah is: *a*) something that is not good; i.e., somethings to be avoided? and *b*) how or on what basis is one made righteous before God?

Can One Be Made Righteous Before God Through Strict, Legal Observance of Torah?

Romans 3:20 says clearly that, “...No one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands.” The KJV translates verse 20 as follows: “Therefore by the deeds of the law [i.e. Torah] there shall be no flesh be justified [Strong's # 1344=*to be declared righteous*] in his [God's] sight: for by the law [Torah] is the knowledge of sin.” So the answer is that no one can be justified/made righteous before God by the works/legalistic observance of the law/Torah commands.

How Is One Made Righteous [Justified] Before God?

It must be remembered that in Tenakh (OT) times men were not justified by the works/legalistic observance of Torah, just as we aren't now. Being considered righteous before God has always been a matter of faith and heart orientation (the outworking of which is always obedience to Torah—the teaching or ways of God for man) and NOT legalistic, mechanistic Torah observance. Abraham was justified/made righteous before God by his faith (Rom. 4:2,5,6,9,11,12,13) not by his Torah observance (even though Torah existed at the time of Abraham and he was obedient to it—See Gen. 26:5).

Two Common Notions Need to Be Addressed At This Point:

Notion number one says that no one can be considered righteous by God on the grounds of the good works of Torah. This notion is groundless since Torah's primary demand or “good work” is that one trust and have faith in God; i.e., to love Him with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength which is the summation of the Torah according to Yahshua in Mark 12:28-30. Additionally, Sha'ul says in Romans 10:5 (quoting Lev. 18:5) that those who do the deeds of Torah will attain life (both physical and spiritual) through those deeds. Wouldn't life and righteousness be equivalent in God's eyes since there is no life apart from righteousness?

Notion number two says that one can't attain righteousness by Torah because its requirements are impossible to live up to. If that were the case then we must ask the following question: How could God be a just and loving

Being if He were to require of His creation something which is impossible to do (namely, obey Torah) then curses and damns them for not doing what He commands? Yet this is what some Christian antinomian (anti-Torah, anti-semitic) theology implies!

But Wasn't the Torah a Yoke That Ancient Israel Couldn't Bear?

The “impossible yoke” to which Peter referred in Acts 15: 10 is not Torah, per se, but the detailed, mechanical, rule-keeping legalistic Torah observance that said that, “one has to do such-and-such” to be saved and to be apart of the redeemed community of Israel. These type of salvational requirements were not so much predicated on faith and heart attitude as they were on an external letter-of-the-law code of conduct. In Acts 15 the issue (see verse 1) was whether one had to undergo the rabbinical ceremony of B'rit Milah (circumcision ritual) to be saved. This was a stumbling stone to those grown men who had a heart of faith for God, yet cringed at the thought of enduring a public ceremony where blood had to drawn from the male organ via use of a sharp knife. God didn't even require this of Abraham, in order to obtain righteous standing before Him. With God, righteousness has always been a matter of faith and heart attitude and was never based just on works alone. One can have a cold, dead, non-loving heart toward God (and man) and be perfectly Torah-obedient and still miss the mark of righteousness. So, righteousness before God has to be based on heart (faith and love) and not just on outward, perfect obedience. Righteousness, therefore, has two parts: faith and obedience...not just obedience and not just faith. Remember that Romans 3 says that Abraham was declared righteous/justified by faith, while James 2:20-22 says Abraham was justified by works/action, and that faith without works/action is dead, and works/action is how faith is made complete. So obedience to Torah was/is not a yoke that was/is impossible for one to bear. On the contrary, people like David considered Torah a delight (Psa. 119:16, 35, 47, 92,143, 173), something that caused him to rejoice (Psa. 119:14), something that he greatly loved (Psa. 119:48, 97, 119, 127, 159, 165, 167) and a source of hope (Psa. 119:43, 49 74). Furthermore, Yahshua, the Word of God made flesh, the Living Torah, said that His yoke was light and His burden easy (Matt. 11:28-30).

Is One Made Righteous By Faith IN Yahshua Or the Faith OF Yahshua?

Remember we started this discussion with Romans 3:20 where it says that in the sight of God no one is considered righteous on the grounds of legalistic Torah observance. Then in verse 21 we read that righteousness comes *apart* from the Torah. In verse 22 we read that, “...It is righteousness that comes from God, through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah, to all who continue trusting...” (CJB). For this verse the KJV reads as follows: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe...” Are we talking here about the *faithfulness of Yahshua* or *faith in Yahshua* that is considered by God to be righteousness? Most modern translations (see the NKJV, NAS, NIV, RSV, Louis Segond-French, ABS-Spanish) render this phrase in verse 22 as, “faith *in* Jesus Christ.” This rendering implies that God considers an individual righteous by simply becoming a believer (i.e. by exercising mental ascent with no tie to obedience) *in* Jesus Christ. Is this rendering a correct one and is it consistent with the greater context of how scripture shows one become righteous/ is justified before God? Many scholars believe that the word *faith* should be more correctly rendered *faithfulness*. (See Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* for a complete treatment of this issue at Romans 3:22) This is not inconsistent with the meaning of the Greek word for *faith* which is *pistis*. Furthermore, it is totally consistent with the word *emunah* which is the corresponding word in Hebrew for *faith*. In fact, the meaning of the word *emunah* links the concepts of faith and faithfulness together. One cannot have faith without faithfulness or obedience—or as James said, “Faith without works/action is dead” or is not faith at all. Additionally, the next question is, in Romans 3:22 are we talking about faithfulness *of* or *in* Yahshua. Again, the Greek tenses indicate that *in* should be rendered *of* (again see Stern for further discussion of this). So what we have in Romans 3:22 is not *faith in Yahshua*, but, rather, the *faithfulness of Yahshua* as part of the basis for our becoming righteous before God.

Are We To Have Faith In the Name of Yahshua? If So What Does That Mean?

In Acts 3:16 we read, speaking of the lame man who was healed at the Gate Beautiful, “And it is through putting trust in his name that his name has given strength to this man who you see and know. Yes, it is trust that comes through Yeshua which has given him this perfect healing in the presence of you all.” The use of *His name* was not equivalent to some magic formula or mantra. The Greek word for *name* is *onama* which corresponds to the Hebrew word for *name* which is *shem*. The meaning for *name* involves more than just a name or a title. It involves everything the named individual is and represents.

Trust/Faith In His Name.

Faith, as we have already seen in the Greek is the word *pistis* which means *belief, trust, firm reliance, firm conviction and faith*. *Pistis* corresponds to the Hebrew word for *faith* which is *emunah* which means faithfulness. Because of its root associations *emunah* is related to the Hebrew word *emet* which means *truth* and *aman* which means *firm, faithful, truth, trust, trustworthy* and *steadfastness*. So *emunah* has a wealth of meanings and implications which far transcend the idea of simple mental ascent and mouth confession (as we see so prevalently taught and displayed in Christianity today) and carries with it the idea of obedience to truth based on faithfulness backed up by action. In the case of the blind beggar at the Gate Beautiful, he believed in the name of Yahshua and followed that faith through corresponding action: the action of standing up on his previously impotent legs. He backed his faith up with works. His faith was not dead and so he obtained his miracle. If he had not believed with all of his heart that Yahshua could heal him, he would never have been healed. So faith involves a heart attitude. It is not just a matter of legalistic works alone, otherwise one will not receive the miracle of physical healing or spiritual healing (salvation). Such faith expresses itself in corresponding acts of righteous obedience. The blind beggar had first to look at Peter (Acts 3:4) and then to rise up (verse 7) onto his feet. Abraham had this kind of faith when God told him to leave the land of Ur and migrate to Canaan—Abraham obeyed. This is the kind of faith that God honors both in the Tenakh (OT) and in the Brit Hadashah (NT). This faith involves acknowledging Who God is and what He has done, believing His promises, relying on Him for power to live a holy life and then living that life.

Faith and Faithfulness Are two Sides of the Same Coin.

Galatians 2:16 is a corollary scripture to Romans 3:21-22. It says, “...Even so, we have come to realize that a person is not declared righteous by God on the ground of his legalistic observance of Torah commands, but through the Messiah Yeshua's trusting faithfulness. Therefore, we too have put our trust in Messiah Yeshua and become faithful to him, in order that we might be declared righteous on the ground of the Messiah's trusting faithfulness and not on the ground of our legalistic observance of Torah commands. For on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, no one will be declared righteous.” The word *trust* is the Greek word *pistis* which, as we have seen, is analogous to the Hebrew word *emunah*. We have seen that faith involves: (1) trust and reliance on someone or in something, but also involves (2) faithfulness, trust and truth. These two definitions of faith are complimentary concepts—or different sides of the same coin. If one has number one then number two will be true of one's life, as well. Belief, trust and reliance will result in faithfulness or obedience.

Made Righteous By the Faithfulness of Yahshua and By Faith In His Name.

Now let's look at the phrase *Messiah's trusting faithfulness* which is the same Greek phrase used in Romans 3:22, *the faithfulness of Yahshua*. What do these phrases mean? We know what it means to have faith in Yahshua, but what is His faith(fulness)? This is referring to Yahshua's own faith and faithfulness to God, His Father, and is not referring to our own faith in Yahshua. In Galatians 2:16 where the CJB says *Messiah's trusting faithfulness* the KJV renders this phrase *the faith of Jesus Christ* referring to Yahshua's own faith toward His Father. As noted before, other modern English translations (e.g. NKJV, NIV, NAS, RSV) render this phrase as *faith in Jesus Christ*. The erroneous implication of these versions is that all one has to do is have mental ascent faith in Yahshua in order to be saved. But as implied in the KJV rendering of this phrase in both Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:22 there is something more to it than that. Let's examine this more closely. The phrase *the faith(fulness) of Yahshua* is referring to His own faith, thus implying the idea of His faithfulness to His Father and faith in His Father. So this phrase shows that as Yahshua had faithfulness in His Father by believing and obey Him, so we, likewise, must follow Yahshua's example by placing our faith(fulness) in our Heavenly Father, as well. Faith implies mental ascent and belief, but faithfulness bespeaks of obedience...of fruits...of works/action—the very works/action without which James says faith is dead.

So How Are We Made Righteous Before God?

By following Yahshua's example of faith and faithfulness He is literally showing us how to be made righteous before the Father. By placing faith or trust *in Him* and as is stated twice in the remaining part of Galatians 2:16 and as we *become faithful to Him, in order that we might be declared righteous on the ground of Messiah's trusting faithfulness...*(same verse). So, what it is saying here is that we have faith (belief, mental ascent) in and

become faithful (obedient) toward Yahshua Who in turn had faith in and faithfulness toward the Father. Therefore, Yahshua literally shows us the way to being made righteous by modelling it. Truly He is the door to salvation and the only way to right standing or righteousness with the Father. As this verse states, no one can be declared righteous through legalistic, cold, stony-hearted and mechanistic observance of Torah commands, but through heartfelt trust, belief producing the fruits of faithfulness and obedience to the Torah commands of the Father. Again, how does this happen? The next verse (2:16) says that to be declared righteous by God we must be in union with the Messiah and that we cannot be in union with him if we are walking in sin (i.e. disobedience to the Torah commands [See 1 John 3:4]). So as Yahshua, during His ministry on earth, declared that He was one with the Father, so we must be one or in union with Him in order to come to the Father. (The marital implications here from a Hebrew perspective should be very obvious!) The question needs to be asked: Are we willing to trust and obey our Messiah as He trusted and obeyed His Father with all of His life...even unto death? Therefore, faith in the person and work of Yahshua, that is, faith in His faith and in His faithfulness to God is the only way to be declared righteous by God and a mere legalistic obedience to Torah is not the way to be justified or declared righteous by God.

Summary: Saving Faith Has Two Components.

First, one must have the same trust in and faithfulness toward God which Yahshua had. Second, one must have trust in and faithfulness toward Yahshua and by implication, toward the Father. (These concepts are stated in 1 John 2:3-6: one cannot say that he knows God, i.e. has a belief and mental ascent, without obeying His Torah, i.e. demonstrating faithfulness and obedience.) So according to Galatians 2:16 neither one part of faith alone is sufficient to be declared righteous by God. Similarly, Romans 3:20 says this also: no one is declared righteous through legalistic observance of Torah, but by the faithfulness of Yahshua (verse 22) and to those who have faith in Messiah (verse 22). An identification occurs on the part of the believer with Yahshua's faithful obedience and trust in the father. By identifying with his faithfulness/obedience and trusting in His paying the penalty price for our sins with His blood we have remission for our past sins (verse 25). As a result, our past sin slate is wiped clean and we are declared righteous as we simultaneously exercise belief, mental ascent and trust coupled with faithfulness and obedience to Torah—disobedience to which caused us to need redemption in the first place. This is the grace and mercy of God being extended toward us. And to help us further, when we are born again we receive the indwelling presence of Yahshua the Messiah living in us through the Ruach HaChodesh (Holy Spirit) helping us to live in an ongoing state of faith and faithfulness. Does our being declared righteous on the basis of trust and not on legalistic observance of Torah (verse 28) diminish or make void Torah? Verse 31 says, “Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah.”-

Good Bye Easy Believism and False Conversion!

The Christian church is full of people who believe that to gain a standing of righteousness before God and to enter into life eternal all one has to do is simply confess the magic words, “I believe” and that is all there is to it. Their life style does not change. They refuse to stop sinning and they haven't a clue about Torah, about faithfulness and obedience to the commands of God. Only God knows their heart and their true spiritual condition, but needless to say, many are walking on pretty thin ice spiritually!

This study was prepared with major help from David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary*. All quotes in this work are from the *Complete Jewish Bible* unless otherwise noted.