

RIGHTEOUSNESS

This word, and its cognates, is one of the central concepts of the good news as given by Paul. But do we understand it, or is it just another word on our lips that slips through our minds without comprehension? Different brands of "Christianity" tend to see this concept from different perspectives, and probably to each of us it means something slightly different. It was part of the contention between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformers of the 16th century. For many years it was to me just another "Scripture word" associated with our salvation. I remember being offended when I heard one jazz musician call another's musical performance "righteous." I didn't know how ignorant I was.

Then, it was also part of God's character, and I can still hear the reverence in the voice of R. C. Sproul when he would speak of "a righteous and holy God." The words can be awe-inspiring. But what do they mean? How does this apply to us?

In my old age, I have decided to not wait until I understand things perfectly before I enter into dialogue with the Body about important subjects. So I invite you into this dialogue. I want to share with you an understanding which has come to me.

William D. Chamberlain, in *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, states the following regarding the history and development of the root of our word, "righteousness." He says, "... a root as δικ-, [has] in the Sanskrit the primary idea 'to show.'.... From δικ-, 'to show,' 'point out,' we get δικ-η, 'the way pointed out,' i. e., 'the thing which is right,' 'justice.'

The *Analytical Greek Lexicon* gives the following definition of our word "righteousness," which in the Greek is δικαιοσυνη: fair and equitable dealing; justice; righteousness.

E. W. Bullinger, in *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, gives the following meaning: "the doing or being what is just and right.... it signifies the sum total of all that God commands and approves. As such it is not only what God demands, but what He gives to man, and which is appropriated by faith; and hence it is a state called forth by God's act of justification, viz.. by judicial deliverance from all that stands in the

**way of being δικαίος [just; righteous; in accord with the way pointed out]."
(brackets, mine).**

Liddell and Scott say that the classical thought behind the concept of "righteous" (δικαίος) was "observant of custom and social rule, well-ordered, civilized; decent; observant of right; fitting; well-balanced; just."

I recall William Barclay stating that righteousness, especially in a social setting, has the sense of being "in right relationship."

There is definitely a forensic use of this word-group, and they can have legal connotations. Both Augustine and Luther had legal training, and it is my suspicion that their personal bent in this direction led to the legal flavor of these words in church dogma and tradition. But here is where context must play a decisive role. Yet, often, the context could be considered abstract, as Paul does not always relate his context to a specific social or religious setting. So the tendency is to put our own concepts into the text, based upon what we think the word means.

Etymology (viewing meanings based upon the roots and components of how the word is made up) has come under attack in recent linguistic trends which favor the concept of semantic domains (which gives the greatest weight to the context for determining the "meaning" of the word; the result is a very broad range of semantic meanings for any word; this allows for translating a passage according to what we "think" it means). So, my views here are a bit out-of-step with current trends, but they are based upon centuries of linguistic theory and practice. I also lean toward a concordant concept of translating. With all this in mind, I proceed to share my understanding of "righteousness" with you.

In my translations, I have come to give this expanded meaning: that which is in accord with the way pointed out; well-ordered dealings with fairness and equity in right-wised relationships; justice; righteousness.

If we consider that Christ is "the Way [pointed out], the Truth [of justice, fairness and equity] and the Life [in right relationship with God and mankind]," as I have indicated in brackets, I think that we can best understand this concept of "righteousness."

Now if we consider the verb form, we see that by being placed into Christ we have been declared righteous (by being a part of the Christ through being

buried and raised with Him) -- the forensic view; but we have also been placed in "the Way pointed out" -- the fair and equitable and just way of living; and we have been set in right relationship with both God and mankind. The way pointed out is also a life in faith, by faith. This is all due to the act of obedience which the One Man, the Last Adam, did, and His gracious gift to us.

**Shalom,
Jonathan**