

Thieme's Dissertation on "Dikaiosune": the Thinking of a Judge; the Divine Standard Is the Only Source of Truth; Adjustments to the Justice of God

20. A brilliant dissertation on the vocabulary used in Scripture to describe the righteous standards of divine thought was presented in 1977 by R. B. Thieme, Jr., in his *Romans* series and was later incorporated into his book:

Thieme, R. B., Jr. *The Integrity of God*. 4th ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2005), 28-32:

The word for "righteousness," *dikaiosune*, is one of the most significant words in the New Testament; it means much more than simply "righteousness." It is a second-stage development in the Greek language in that it comes from two older words, the noun *δικη* (*dike*) and the adjective *δικαίος* (*dikaios*). The difference between *dikaiosune* and its two predecessors is the suffix *συνη* (*sune*), and that suffix makes all the difference in the world. (p. 28)

Dikaiosune was first used in the fifth century B.C.; the historian Herodotus [hi-räd'-a-tas] used it in telling the story of Solon [sō'-lan], the farseeing statesman whose laws had saved Athens more than a hundred years before.

In Solon's day, the government leaders had woven a web of decrees that tyrannized and exploited the citizens of Attica, the city-state of which Athens was capital. These rulers tried to play God. They coveted power; they poked their noses into the business of law-abiding citizens; they continually passed new laws. (p. 29)

Solon witnessed this abuse of authority. As an aristocratic member of the ruling assembly, he eventually became the *archon* [ἄρχων, chief magistrate in ancient Athens], and while serving his term, he persuaded the Athenians to adopt a new code. Solon's new system guaranteed freedom for every citizen. Privacy and property were protected; free enterprise became the order of the day. (pp. 29-30)

Solon was confident. He convinced the Athenians to pass one final statute decreeing that no one could add to or subtract from the law—except Solon himself.

The legislation of Solon greatly influenced the development of the meaning of *dikaiosune*. With Solon absent, his laws could not be expanded or rescinded; the people of Athens had to adjust to what he had left them. Under this system of law, Herodotus first coined *dikaiosune* as a legal term, meaning "the thinking of a judge in allotting to each one what is due him," in other words, good, clear, objective thinking that gives everyone a fair shake before the law.

The abstract concept of fairness indirectly included those under the law so that citizens who adjusted to the justice of Solon were said also to possess *dikaiosune* or "civil virtue." The connotation of the word, however, is not the justice of a people but the justice of the person in authority, the judge in a court of law. *Dikaiosune* therefore means "adjustment to the law," and that is the sense in which "righteousness" is a correct translation; but "justice" is an equally accurate rendition. (p. 30)

In 280 B.C., over a century after the Golden Age of Greece, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek by seventy-two scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. In their amazingly accurate version called the Septuagint, *dikaiosune* stood for the Hebrew words *תְּשֻׁבָה* (*tsedeq*) and *תְּשֻׁבָה* (*tsedaqah*), which can mean either righteousness or justice. The concepts are so interrelated that sometimes they cannot be distinguished, and the Hebrew does not attempt to separate them. Whenever God's justice or righteousness is mentioned in the Old Testament, *dikaiosune* appears in the Septuagint. God, instead of Solon, becomes the norm and believers, instead of the citizens of Attica, are called *dikaiosune* when they observe the will of God—that is, when they have adjusted to the justice of God. (pp. 30-31)

By the time the word entered the koine Greek of the New Testament, *dikaiosune* carried a wealth of meaning. It is therefore frequently mistranslated. *Dikaiosune* means “justice” as a characteristic of a judge, as the legal thinking of a judge, as the professional integrity of a judge. It means “righteousness,” not merely in the sense of being good, but as a principle leading to correct thought and action. It means “to be fair and equitable in dealing with others”; it means “virtue, justice”—integrity.

In Scripture, “the *dikaiosune* of God” [*dikaiosune theou*] means one of three things: (1) the overall “integrity” of God, (2) His “righteousness” as the principle of His integrity, or (3) His “justice” as the function of His integrity. (p. 31)

The genitive case of *theos* [God] makes the distinction between these definitions: it is both a subjective and possessive genitive. A noun in the subjective genitive is the subject of the action; that is, it produces the action of the word it modifies—God’s integrity in action is His justice. In the possessive genitive, *theos* indicates something that God possesses as a principle: God’s integrity in principle is His righteousness. Whatever its specific translation, however, *dikaiosune theou* is an abstract term; it always in some way connotes God’s integrity set against the background of His attributes. Divine integrity is, therefore, infinite, perfect, eternal, unchangeable—and incomprehensible apart from its revelation in doctrine. (pp. 31-32)

As a principle, *dikaiosune theou* involves God alone, apart from man; but as a divine action, the term can include man. In this sense, *dikaiosune* ... becomes a technical term for spiritual maturity. Maturity is the believer’s maximum adjustment to the justice of God or total relationship with the integrity of God. (p. 32)

21. From this analysis we are able to conclude that the “thinking of God” is the source of the absolute standards by which we define truth. It is to this truth that the believer must adjust and it is from these standards that he is able to identify and recognize the lie.
 - 1) By the time *dikaiosunē* was utilized by New Testament writers, its definition had evolved to represent the thinking of God who is the ultimate Judge.
 - 2) His thinking represents the expression of His perfection. For humanity the source for determining all that is right and just is God’s perfect righteousness.
 - 3) God does not *have* standards; He *is* what finite minds would classify *as* the standard. His perfection involves absolute truth, love, justice, and righteousness, the components of divine integrity.
 - 4) Solon’s unalterable laws for Athens illustrate the immutable truth of God. Solon’s were eventually altered to Rome’s disadvantage. God’s are absolute, immutable, and perfect.
 - 5) The thoughts, decisions, and actions of men are judged by God as either being in compliance or noncompliance with His righteousness.
 - 6) A believer that adjusts to the justice of God is blessed by Him while the one that does not adjust to His justice is disciplined.
 - 7) The one who adjusts is described in English translations by the word “godly.” The Greek word is **εὐσέβεια, eusebeia** and does not contain the word for God. Its definition expresses the believer’s proper response to the righteousness of God.