

Why can't I see justice in the New Testament?

There are many reasons why it can seem extra-challenging for modern, English-speaking, Western-minded Christians to see justice in the New Testament. The following are just four of the many reasons why it's we have some blocks:

1. Historical reasons.

- The controversy over "social justice" in the church is a recent one in the scheme of Christian history- it only dates back just over 100 years.
- The early 1900's, many white Protestant churches split over 'social justice or the gospel,' in large part due to a reaction to the theology expressed in the Social Gospel movement.
- The current Evangelical movement comes from the side of the church that rejected social justice.
- The 'gospel OR justice' legacy continues today, so many Christians think that in order to follow the true gospel, they have to reject social justice/justice/social transformation.
- Because of a century of teaching that social justice is anti-Biblical (instead of being taught the biblical foundations of it), many Christians reject social justice out of a genuine desire to follow Christ.
- If we want to see faith leaders championing and sustaining social transformation, we need a Biblical understanding that doesn't force us to choose 'justice or the gospel.'

2. Western meanings of justice.

- Justice has a legal flavor in English, and it can be hard for Western-minded Christians to learn to do justice without rules and laws.
- The things we often connect to justice, including judgement, condemnation, punishment, don't fit into our understanding of a God in the New Testament, full of grace and mercy.
- Jesus didn't bring a whole new law code with Him, He brought us a fully restored relationship to God, a new nature, complete freedom, and access to the Holy Spirit. He brought us into a totally new kind of life—a life that flows from within and is guided by a transformed heart.
- To many with our *law-and-order equals justice* Western minds, those things Jesus brought seems to not relate to doing justice.

Demystifying Biblical Justice

- When we bring the kingdom of God on earth, and restoration and wholeness come—that is justice.
- The focus of Biblical justice is to restore and sustain *shalom*- wholeness, peace and prosperity- so if you look for that, it's all over the New Testament.
- Our justice should be full of the New Testament teachings of compassion, mercy, grace, and freedom.

3. Translation challenges.

- The word "justice" doesn't appear much in most English translations of the New Testament- often 10 or less times in most English translations.
- The concept of justice appears in the Greek, but it's not translated into English.
- The Greek word that you need the concepts of both justice and righteousness to define- *dikaiosune* - is only translated as one, righteousness. This can make it seem like righteousness, not justice, is the focus of Christian lives.
- Righteousness in our culture has a meaning that is almost exclusively connected private morality. That can make it seem like sitting around in church buildings not doing drugs, having sex or watching PG-13 movies as the highest expression of a Christ-centered life instead of doing justice in the public world.

4. Social translation challenges.

- Many/most/all of the revolutionary social parts of Jesus' life and teachings are missed because we are so far removed from the His cultural context.
- When we read the stories and commands of Jesus, we often miss what the meant in their social context.
- The social world of Jesus' time excluded people based on age, race and gender, but Jesus includes them as essential, public parts of His ministry.
- He talked to, validated, and included women, widows, children, and Samaritans. In Jesus' time, those actions carried massive implications.
- It should be normal for Christians to do the things that are socially revolutionary.
- People that have lost their value or worth in the sight of the world should find family in the church.
- To follow Christ should cause us to do things that look revolutionary to the social order of the world.