# Understanding Justice in New Testament: Exegetical Considerations

It is incumbent upon any believer who is serious about following Jesus Christ and His socio-politico-economic philosophy to understand the nature of justice as such on a personal as well as social level.

Failure to grasp the universal principles of justice found in the Old and New Testaments, and especially as emphasized by Jesus Christ, will result in the believer falling victim to the Right or/and Left American views of justice—and the Right and the Left have views that are diametrically opposed to the teachings in the Bible and of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider Jesus' views of social justice in Matthew 12:17-21 and Luke 4:17-21, which are directed connected to Isaiah 58:6-7; 61:1-2.

Here are two resources that have been helpful to me in my attempt to construct a biblical view of justice and the relationship between justice and love:
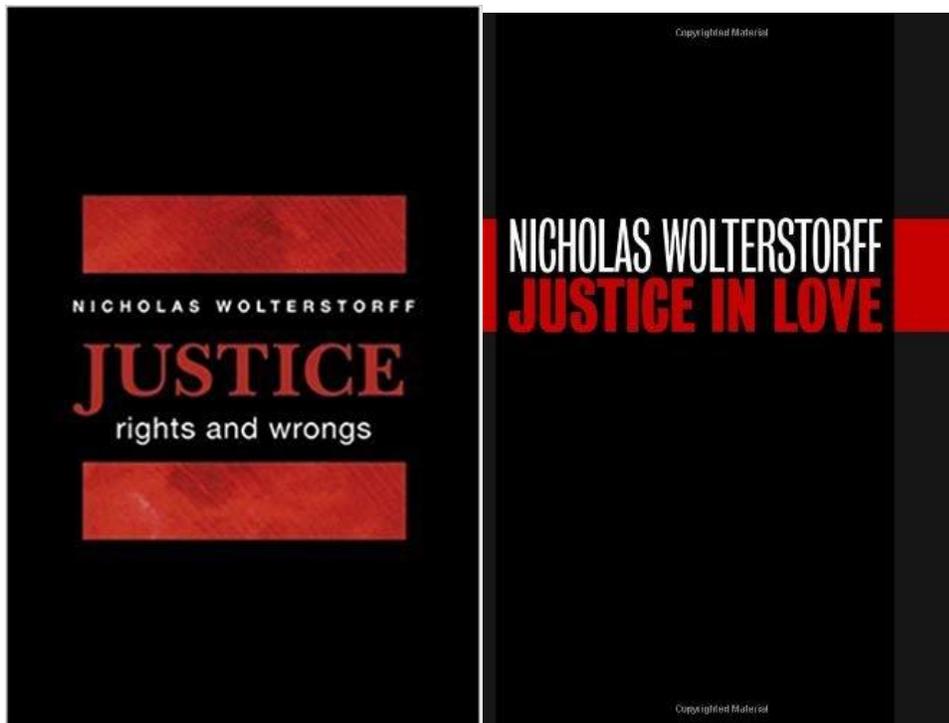
Wolterstorff's comments on translation and linguistic issues related to justice and righteousness are worth noting:

> "Those who approach the New Testament solely through English translations face a serious linguistic obstacle to apprehending what these writings say about justice. In most English translations, the word "justice" occurs relatively infrequently. It is no surprise, then, that most English-speaking people think the New Testament does not say much about justice; the Bibles they read do not say much about

justice. English translations are in this way different from translation into Lain, French, Spanish, German, Dutch—and for all I know, most languages.

The basic issue is well known among translators and commentators. Plato's Republic, as we all know, is about justice. The Greek noun in Plato's test that is standardly translated as "justice" is "diskaiosune"; the adjective standardly translated as "just" is "dikaios." This same dik-stem occurs around three hundred times in the New Testament, in a wide variety of grammatical variants.

To the person who comes to English translations of the New Testament from reading and translating classical Greek, it comes as a surprise to discover that though some of those occurrences are translated with grammatical variants on our word "just," the great bulk of did-stem words are translated with the grammatical variants on our word "right." The noun, for example, is usually translated at "righteousness," not as "justice."

In English we have the word "just" and its grammatical variants coming from the Latin iustitia, and the word "right" and its grammatical variants coming from the Old English recht. Almost all our translators have decided to translate the great bulk of dik-stem words in the New Testament with grammatical variants on the latter—just the opposite of the decision made by most translators of classical Greek . . . It goes almost without saying that the meaning and connotations of "righteousness" are very different in present-day idiomatic English from those of "justice." "Righteousness" names primarily if not exclusively a certain trait of personal character. . . . "Justice," by contrast refers to an interpersonal situation; justice is present when person are related to each other in a certain way ("Justice, rights and wrongs" 110-11).

Following this, Wolterstorff discusses other translational issues (LXX and OT) and key texts in the Bible, especially Luke 4:17-21, which he titles "Jesus as the one who brings justice."

In His Matchless Grace,
Pastor Don