

Righteousness in Business:

A Jansma Series Symposium on Christianity and Business

**At the Calvin University School of Business
Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA
19 and 20 of March 2027**

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

Symposium 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, צְדָקָה 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 Jansma Symposium 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 the following:

1. Descriptively, what do a variety of businesspeople believe that righteousness entails?
 - a. Does the term have a positive or a negative valence?
 - b. Do these beliefs vary systematically by demography, geography, religious tradition, or religiosity?
 - c. 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?
 - a. Are there implications for individual generosity toward internal stakeholders, whether on an ad-hoc basis or through an institutionalized mutual-aid program?
 - b. 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?
 - c. 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 (dikaíosuné; 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?
 - a. Are there implications for conflict management?
 - b. Are there implications for professional ethics in accounting?
 - c. 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?
 - a. Does this re-set proper expectations downward for organizational compliance programs, regulatory reforms, or ESG initiatives?
 - b. Does this re-set proper expectations upward for pessimists about the nature of capitalism or of management?
 - c. 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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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 take the form of English-language short papers that do not exceed 4000 words, plus references; each paper should include a clear thesis or a research question, and state implications either 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.

Papers should be submitted to JansmaSymposium2027@calvin.edu by 11:59 PM EDT, on 1 November of 2026. Submission of a paper indicates agreement by the corresponding author to review two papers, and send completed reviews no later than 11:59 PM on 15 January of 2027.

Corresponding authors of selected papers will be notified of their selection no later than 1 February of 2027. Notified authors are asked to kindly send their acceptance or regrets within six business days of notification. Acceptance of an invitation to present at the Symposium indicates that at least one of the authors will attend the Symposium in its entirety, and that at least one of the authors will present the accepted paper at the Symposium at the scheduled time.

The Calvin Center for Innovation in Business (CCIB) is pleased to reimburse reasonable coach-class airfare for flights within the United States and Canada, and up to \$100 for ground transportation, airport parking, and other incidentals for the presenting author; the CCIB is also pleased to book a complimentary hotel room on the presenter's behalf at the conference hotel for the nights of Thursday, 18 March and Friday, 19 March, 2027. Presenters will receive complimentary conference registration, including access to meals and refreshment breaks. Limited additional travel funding is available for presenting authors coming from outside of the United States or Canada; these funds will be awarded at the discretion of the conference organizers.

Please direct questions to JansmaSymposium2027@calvin.edu.

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Special Issue:

Authors of Symposium submissions are welcome to submit completed manuscripts to a double-blind peer-reviewed special issue of the ***Journal of Religion and Business Ethics***. 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. 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.

Submissions are due on 1 June, 2027; editorial decisions are anticipated by 1 September, and revisions will be due by 1 December, 2027. Publication of the special issue is anticipated in Spring 2028. Please see the special issue call for details, or direct questions to Dr. Jason Stansbury, at Jason.stansbury@calvin.edu.

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