

# Journal of Religion and Business Ethics

## Special Issue on *Righteousness in Business*

*“Blessed are the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
because they will be satisfied.” – Matthew 5:6, LEB*

### **Special Issue Theme:**

“Righteousness” is a familiar term to readers of the Old and New Testaments, invoking moral excellence, divine justice, and salvation. Yet its dwindling usage outside of religious discourse has become somewhat ironic, connoting moral self-satisfaction as much or more often than moral probity (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025; Oxford English Dictionary, 2010). In business ethics, the term is seldom used, occurring primarily in Confucian business ethics (e.g., Woods & Lamond, 2011) and Jewish business ethics (e.g., Fischer & Friedman, 2019; Tamari, 1997). In organizational behavior, it is sometimes used as a shorthand for responsiveness to the expectations of others (e.g., Iqbal, Pfarrer, & Bundy, 2024), but sometimes as shorthand for a sense of moral superiority (e.g., DeCelles & Aquino, 2020; Li, McAllister, Ilies, & Gloor, 2019).

“Righteousness” is integral to the moral vocabulary of Christian scripture. It appears, in the masculine and feminine noun forms (tsedeq, צֶדֶק and tsedaqah, צְדָקָה) and adjectival forms (tsaddiq, צַדִּיק), 481 times in the Hebrew Bible. It appears, in variations of the noun form (dikaiosuné, δικαιοσύνη) and the adjectival form (dikaios, δίκαιος) 172 times in the Greek Bible; a related term that denotes beneficence appears in noun form (eleémosuné, ἐλεημοσύνη) 13 times. In the Old Testament, it often refers to human law-keeping (including on the part of judicial authorities) and general ethical probity; it sometimes refers to human truth-telling, and sometimes kindness; it often refers to divine judgment, grace, and vindication; it sometimes refers to divine trustworthiness and truthfulness; ten times it refers to correct weights and measures (Ziesler, 1972). Notably, the emphasis on law-keeping is distinct from legal justice (mishpat, מִשְׁפָּט), but instead involves doing more than a legal minimum to uphold relationships within a covenant (Fischer & Friedman, 2019). The covenant aspect of right behavior is crucial:

the Hebrew could not conceive of the soul except in relationship, as a ‘link in a covenant’. Health or wholeness was no individual thing. He (sic) therefore understood ts-d-q as primarily loyal activity within a relationship rather than in terms of some norm (Ziesler, 1972: 39).

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In the New Testament, its usage in Matthew is most consistent with that of the Old Testament: for humans it denotes Law-keeping, and for God it denotes gracious saving (Przybylski, 1980). Its clearest Matthaean exposition is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), which describes a meticulous approach to righteousness that has been characterized as “making a fence around the Torah” (Przybylski, 1980: 82) so that the facts of real-life circumstances do not occasion compromises of the Law, because the interpretive standard is to prevent such circumstances. This Matthaean righteousness expresses some of Jesus’s ethical teaching in that Gospel, but the culmination of that teaching is not righteousness but discipleship, in which Jesus’s followers receive grace and salvation according to the will of God; this empowers them to do the will of God (Przybylski, 1980: 122).

Paul’s teaching retains righteousness as an ethical category, which expresses “consistently loving, gracious, loyal” behavior appropriate to a covenantal relationship with God and with others (Zeisler, 1972: 159). “It is a relational word, not in the sense that it denotes a relationship, but in that it denotes activity within a relationship” (Zeisler, 1972: 162). However, Paul also extends righteousness to express a soteriological logic without discarding the term’s ethical content: the Christian is unable to keep the demands of righteousness by their own efforts, but as they are rendered “in Christ” by grace through faith, Christ’s perfect righteousness is theirs. That appropriation, or “putting on,” of a divine righteousness that is not one’s own both renders one acceptable and accepted into communion with God, and empowers one to act with ethical probity in one’s own life (Kittel & Friedrich, 1985; Zeisler, 1972).

Therefore, far from being self-satisfaction, righteousness in the Christian Scriptures is a flexible category of accountable, caring, and just activities appropriate to committed, responsible, covenant relationships with God and God’s people. The relational locus of responsibility makes this a demanding standard, yet it is one that God meets time and again, even to the point of granting Christians the use of Christ’s righteousness for their own justification and sanctification.

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The Special Issue on Righteousness in Business will further explore the implications of this rich Biblical and theological theme for business. Potential topics for exploration include but are not limited to:

1. Descriptively, what do a variety of businesspeople believe that righteousness entails?
  - Does the term have a positive or a negative valence?
  - Do these beliefs vary systematically by demography, geography, religious tradition, or religiosity?
  - Do these beliefs predict ethical affects, evaluations, or behaviors?
2. What normative insight does Biblical teaching on righteousness as beneficence (eleémosuné; ἐλεημοσύνη) offer for philanthropy in the workplace?
  - Are there implications for individual generosity toward internal stakeholders, whether on an ad-hoc basis or through an institutionalized mutual-aid program?
  - Are there implications for individual generosity toward external stakeholders, whether through in-house charitable programs, or through cooperation in external institutions like the United Way?
  - Are there implications for corporate generosity, whether through strategic philanthropy, corporate foundations, or combined-giving programs that solicit customer donations alongside corporate money?
3. What normative insight does Biblical teaching on righteousness as covenant-honoring behavior (dikaiosuné; δικαιοσύνη) offer for business practices in marketing, human resources, or supply chain management?
4. What normative insight does the righteousness teaching exemplified by the Sermon on the Mount offer for individual businesspeople?
  - Are there implications for conflict management?
  - Are there implications for professional ethics in accounting?
  - Are there implications for financial planning?
5. What should people of conscience, whether activists, businesspeople, or pastors, make of the Pauline teaching that, as an ethical and not only a soteriological matter, the Christian never has righteousness of their own, but can only put on the righteousness of Christ?
  - Does this re-set proper expectations downward for organizational compliance programs, regulatory reforms, or ESG initiatives?
  - Does this re-set proper expectations upward for pessimists about the nature of capitalism or of management?
  - Does this re-set the proper mindset of people of conscience concerned with business, from a default position of criticism or of sympathy to something else?

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## **Special Issue on *Righteousness in Business***

### **Symposium:**

Authors of potential special issue submissions are welcome to submit manuscript proposals to the double-blind peer-reviewed Cate and Sid Jansma Jr. Symposium on Righteousness in Business, to be held at the Calvin University School of Business in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA on March 18 and 19 of 2027. Participation in the Symposium is not a prerequisite for consideration of an author's work for the special issue, nor will papers presented at the Symposium be accorded any special consideration or advantage in the review process for the special issue. Please see the Symposium Call for Papers for details, or direct questions to [JansmaSymposium2027@calvin.edu](mailto:JansmaSymposium2027@calvin.edu).

### **Call for Proposals:**

Authors are invited to write papers that explore the theme of righteousness with respect to the range of business theories and practices, with meaningful implications for theory and practice, or for pedagogy.

Submissions should not include any author-identifying information; each submission should be accompanied by a cover page in a separate file including the submission name, author names and affiliations, and contact information for the corresponding author.

Submission of a manuscript for consideration in the special issue indicates acceptance of responsibility to review two manuscripts for the same special issue, and to submit completed manuscript reviews within six weeks of receipt of the draft manuscripts.

Please note that participation in the abovementioned Symposium is not a prerequisite for consideration of an author's work for the special issue, nor will papers presented at the Symposium be accorded any special consideration or advantage in the review process for the special issue.

Submissions are due on 1 June, 2027; editorial decisions are anticipated by 1 September; revisions will be due by 1 December, 2027. Publication of the special issue is anticipated in Spring 2028.

Please direct questions to Dr. Jason Stansbury, at [Jason.stansbury@calvin.edu](mailto:Jason.stansbury@calvin.edu).

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