

COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

BIB 3616.1 Romans

Project B 2

Word Study on “Justified” (**dikaioō**)

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1. Its modern secular meaning by a radio or TV commentator

“Justified is used in a number of ways in contemporary culture which don’t all appear to be obviously connected. In conversation, if someone attempts to “justify” their actions they are attempting to explain why their actions were not wrong. This meaning is similarly found in court rooms. When something is “justified” it is found that there was adequate reason for it to occur.

Recently a pop star named Justin Timberlake released a CD titled “Justified.” The title was both a word play on his name and statement. With the title he was saying that this CD would prove his musical prowess. He wanted his musical career to be “justified” (Wikipedia.org).

The word is also used to describe the process by which you space lines on text on a document so that the lines come out even at the margins.

2. Its ancient meanings

The root word for my words group is *dike*. Dike traces its origin to the beginning of abstract thought. Because of this, none of the words in the dike word group appear in the writings of Homer or Hesiod (Kittel 2:192). However, the writings of Hesiod do give us insight into the origin of the word. According to Hesiod, “Dike is the daughter of Zeus who shares in his government of the world” (H. Seebass in Brown 3:353). In those times, dike was not seen as standard imposed on mankind by God, but as an immanent force in the nature of being, specifically relating to our functioning in society. In the post-Homeric time it also started to refer to an expiation of wrongdoers or as the goddess of punishment who pursued wrongdoers (H. Seebass in Brown 3:353).

Plato used the group word *dikaiosyne* to refer to the basic structure of the state and the human soul. Aristotle used the same word to refer to the chief of human virtues. It was later on that the word started to refer to the idea of conforming to a standard (H. Seebass in Brown 3:353).

My word first appeared in the writings of Pindar and Aeschylus. At the time it carried three meanings: (1) to put right (2) to demand as a right (3) to give someone his due (H. Seebass in Brown 3:354). The word was later used by Herodotus in three ways: (1) to hold or deem right (2) to desire to do (3) to chastise or punish. Thucydides used the term two ways: (1) to refuse (2) to condemn (Liddell 202).

3. Its OT equivalent(s)

Dikaios most frequently, twenty three times, translates the Hebrew word *šādaq* (H. Seebass in Brown 3:355). *Sādaq* is a causative verb which literally means “to declare one right” (J.B.P in Wood 634), “be righteous” (Harris 240) or “to do right” (du Toit 12.3.1). It is the Old Testament word for forensic term justify, which means to acquit (J.I.P in Wood 636). It is translated twice into the phrase “to do (someone) justice” (J.B.P in Wood 634).

“Righteousness in the OT is not a matter of actions conforming to a given set of absolute legal standards, but of behavior which is in keeping with the two-way relationship between God and man” (H. Seebass in Brown 3:355). This means that righteousness of God comes from his dealings with His people, such as offering redemption and salvation. Prior to the exile, little was said about individual righteousness. The main focus was on national righteousness. The exile marked a turning point in thought. From then on the Old Testament feels comfortable speaking of individual righteousness (H. Seebass in Brown 3:355).

4. Its LXX (Septuagint) meaning

The *dikaios* word group underwent considerable due to being used to render the Hebrew group formed from *sdq*. Typically the words of this group were not used to refer to the divine, except at early dates, but in the LXX, they were almost exclusively used to refer to the God’s character and actions (Brown 3:358).

“The verb *dikaioo* is not found with its secular Greek meanings in the LXX; it has to be interpreted in terms of the Hebrew root it renders. When it translates the root *sdq.*, the forensic sense is almost always present” (Brown 3:358).

Dikaioo is used to translate five different Hebrew words *sadaq*, *bahan*, *zakah*, *rib*, and *sapat* but primarily *sadaq*. “In the LXX the use is forensic but mostly in the positive sense “to pronounce righteous,” “to vindicate” (Kittel 175). In Genesis 44:16 it is used for the phrase, “And how can we justify ourselves.” It is also used in two other ways: (1) “to acquit,” “to prove innocent,” and “to make pure” (2) a use for vindication, divine or human (Kittel 175).

5. Judaism

“In the rabbinic Judaism righteousness was completely identified with conformity to -> law” (Brown 3:358). While I couldn’t find my specific word used in the Jewish writings, I did find the related word *dikaioo*, which means “righteousness.” To the Jews of the synagogue the “righteous are those whose merits outweigh their faults” The first class among the righteous are the patriarchs and some teachers (Kittel 169). They also used the term to refer to the Messiah, who is righteous because His whole nature and action conform to the will of God (Kittel 169).

While I could not find my word in the Talmud or Targooms, I did find that it in the apocryphal writings. In Sirach 42:2 it is used to mean “to do justice or punish.” In Sirach 7:5, 10:29, and 13:22 it means “to recognize or declare to be right or righteous.” In the Psalms of Solomon it refers to recognizing something as just as righteous (Brown 3:358).

6. Hellenistic Judaism

Several words in the *dike* word group are used by in the writings of Philo and Josephus. *Dikaioo* is used by Josephus to refer to “virtues.” Both Philo and Josephus use it to refer to the Old Testament

saints and God Himself. The word is also used to describe things as “good,” “legal,” “exact,” “correct,” or “fertile” (Kittel 169).

Dikaioo was originally used by Pindar to mean “to validate” or “to establish as right.” By the writings of Josephus and Philo, however, the more general meaning was “regard as right,” “to judge,” “to grant,” “to agree,” “to desire,” or “to demand” (Kittel 175). It is also used in the sense of “to treat someone rightly,” “to secure justice for someone,” “to pass sentence,” “to condemn or punish,” “to pass sentence of death,” or “to represent someone’s cause.” Mystics used the term to mean “to become sinless” (Kittel 175).

7. Its secular meaning in NT times

The related word *dikaiosyne*, which means justification or righteousness, was used in a number of ways among common Greeks. It was closely related to their sense of law, and it occurs commonly as a virtue. It referred to civic virtue of observance of the law and fulfillment of duty. It was seen as a cardinal virtue, and in mysticism it refers to “the power of virtue with which the initiate is invested” (Kittel 171). Legally the term was used to refer to “distributive justice, i.e., allotting what is due” (Kittel 171).

Josephus and Philo also used this related term. Josephus used it to refer to divine justice and human virtue. “Philo speaks of the righteousness of God in the sense of his revelation when he inquires into what is right.” In his writings he demonstrates a developed ethical system with *dikaiosyne* as the ultimate virtue (Kittel 171).

8. Its general New Testament use

In the New Testament *dikaioo* is almost always used in the legal sense, and it is never used in the common Greek meaning of “to regard as fair and right.” The LXX, and its legal focus, appears to have been the main influence on the New Testament usage of the word (Kittel 2:214).

Dikaioo is used 39 times in the New Testament. Paul, who uses the term more than any other New Testament author, uses the term 24 times. Paul uses the term 14 times in Romans alone. Luke, who uses the term five times, is the non-Pauline author who uses the term the most. Mark, John, Peter, Jude, and the author of Hebrews never use the term. Twenty four out of the thirty nine times *dikaioo* appears in the New Testament it is translated “justified,” and it almost always is used in reference to God (Chandler 2). By far the term is mostly used in the legal sense, by Paul, to refer to how the wicked are seen as righteous by God (Kittel 175).

Apart from being translated “justified,” *dikaioo* is used in a variety of ways. Acts 13:39 says, “And through Him everyone who believes is *freed* (**dikaioō**) from all things, from which you could not *be freed* (**dikaioō**) through the Law of Moses” (Chandler 3). In Romans 6, Paul uses the term to refer to us being freed from sin. Twice the term is translated “vindicated,” and each of these times it refers to a member of the Godhead (Chandler 3). In Revelation it is given the unusual meaning of “to exercise righteousness” (Kittel 175).

When Paul and James use *dikaioo*, they appear to make contradictory claims. In Romans 3:24, Paul teaches that we are *dikaioo* by faith in Jesus. However, in James 2:24, James teaches that we are *dikaioo* by faith and works. There are other passages which appear to contradict Paul’s teaching. Matthew 12:37 indicates that we are *dikaioo* by our words, and Luke 18:14 teaches we are *dikaioo* by praying for mercy (Chandler 2).

9. Its use by Paul

a. general

Paul not only uses *dikaioo* more than any other New Testament writer, he uses the entire word group more than any other writer. Further, he used the terms with the widest range of meanings. He was the one who established the connection between the Old Testament view of God’s righteousness

and God's justification of sinners (Brown 363). Paul's conclusion is that sinners are justified, *dikaioo*, by faith in Christ (Brown 363).

Though Paul uses the word group in a variety of ways, it is primarily used in the legal sense to refer to how the wicked are justified or acquitted before God. The central theme of both Romans and Galatians is that sinful man can be justified in the sight of god by faith in Christ (Kittel 175).

1st Timothy 3:16 uses *dikaioo* to refer to Christ being "vindicated" by the Spirit (McReynolds 1142). The only other time *dikaioo* is translated "vindicated," it is also being used to refer to Christ, in Matthew 11:19 (Chandler 2). Once, in Romans 6:7, He uses it to refer to sinners being "freed" from sin (McReynolds 1142).

Besides these two occurrences, Paul always uses *dikaioo* to refer to how God "justifies" sinners, how sinners are "justified," and how sinners are acquitted of their sin and made right before God (McReynolds 1142).

b. specific

Of the fifteen times Paul uses *dikaioo* in Romans it is translated "justified" 10 times, "justifies" 3 times, "justify" once and "freed" once. Besides the time it is translated "freed," it is always referring to how sinful man is made right or righteous before a righteous God (Chandler 2).

In Romans 1:17-3:20, Paul builds God's case against sinful man. In Romans 3:23 he establishes that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." When Paul uses *dikaioo*, He follows in the tradition of the LXX, not the common usage, and explicitly and almost exclusively uses it in forensic sense. Further, like how Philo used the term to refer to righteousness and the mystic's use of it to refer to sinlessness (Kittel 175), Paul uses the term to refer to sinners as righteous and free of sin.

According to Paul, our becoming right before is a gift from God's grace which we gain access to through faith in Christ. Paul believes that by putting our faith in Christ we become righteous before God. This is a legal standing. Though we may be sinners, through faith in Christ we are acquitted of our sin and seen as righteous. Before our judge, God, we are seen as not guilty. John MacArthur put this way, "Justification is God's declaration that all the demands of the law are fulfilled on behalf of the believing sinner through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Justification is a wholly forensic, or legal, transaction. It changes the judicial *standing* of the sinner before God" (MacArthur 3:24).

Some of the meaning of the passage is lost in translation. The sinner receives his righteousness directly from God. "In view of man's sin God has stepped in with His provided righteousness" (Walvoord Romans 3:24). "*Are justified* at the beginning of v 24 harks back to God's righteousness in vs 21–22. (The connection is not clear in English because we have to use words from two different roots—'justify' and 'righteousness'—to translate Greek words that come from the same root.) (Carson Romans 3:24)." This means that when we are *dikaioo*, we are not only given a new standing before God, but we are also given god's righteousness.

In short, Paul explains that sinners, who are guilty before God, can be acquitted of their sin, found not guilty of their sin but declared righteous, and actually be given the righteousness of God if only they would put their faith in Christ.

10. Its translation

Most of the contemporary word for word translations I found translated *dikaioo* "justified." However, Young's Literal Translation translated the term "being made righteous." This seems to best nail the full meaning of the original Greek and Paul's full intended meaning. It is not merely that we are declared "not guilty," as the New Living Translation, or that we are "made right" as the

New Century Version says. An accurate translation needs to have both the forensic verdict and our new standing as righteous or right before God. The Young's Literal Translation best captures this idea. The English Standard Version, as well as many other contemporary translations, do a good job of translating this passage by using the term "justified," a term which carries both the forensic idea and the idea of new standing. While The Message may use very simple English, it does accurately carry both the idea that we have a right standing before God, and that He is restoring us to the state where He always wanted us, righteous.

- "Being declared righteous freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Romans 3:23, Young's Literal Translation)
- "And are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Romans 3:23, English Standard Version)
- "God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ." (Romans 3:23, The Message)
- "Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins." (Romans 3:24, New Living Translation)
- "And all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ." (Romans 3:24, New Century Version)

11. Its application

After spending hours researching the meaning of *dikaioo*, we have to ask, "So what?" or "Why does it matter that Paul says we are *dikaioo*?" It matters because with this single word, sinners are acquitted of their sin and given a new identity. In God's court, all of mankind would be found guilty of our sin, and would be sentenced to an eternity in Hell to pay for our sin. When Paul announces

that we are *dikaioo*, he is declaring that we will no longer receive the sentence we were previously due. To everyone who has put their faith in Christ, this truth should radically alter their life. No matter what sin they have committed, no matter what crimes they have committed on earth; no matter what sentence they receive from the courts of man, by putting their faith in Christ they can be acquitted of their sin and be seen as not guilty in the eyes of God. No one is without hope in God's court.

However, this is not the only reason it was important that Paul used *dikaioo*. This word not only carries the forensic idea of being found not guilty, it also carries the meaning of being found righteous. Since Paul uses other words in the *dike* word group to refer to God's righteousness, we can see there is connection between God's righteousness and our new standing before God. With this word we go from being sinners to being righteous in God's eyes. Once again, for all of us who have put their faith in Christ, this should radically change our self image. We should no longer view ourselves as guilty sinners in God's sight, though we still sin. Instead, we should see ourselves as righteous. In seeing ourselves as righteous, this should lead us to cease acting like sinners and start acting like saints. Further, our motive for obeying God shouldn't be in an attempt to please Him or make ourselves more righteous because He has already made us righteous in His sight. Our motive should be love and gratitude for the grace He has shown us.

Finally, we should stand confident in His sight knowing that we have been acquitted of our sin and have been given His righteousness. We have no reason to fear the loss of our salvation because we have been found "not guilty" in God's court. Not only that but, we are now righteous. If we have been found "not guilty" in His court, then we have no reason to fear the loss of salvation. We can stand confident, knowing that we are His.

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