

## **LESSON 22 - THE RIGHTEOUS ONE**

### **Can We Be Righteous By Obeying God's Law or Do We Need Jesus?**

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**A**re there good people? Can we become righteous apart from Jesus? Is obeying God's laws and commands from the Torah in the Old Testament enough to be a good person? Does God expect people to live according to those laws and gain their righteousness by obeying them? And if so, how would anyone be able to without a temple and priesthood in Israel? The answer to these questions is NO. We need to believe and trust in Jesus and the Gospel, and not just *any* Jesus or Gospel, but the Jesus and Gospel of the Bible! The Bible says Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Word and Image of God, incarnated as the Son of God, the God-man, by being miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Spirit of God (Luke 1:35). He lived a perfect sinless life and then voluntarily died in our place on the cross to pay for the penalty of all our sins. God then rose Him from the dead confirming that His payment for our sins was acceptable. Jesus is the *only Perfect One* and it's *only through* Him that we can be forgiven, made blameless under God's Law, and become perfectly righteous in God's sight.

***1. We're Sinful. Jesus is Perfect.*** Are some people good? In Luke 18:19 Jesus said, "*Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.*" Jesus didn't say He wasn't good. He didn't deny His deity or sinlessness. But Jesus's audience didn't know what we do; they thought He was a normal prophet or teacher. Jesus wanted us to know that there aren't any people that are "good." Yes, recognize some people are worse and more sinful than others, but only God is truly good. The rest of us are just *less bad* than we *could* be. Romans 3:10-20 says, "*There is no one righteous, not even one... All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.*" Furthermore, "*every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*" Every person has fallen short of being good like God. In fact, God is *so* good that offense against Him is worthy of death. God required all sin to be atoned for through animal sacrifice in the temple. Hebrews 9:22 says, "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*" So no, we're not good; we actually deserved the death penalty. Now let's consider Jesus: the Perfect One. Quoting Isaiah 53:9, 1 Peter 2:21 says of Jesus, "*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.*" He's called *the* Holy and Righteous One in Acts 3:14. Even demons recognized this, saying in Luke 4:34, "*Jesus of Nazareth... Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!*" Hebrews 4:15 speaks of Jesus's humanity as well as His sinlessness saying, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet*

*he did not sin.*” Examine your own heart. Recognize that you’re a sinner who falls short of your own standards, not to mention God’s perfect standard. Jesus is perfect and lived a sinless life. This is good for us because He has empathy for us since He also experienced living in human weakness and temptation.

**2. God’s Law Prepared People For Jesus.** The Law made us conscious of our sin and need for Jesus. Though the Law helped the Israelites (and us) learn aspects of righteousness, holiness, and obedience, it’s main purpose wasn’t to make us right with God. Galatians 3:19 says, *“Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”* The Law was given to help restrain sin and point forward to Jesus, the promised Messiah. Romans 7:7 speaks of a benefit of the Law saying, *“I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.”* Galatians 3:24-25 says, *“So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”* Eternal life isn’t found in the Law, nor are humans even capable of fully obeying the Law. Our permanent restoration to God is found only through faith in Jesus, who is the fulfillment of both the Law and all God’s covenant promises before and after the Law. God desires us to be perfect (see Matthew 5:48). Though the Law can help restrain sin and guide us to righteous behavior, it cannot erase past sins, give us a clean heart that hates sin, nor grow our spiritual relationship with God. Galatians 2:16 says, *“a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”*

**3. Jesus Alone is our Atonement and Righteousness.** Faith in Jesus is necessary to become righteous. All God’s laws regarding animal sacrifice to atone for forgiveness of sins foreshadowed the future significance of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 10:1). In John 1:29 Jesus is called, *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* He was able to offer Himself for us because He’s perfect. 1 Peter 1:19 describes Him as a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.”* Hebrews 7:26-27 ties the previous points together, saying of Jesus: *“Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”* Jesus accomplished two amazing things on the cross. First, He took the consequences of all our sins and purchased our forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7 says, *“In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”* Second, Jesus *imputed* to us *His righteousness*. This means His righteousness is credited to the account of everyone who places their trust in Him. We can *become good* through Him! Philippians 3:8-9 says, *“that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”* 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, I confess my sins and repent. I believe I’m forgiven and saved, not because I’m good or keep the Law, rather I believe and trust Your Son, Jesus, the Righteous One. Amen.