

Righteousness in the context of the Bible

Tasks

1. Work out what constitutes biblical "zedaqa - righteousness".
2. Research (on the Internet or in a library) the "option for the poor" and make notes of your findings .
3. Identify situations that you yourself perceive as "unjust" and discuss how righteousness can/could be sought after or achieved there. In your considerations, refer to righteousness as it is to be understood in the context of the Bible.

If there is one decisive term that expresses what the biblical tradition is about, then it is "righteousness ". The problem lies in the fact that the word "righteousness" is not so easy to grasp what is meant by it in biblical terms.

Righteousness in the First (Old) Testament

The word "righteousness" suggests a state, whereas at least in the Hebrew language and the Bible, "zedaqa - righteousness" is to be understood on the one hand dynamically, as a movement, an ever-changing process, and on the other relationally, describing the relationship between God and human, or between people. Righteousness ensures that what has become disordered is put right again. The question of whether an action serves or harms the community is the yardstick for justice and injustice.

No relationship with God is possible beyond justice and righteousness. Because God reveals himself to people as the one who acts justly, people in turn are only in accordance to him and come to know him when they act justly, i.e. in particular when they stand up for the poor and disadvantaged.

Righteousness in the Gospels of the Second (New) Testament

The Gospels then make it clear that Jesus, following this tradition, points to the righteous God who has mercy on the poor and disenfranchised in particular. Jesus announces the reign of God, through which a complete reversal of the prevailing conditions sets in: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33).- Jesus turns prevailing conditions upside down by making the "option for the poor", i.e. a special focus on the socially marginalised, the standard for God-pleasing behaviour. This can be seen, for example, in his devotion to sinners. Furthermore, as a sign of the dawning kingdom of God, the "poor" are healed in an exemplary way by being noticed by Jesus (and God), by being placed at the centre of attention, but also by being healed, by having their needs of body (feeding of the 5,000; healing stories) and soul (healings) met.

Righteousness with Paul

The understanding of God's righteousness has become particularly influential for Protestant theology. Based on Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, Paul makes it clear that the relationship between God and human beings, which has been shattered or even destroyed by sin, is restored by God himself. The lack of faithfulness to fellowship with God and mankind is the starting point of Paul's argumentation and it also remains the point of reference in his admonishing letters to the first Christian communities. He sees them as being in danger of losing the new beginning (new or renewed covenant between God and mankind) based on Jesus' life, death and resurrection by falling back into behaviours that exclude the poor or make them feel to be "better people" in relation to other people.



God's righteousness and human righteousness

The understanding of righteousness expressed in the biblical traditions affects every person in their relationship to God, to their fellow human beings, to society and to the (co-)world as a whole. Righteousness has a relational character and is therefore dynamic and process-like, i.e. it can grow and diminish, be attributed or denied. Ultimately, divine righteousness describes the goal of all action, but remains unavailable to humans.

Three aspects of biblical righteousness are constitutive:

1. faith in righteousness - righteousness is possible. Even if it often seems in life as if unjust actions and doers gain the upper hand (problematizing of righteousness), righteousness (of God) will ultimately prevail.
2. problematizing of righteousness - righteousness is repeatedly missed and it is often not so easy to describe what it consists of in a particular situation. It is important to cope with this and endeavour to redefine righteousness.
3. redefining righteousness - Since righteousness is to be understood as a process and relational, righteousness must be "wrestled" for again and again and what is just must be described anew in a new or changed situation.