

Defining “Arete” and “Dikaiousune”: Virtue & Integrity: the Thinking of a Judge; Capacity Righteousness: Eminence, Valor, Merit, Virtue

16. The Greek word for virtue is ἀρετή, *aretē* and its development in the Greek language by the Classical writers is discussed in:

Kittel, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 1:458-59:

ἀρετή [aretē] outside the New Testament. A single basic meaning might be rendered “eminence” [A position of prominence or superiority; a person of high rank or attainments (MWCD-11)]. It can refer to excellence of achievement, to mastery in a specific field, or to endowment with higher power. Thus a happy destiny is the result of fine achievement. In the time of Homer it is used to denote one particular human achievement, namely, “manliness” or martial valour [strength of mind or spirit that enables a person to encounter danger with firmness: personal bravery (Ibid.)]. In relation to the goal which it serves, this often comes to denote “merit” [a praiseworthy quality: virtue; character or conduct deserving reward, honor, or esteem: achievement (Ibid.)]. (p. 458)

At the time of the Sophists [5th century B.C.] the intellectual aspect of the term on the one side, and the ethical, dating from Socrates and Plato, on the other, achieve a prominence unknown in ancient Greece. It is now that the word acquires the particular meaning which becomes predominant and which primarily influences our own impression of it. ἀρετή becomes a leading tool in the language of Greek moral philosophy in the sense of “virtue” [conformity to standard; moral excellence (Ibid.)]. ἀρετή approximates to δικαιοσύνη [dikaiousunē] ... the two words become almost equivalents. (pp. 458-59)

17. The close relationship between ἀρετή and δικαιοσύνη is amplified by the development of the latter’s definition in Classical Greek. An overview of the etymology of *dikaiousunē* is found in:

Thieme, *The Integrity of God*, 28; 30-31:

The Thinking of a Judge. The word for “righteousness,” *dikaiousunē*, is one of the most significant words in the New Testament; it means much more than simply “righteousness.” It is a second-stage development in the Greek language in that it comes from two older words, the noun δίκη (*dikē*) and the adjective δίκαιος (*dikaios*). The difference between *dikaiousunē* and its two predecessors is the suffix σὺνη (*sunē*), and that suffix makes all the difference in the world. (p. 28)

Herodotus first coined *dikaiousunē* as a legal term, meaning “the thinking of a judge in allotting to each one what is due him,” in other words, good, clear, objective thinking.

Dikaiousunē therefore means “adjustment to the law,” and that is the sense in which “righteousness” is a correct translation; but “justice” is an equally accurate rendition. (p. 30)

In 280 B.C., over a century after the Golden Age of Greece, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek by seventy-two scholars from Alexandria. In their amazingly accurate version called the Septuagint, *dikaiousunē* stood for the Hebrew words קִדְּוָה (*tsedeq*) and תְּשׁוּבָה (*tsedaqah*), which can mean either righteousness or justice.

The concepts are so interrelated that sometimes they cannot be distinguished, and the Hebrew does not attempt to separate them. Whenever God’s justice or righteousness is mentioned in the Old Testament, *dikaiousunē* appears in the Septuagint. God becomes the norm and believers are called *dikaiousunē* when they observe the will of God—that is, when they have adjusted to the justice of God. (pp. 30-31)

Josephus, the Jewish historian, follows his many predecessors in using *dikaiosunē* as adjustment to the law, hence, “legal righteousness” or righteousness in judicial thinking. The word emphasizes the judge’s sense of justice, his ability to pronounce a fair verdict by scrutinizing all the evidence in the light of his expert knowledge of the law.

Dikaiosunē means “justice” as a characteristic of a judge, as the legal thinking of a judge, as the professional integrity of a judge. It means “righteousness” as a principle leading to correct thought and action. It means “to be fair and equitable in dealing with others”; it means “virtue, justice”—integrity. (p. 31)

18. From these two sources we can develop some applications to our subject of capacity righteousness. First of all, Kittel presents four words in the development of *aretē* that, with Merriam-Webster’s assistance, help define the idea of capacity righteousness:

1) Eminence: It can refer to excellence in achievement, to mastery in a specific field, or to endowment with higher power. Thus a “happy destiny” is the result of fine achievement.

The specific field that the believer masters is theology. He combines the imputed power of the Holy Spirit with the inherent power in the Word of God resident in his soul to achieve a high inventory of divine thought.

Merriam-Webster defines the word as, “A position of prominence or superiority; a person of high rank or attainments.”

The position of prominence is one’s membership in the royal family of God, and his position of superiority is found in the fact that he is a citizen of heaven with all the privileges that go with it.

“High rank” has to do with being classified as a “child of God.”

“Attainments” involve one’s advance in the system while on earth with a view toward conveyance of escrow blessings.

2) Valor: Merriam-Webster defines it as “strength of mind or spirit that enables a person to encounter danger with firmness: personal bravery.”

“Strength of mind” refers to the content of one’s doctrinal inventory” while “strength of spirit” implies the delegated omnipotence of the Holy Spirit. These spiritual assets enable the believer to confront the exigencies of life with confidence and courage, or “personal bravery,” on the battlefields of the Invisible War.

3) Merit: “a praiseworthy quality; character or conduct deserving reward, honor, or esteem: achievement.”

The objective of the Christian way of life is to take on the thinking of God and Christ. The mechanics of doing so requires retention within our souls of the same righteous standards that define God and Christ.

Consequently, you are what you think, and as a result, our character is expressed by our conduct. Conduct is primarily measured by how we line up with divine policy and secondarily by our relationship with others.

When a client nation is experiencing an uptrend due to widespread application of biblical principles among the population, then there is broad general approval of one’s Christian conduct and disapproval is considered out of the mainstream.

When a client nation is experiencing a downtrend due to widespread negligence of biblical principles among the population, then there is broad general disapproval of one's Christian conduct and approval is considered out of the mainstream.

In either case, the primary motivation in executing the Christian life is to seek to win God's approval, not man's.

- 4) Virtue: "conformity to standards; moral excellence."

Virtue may be defined for the believer as conformity to doctrine, or willing subordination to divine mandates. Moral excellence is the result of such a disposition of soul and visible lifestyle.