

Finding a Treasure in One Word

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The Greek word *dikaosune* (pronounced dik-ai-o-soo-nay) is the Bible word for “righteousness.” It reveals the true worth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In their quest to discover why Job was going through such turmoil in his life, Eliphaz, Job’s friend, asked this searching question: “Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?” (Job 4:17).

Then another of his friends, Bildad, asked a similar question. “How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?” (Job 25:4)

This is a question that still puzzles many today! How can a sinner be declared forever right before God? In order to understand the answer, we must realize that God must first be just with Himself. What do we mean? God, who cannot lie, said, “The wages of sin is death.” That is not a strong suggestion. That is a command!

In order for God to be true to His word, all who have sinned must die! There can be absolutely no exceptions, not any! How then is it possible for God to be just with Himself and for sinners to be allowed to live? How can God be just and allow a sinner to be right before Him? The answer is found in the gospel of God’s grace.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **For in it the righteousness of God is revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’” (Rom. 1:16-17)

The gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ) makes known the righteousness of God. The word translated “righteousness” in English is the Greek word “*dikaosune*.” It was a word used both in the Greek and Roman court systems. The word eventually came to mean “adjustment to the standard of the law.”

When a law was broken, the one convicted of the crime had to be adjusted to the standard imposed by the law. This adjustment was to be made by meeting whatever requirement the law demanded. If the law required a fine, the fine had to be paid. If the law demanded death as the just settlement, then death it was. We would call this “justice.” When the penalty was paid, justice was satisfied. This is precisely what the word “*dikaosune*” means. However, the justice that Paul had in mind had nothing whatsoever to do with man’s legal system. The word used in the Bible means adjustment to God’s standard. The gospel made known God’s adjustment to His righteous standard.

God’s Righteousness

The God of the Bible is the author of righteousness. The absolute standard of righteousness comes from Him. God alone set the standard of right. He is the source of all righteousness. John made this clear with these words: “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” (1 Jn. 1:5) Righteousness is a part of who God is. God is the epitome of absolute perfection.

“Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice.” (Dan. 9:14)

Human Righteousness

Man's righteousness falls far short of God's righteousness. Every human being is born a sinner. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

To be a sinner means that we are "not right when measured against God's standard." In fact, our very best when compared to God's righteousness falls far short (Isa. 64:6). One sinner may be more righteous than another, but when compared to God all are sinners. When measured against God's supreme right standard, man's righteousness slips into a sea of relativity. What may be right for one person may not be considered right to another. What may be right for one legal system may not be right for another. What may be right to one human government may not be right with another.

"For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12).

God's Justice

The God of the Bible is not only a God of absolute righteousness, but He is also the God of absolute justice. Like righteousness, God's justice is a part of His being. "The Rock His work is perfect. For all His ways are just. A God of faithfulness and without injustice. Righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4).

Because God is totally just, He must **always** adjust that which is not right back to His righteousness. Why? God must be true to Himself. He cannot compromise who He is. Someone has said, "God's required righteousness is that righteousness which His essence requires Him to require." This is why God must judge *all* unrighteousness! God must judge all sinners. And His required judgment is death.

Human Justice

Our human understanding of justice is flawed because our thoughts are contaminated by sin. Sin distorts everything that we think and do. Our human judgments do not always fit the crime. We do not have all knowledge, and so we never have all the facts, and the facts that we have are not always one hundred percent accurate. Our sin creates hidden motives that taint and distort our judgment.

Depravity obscures every judgmental issue. It causes rationalism that pollutes every verdict. Our emotion also gets in the way to color the facts that we think we may know. We cannot be one hundred percent fair in our legal system. Our human court system is not perfect. We are not fair with our friends or our families. We must admit before God that we are sinners. We are part of a fallen creation, and we are not righteous, and we are not just. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's perfection.

Has God Been Just?

At the beginning of this study we asked this question, "Has God been just?" Death is the only payment for sin that will satisfy God's justice and restore His righteousness. Because of

God's desire to make known the riches of His glory, He has determined to extend grace and allow a sinner to be just before Him. However, God cannot compromise His integrity in allowing that to happen. He cannot bend, or twist, or distort in any way His righteousness and His justice by allowing even one single sin to go unjudged. Nor can He allow one sinner into His presence without the penalty being paid. God's justice requires Him to **always adjust** that which is not right to His righteousness. God demands death to restore His righteousness, and death it must be.

God's Righteousness Restored in Christ

In order to reveal the riches of His glory and motivated by an indescribable love, God elected to pay man's sin debt. But God, as God, could not die. God is eternal life (Psa. 90:2). So in order to die, God became a man. He bypassed Adam's sin by coming into this world through a virgin. Jesus Christ knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). God, in the person of Jesus Christ, then died – the just for the unjust. The death of the Son of God paid in full God's demand for righteousness. God's demand of death for sin was adjusted to **in Christ**. God's righteousness and His justice came together in perfect harmony through the sacrifice of Christ.

Is there one word that says all of this? Yes! *Dikaiosune*! *Dikaiosune* means "adjustment to the righteousness of God." It is this "righteousness" that the gospel makes known. When we by faith believe in Christ, we are immediately placed into union with Him. We are spiritually immersed into His body. We are placed into the One who satisfied forever God's divine Judgment. When we are placed into the body of Jesus Christ, *we die in Him*. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live" (Gal. 2:20a).

The wages of sin is death, but we pay our debt the moment we are placed "into Christ." God forever adjusts us to His absolute righteousness "in Christ."

"And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness (*dikaiosune*) which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9). "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness (*dikaiosune*) of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Can God remain just and at the same time be gracious to those who are *in His Son*? Yes! In Christ we are justified before God. To be justified means to be declared forever right. So how can we answer Eliphaz and Bildad's question, "How can a man be right before God?" There is only one way. Justification before God is made available as a gift of God's grace by faith alone in Christ alone.

"Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

God's Righteousness Required

God's declaration that all who sin must die is still in force. He has set apart a special day in which every human being will be judged by Him according to His standard of righteousness. "Because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

Like those who were outside of Noah's ark faced God's righteous wrath, all who are outside of God's Son will also face God's just judgment for sin in full.

Where do you stand?