

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE: DUAL INSEPARABLE PRINCIPLES IN THE CHARACTER OF GOD & SCRIPTURE

by Thomas W. Jacobson (2013, revised 2016)

Righteousness and justice are deep within the nature of Almighty God. Correspondingly, these characteristics in Scripture are intertwined and inseparable, providing fixed standards by which we can live in right relationship to God and one another, and understand the Divine purpose of civil government as a “minister of God” (Romans 13:1-4). Many of the words for right or righteousness also mean just, justice, or judgment. “Minister of God” in this context means civil government authority and law, not a pastor or priest who is a minister of God for a church or synagogue. God alone is absolutely good and able to perfectly and simultaneously be a minister of law and love. He is the King of kings, Law Giver and Supreme Judge, and is the God of unfailing love and compassion, Savior and Redeemer of mankind, and Great Shepherd.

God’s standards of righteousness require justice. Every injustice is a result of an act of unrighteousness. Without righteousness, there can be no justice. Without justice, righteousness cannot be preserved.

Righteousness is rightly relating to God and people, based on God’s standards, not our standards. It is “purity of heart” and “conformity of heart and life to the divine law. ... It includes justice, honesty and virtue ... in short, it is true religion” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1828).

Justice is “the virtue which consists in giving to every person what is his due” based on principles of impartiality and equity (Webster’s 1828), firmly rooted in legal standards of right and wrong that are universal, uniform, and unchanging.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of the inseparable nature of the righteousness and justice of Almighty God, because the Lamb of God was perfect in righteousness, while the justice of God required His sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

Followers of Jesus Christ should be equally concerned with matters of justice as they are with matters of righteousness. For He is!

Below are a few of the 1,695 times that righteousness and justice (and related terms) occur in the Bible. The Old Covenant passages pertain mostly to the nature of God, and principles of good civil government. The New Covenant focuses on the righteousness and justification of God given to mankind as a free gift through the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus. All should shape our understanding of God, our understanding of the purpose and function of civil government, and our relationships with each other.

“For the word of the LORD is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness. **He loves righteousness (H6666) and justice (H4941)**” (Psalm 33:4-5).

“**Righteousness (H6664) and justice (H4941) are the foundation of Your throne;** Lovingkindness and truth go before You” (Psalm 89:14).

“For **I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness (H6666) and justice (H4941)**, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him” (Gen. 18:19).

“**There shall be one standard (law, verdict, justice; H4941) for you**; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 24:22).

“So David reigned over all Israel; and **David administered justice (H4941) and righteousness (H6666)** for all his people” (II Samuel 8:15).

“I know that **the LORD will maintain the cause (judgment, H1779) of the afflicted and justice (H4941) for the poor**. Surely **the righteous (just, H6662) will** give thanks to Your name; **the upright (straight, just, H3477) will dwell in Your presence**” (Psalm 140:12-13).

“For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. **He stores up sound wisdom for the upright (H3477)**; *He is* a shield to those who walk in integrity, **guarding the paths of justice (H4941)**, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. **Then you will discern righteousness (H6664) and justice (H4941)** and equity *and every good course*” (Proverbs 2:6-9).

“**To do righteousness (H6666) and justice (H4941) is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice**” (Proverbs 21:3).

“How **the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was full of justice (H4941)! Righteousness (H6664) once lodged in her**, but now murderers” (Isaiah 1:21).

“The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and **He will not judge (H8199) by what His eyes see, nor make a decision (H3198) by what His ears hear; but with righteousness (H6664) He will judge (H8199) the poor, and decide (be right, justify, H3198) with fairness (justice, right, H4334)** for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also **righteousness (H6664) will be the belt about His loins**, and faithfulness the belt about His waist” (Isaiah 11:2-5).

“But **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (justification; G1343; from just, right, equitable, innocent, holy, G1342)**, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill ... and have **neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice (G2920) and mercy and faithfulness**; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23:23).

“Why do you not even on your own initiative **judge (G2919) what is right (just, equitable, holy, G1342)?**” (Luke 12:57)

“**Do not judge (G2919) according to appearance, but judge (G2919) with righteous (G1342) judgment (G2920)**” (John 7:24).

“(W)hen He is come, **He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness (G1343), and of judgment (G2920)**” (John 16:8).

“But now **apart from the Law *the* righteousness** (equity, justification, G1343) **of God has been manifested**, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even ***the* righteousness** (G1343) **of God through faith in Jesus Christ** for all those who believe; for there is **no distinction**; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **being justified** (render innocent, be righteous, G1344) **as a gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to **demonstrate His righteousness** (G1343), because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of **His righteousness** (G1343) at the present time, **so that He would be just** (G1342) **and the justifier** (G1344) of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

“*This is* a plain indication of **God's righteous** (G1342) **judgment** (G2920) so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering” (II Thess. 1:5).

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all *the spoils*, was first of all, by the translation of *his name*, **king of righteousness** (H1343), and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace” (Hebrews 7:1-2).

Christ Jesus “who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but **kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges** (G2919) **righteously** (G1346); and **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness** (G1343); for by His wounds you were healed” (I Peter 2:22-24).

“Little children, make sure no one deceives you; **the one who practices righteousness** (G1343) **is righteous** (G1342), **just as He is righteous** (1342); the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:7-8).

“And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, **true and righteous** (G1342) **are Your judgments** (G2920)’” (Revelation 16:7).

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and **He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness** (G1343) **He judges** (G2919) **and wages war**. His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. *He is* clothed with a **robe dipped in blood**, and His name is called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:11-13).

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The H numbers and G numbers above reference Hebrew or Greek words in Strong's Concordance. The definitions and root words are included below (www.blueletterbible.org):

Hebrew 1777 (25 times): **diyn**: to rule, regulate; judge; contend; condemn; defend the right.

Hebrew 1779 (from 1777; 21 times): **diyn**: judgment; cause (which is judged); plea; strife.

Hebrew 3198 (64 times): **yakach**: be in the front, in the forepart; argue, prove; confute, convict; correct, punish; judge, decide, do justice.

Hebrew 3474 (39 times): **yashar**: to be right, straight, level, upright, just, lawful, smooth.

Hebrew 3477 (from 3474; 137 times): **yashar**: straight; upright, righteous; right; correct; level.

Hebrew 3559 (5 times translated "right"): **kuwn**: to stand upright, right, set up, erect, establish.

Hebrew 4334 (from 3474; 24 times): **miyshowr**: uprightness, justice; a plain, level country.

Hebrew 4941 (from 8199; 426 times): **mishpat**: judgment, justice; right, that which is just, lawful, according to law; cause; lawful; law; order; ordinance; worthy; discretion; sentence; act of deciding a case; place or seat of judgment, court.

Hebrew 6663 (50 times): **tsadaq**: to be right, straight; to be just, righteous; justify, just, justice.

Hebrew 6664 (from 6663; 123 times): **tsedeq**: righteousness, rightness, right; straightness; just, justice; what is right and just; righteous cause; righteousness (in government).

Hebrew 6666 (from 6663; 167 times): **tsēdaqah**: rectitude, righteousness, right; justice; piety, virtue; righteous acts; righteousness (in government, of a judge, ruler, king, law).

Hebrew 8199 (219 times): **shaphat**: to judge; to set up, erect; plead; vindicate; condemn, punish; defend; deliver; rule, govern; execute judgment; discriminating (of man).

Greek 1342 (from 1349; 96 times): **dikaio**: righteous, right; just; observing divine and human laws; upright, virtuous, keeping the commands of God.

Greek 1343 (from 1342; 91 times): **dikaioσynē**: righteousness; integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting; beneficence.

Greek 1349 (3 times): **dikē**: vengeance, judgment, punish; right, just; damnatory sentence.

Greek 1344 (from 1342; 40 times): **dikaioō**: to render righteous or such as he ought to be; justify; be freed; be righteous; justifier.

Greek 2919 (123 times): **krinō**: judge; determine; condemn; to separate, put asunder, pick out, select, choose; approve, esteem, prefer; determine, resolve, decree.

Greek 2920 (47 times): **krisis**: judgment; a separating, sundering; trial, contest; selection; opinion or decision concerning justice and injustice, right or wrong.