

# Justice: Hiding in Translation

- It can be hard to understand how justice is supposed to be a priority in Christian lives when the word “justice” doesn’t show up in English translations of the New Testament
- If you type “justice” into a Bible word search engine, “justice” appears only 11 times in the ESV translation,<sup>i</sup> 9 times in the NASB,<sup>ii</sup> and 8 times in the NKJV.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Greek word translated into English as “justice”:** *krisis*
  - The definitions of *krisis* line up with our English definitions: legal decision, condemnation, the authority to judge, punishment, or judgment.<sup>iv</sup>
- **There is another Greek word, *dikaiosune*, that captures the concept of justice, but is translated into other words in English translations**
  - *Dik*-stem words are common in the New Testament, showing up around 300 times
  - The concept of *dikaiosune* is captured by two English words—righteousness and justice—yet is almost always translated as one of the two: “righteousness.”<sup>v</sup>
  - Translators of classical Greek literature usually did the opposite when translating *dikaiosune* into English, opting for “justice” instead of “righteousness.”<sup>vi</sup>
  - In classical Greek, *dikaiosune* meant “well-ordering,” and it was an important word for understanding justice and government at the time.
  - It was more than a personal quality; it was particularly demonstrated in relationships.<sup>vii</sup>
  - Romance languages like Spanish and French don’t have a word for “righteousness,” so *dikaiosune* is translated almost entirely as “justice.”
- Challenge with the translation:
  - When English-speakers like me read the Bible, we see righteousness all over the New Testament, but not justice.
  - Because righteousness in our world is connected to private, personal morality, it can seem like the highest goal of Christian life is to be clustered inside of church buildings, never doing wrong, instead of doing right in the wider world.
- Just a few verses where *dikaiosune* shows up:
  - “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness/justice [*dikaiosune*].” (Matthew 6:33a NASB)
  - “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness/justice [*dikaiosune*].” (Matthew 5:6 NASB)
  - “...those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness/justice [*dikaiosune*] will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17b NASB)
  - “But even if you should suffer for righteousness/justice’ [*dikaiosune*] sake, you are blessed.” (1 Peter 3:14a NASB)

# Demystifying Biblical Justice

- “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness/justice [*dikaiosune*] and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17 NASB)

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 12:18, 12:20, 23:23; Luke 11:42, 18:3, 18:5, 18:7, 18:8; Acts 8:33, 28:4; Hebrews 11:33

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 12:18, 12:20, 23:23; Luke 7:29, 11:42, 18:7, 18:8; Acts 28:4, Col 4:1

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 12:18, 12:20, 23:23; Luke 11:42, 18:3,; Acts 8:33, 28:4; Romans 9:14

<sup>iv</sup> Swanson, James A. *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (NT)*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

<sup>v</sup> Blomberg, Craig, and Jennifer Foutz Markley. *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.