

Is God Fair?
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We are in a sermon series entitled Knowing God. Today I am preaching a message entitled: Is God Fair? The answer to that question is yes and no because God is fair – but the fairness of God is not what we humans call fairness.

1- God’s fairness is not like human fairness

To us – fairness means that what we do for one person we must do for every other person. Fairness means we treat everyone exactly the same.

But God’s fairness is different! God knows what each of us need in our lives and He treats us all according to His perfect knowledge and will. That means that sometimes God does something for one person that He does not do for others. Sometimes God gives something to one person and withholds it from another. Because of that - God is not fair as defined by human fairness. But God is always right and always just and always good!

The average teenager uses the phrase “It’s not fair!” 8.6 times a day. And there are many things in life that are simply not fair.

- It’s not fair that some people are taller or faster.
- It’s not fair that some can eat gallons of Blue Bell without gaining a pound.
- It’s not fair that when some people have worked for a company for years, yet a young upstart gets the promotion.
- It’s not fair when you love your spouse to the best of your ability and they leave you for someone else.
- It’s not fair when some people live a clean life, diet and exercise and they get cancer. Yet their uncle smoked a pack a day for 30 years and never got off the couch and he’s healthy as a horse. It’s just not fair!

2- Life is not fair, but God is always good!

Life is not fair and God is not always fair like we define fairness. I struggled with this for years when I saw bad things happen to good people. The enemy tempted me to doubt the goodness of God. But I had to come to the place of believing that God is always right. Deuteronomy 32:3-4 says:

I will proclaim the name of the Lord; how glorious is our God! He is the Rock; His deeds are perfect. Everything He does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright He is!

God’s ways are perfect all the time! Even when I don’t understand why God did something – He is right.

Even if I would have done it differently – God is right! Genesis 18:25 says:

Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Of course the Judge of the earth will do right. It's the only thing He can do. God cannot do wrong. God cannot be unjust. That's because:

3- God is just!

That means that God is not prejudiced. He is totally unbiased. No human being is capable of that. God alone is perfectly just.

Not only is God just and right – but Acts 10:34 says:

God is no respecter of persons.

That means that God does not play favorites. He is not partial. Otherwise He would not be just. But God is just – which is much better than human fairness! And He is omniscient which means He judges with all knowledge. He knows exactly what each person needs at all times! Because of that:

4- God treats us the same and God treats us differently.

I know that sounds confusing, but there are certain times when God treats everyone the same and there are times when He doesn't.

For example – God treats everyone the same regarding salvation. We are all sinners who deserve Hell. But God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in our place. Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Some people don't like that – they say it's not fair. They think that everyone should be able to make their own way to God. But when it comes to salvation – God treats us all the same. We must all repent of our sin and place our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. There is no other way! And ultimately – that is fair!

One of the key Scriptures about fairness is found in Matthew 20:1-16.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

At nine o'clock he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

This happened again at noon, three o'clock and five o'clock – which is an hour before quitting time.

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

The workers who were hired at five o'clock came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

This parable is about salvation and the point is that salvation is the same for those who get saved early in life and for those who get saved later in life. In this parable, the early workers did not think it was fair that the late arrivers got the same pay since they worked for less time. But we need to understand that in God's kingdom, salvation is the same no matter what time you arrived - no matter what age you get saved. Some come to the Lord in childhood - some as youth - some as young adults and some as senior adults. Yes, it is better if someone comes to know the Lord as a child and serves Him their entire lives. But it is never too late to get saved and no matter when you get saved - that salvation is the same.

Think of the thief on the cross. He did not place his faith in Christ until moments before he died. But Jesus said to that thief in Luke 23:43:

I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.

He got the same eternal life and went to the same heaven as those who live for God their whole lives. We should not be upset about that. We should be glad that Psalm 145:8-9 says:

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.

But there are times when God treats us the same and times He treats us differently. Think of the Parable of the Talents. In that parable different people received different amounts of gifts from the Lord. It shows us that God does not give everyone the same gifts and talents.

Some people think that is not fair - but Jesus said those gifts were given according to each person's ability. He knows what each person can handle. And He does not hold you accountable for what He has given to others. He only holds you accountable for what you do with what He's given you.

Ezekiel 18:29-32 says:

The house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

The truth I want you to see here is that God said that He is fair because He judges each of us individually. He judges each of us according to our ways and our gifts and calling.

That's why we should not be envious when God is generous to others. People who grumble when other people get blessed are very similar to the Prodigal Son's older brother – who got upset because the father was gracious and merciful to the prodigal. Isn't it interesting how we want the grace and mercy and generosity of God for ourselves – but we can get upset when He gives it to others that we feel are undeserving. As if we are deserving!

Let me give you a big key today: Never ask God for what you deserve! If God gave us what we deserve we would all spend eternity in hell! So we should be glad that God is not fair. It would be entirely fair for everyone who ever lived to spend eternity in hell because everyone has sinned against God. Thank God for grace because grace is greater than fairness! Thank God that mercy triumphs over judgment!

Everything we receive from God is based on His grace, not our works! So when you see God blessing someone else – don't be envious. Be glad that you've received His grace also.

By the way, comparing yourself to others is not wise! The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:12:

When they measure themselves with themselves and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding and behave unwisely.

Don't compare what you get or don't get to what others get or don't get. I used to see this in my grandkids when they were younger. If you buy them all something, they immediately start comparing what they got to what the others got.

"His is better than mine." "She got more than me." "I like his color." I just finally decided to get them all the same thing every time. But God does not do that! He knows what each of us needs and He does what's best for each of us individually every time. We must trust Him with that!

Peter made the mistake of comparing himself to John in John 21:21-22. Jesus told Peter the type of death he would suffer. Then Peter looked around and saw John.

Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow Me."

In other words, it's none of your business how God treats others. That's God's business. He knows what they need and He knows what you need and He will do what's best for both of you every time!

So, don't compare yourselves to others - just choose to follow God no matter what. If it looks like everyone else is getting more blessed than you - what is that to you? You follow God! If it looks like everyone else's prayers are answered and yours are not - what is that to you? You follow God! If someone else got the position you wanted - follow God!

Maturity says: "There is a God and I'm not Him!
His ways are right and I will serve Him no matter what!
I will tithe because it's right.
I will be faithful to my spouse because it's right.
I will do what's right simply because it's right!
And I will leave the results up to God!"

You can only do that when you understand this: God is sovereign - He has the right to do whatever He wants to do. And whatever He does is always right!
Always!

The workers who worked all day in the parable didn't think their pay was fair. But the owner said in Matthew 20:15:

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?

God's radical grace and generosity can upset our sense of fairness. But God created the universe and everything in it is His. He rules and reigns and does as He thinks best.

Some of you business owners are thinking, "That's no way to run a business." Well of course not. This parable was not designed to show you how to run a great business! It was designed to show you how great your God is! To show you how generous and gracious He is! That's not fair - but that's grace! And grace is greater than fairness! Because of that: All who respond to God's call receive everything God has to give! God is no respecter of persons! We all come to Him the same way: by grace through faith in Jesus.

And everyone who follows Christ gets everything He has to give.
 Everyone who is born again receives eternal life.
 Everyone who is born again receives heaven.
 Everyone who is born again receives the grace and mercy of God.
 Everyone who is born again receives the forgiveness of God.
 Everyone who is born again receives a personal relationship with God.
 Everyone gets it all!

If God dealt with us on the basis of fairness, we would all end up in hell!
 Aren't you glad that instead of being fair – God is merciful!
 Aren't you glad that instead of being fair – God is forgiving!
 Aren't you glad that instead of being fair – God is gracious!

Today God is still inviting people into His vineyard – into His kingdom.
 And you enter it by His grace. For some grace is a total mystery, but for the
 Christians it is the reason we are saved. "For it is by grace that you are saved
 through faith."

In the dictionary there are many definitions of grace: like pardon or forgiveness.
 But for the Christian the word grace has a special meaning. The one definition
 that sums up what grace really means is "undeserved favor." This is what has
 God shown us: an "undeserved love." He wants us to be a part of His kingdom.
 And He sacrificed His Only Son for us to be able to enter His kingdom. There is
 no greater love than this.

So – the question "Is God fair?" is not really the question. God is so much more
 than fair. He is holy – just – loving – kind – patient – gracious and merciful.
 God does not deal with us fairly and that is a good thing! Instead, He deals with
 us graciously! And grace is greater than fairness!

Genesis 48 tells the story of Jacob blessing his sons before he died. He also
 blessed Joseph's two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. In those days they believed
 that the right hand gave the greater blessing. Since Jacob's eyesight was failing,
 Joseph lined his sons up so that Jacob's right hand would be on the older son,
 Manasseh, who was to receive the greater blessing.

However, when he blessed the sons, Jacob crossed his hands and put his right
 hand on Ephraim to give him the greater blessing. Joseph tried to stop him and
 told his father he had his hands crossed up. He said, "You need to put your right
 hand on the firstborn so he gets the greater blessing." But Jacob said, "I know
 what I'm doing. I crossed my hands on purpose. Manasseh will become great, but
 Ephraim will become greater."

Now we normally think this was not fair at all because we identify with Manasseh
 who should have received the greater blessing. But I want to turn it around this
 morning. I want you to identify with Ephraim. He did not deserve a greater
 blessing. He did nothing to qualify for a greater blessing.

But God crossed His hands and moved Ephraim from the back to the front. He gave Ephraim what he didn't deserve. What a picture of God's grace! And we have many instances in the Bible where God crossed His hands to bless somebody with His grace!

God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses said, "Not me. I stutter. I killed a man. I can't lead these people." But God said, "I'm crossing my hands and I'll give you what you need." And Moses did indeed lead the children of Israel out!

God called Gideon to lead His people to battle. Gideon said, "Not me. I come from the least of the families in the poorest of tribes. I can't lead an army" But God said, "I'm crossing my hands and I will fight for you." And Gideon did indeed win the battle!

God called Esther to appeal to the king on behalf of the Jewish people. Esther said, "I can't speak to the king. I'm an orphan without influence." But God said, "I'm crossing my hands and I'll give you favor with the king." And God used Esther to deliver His people from destruction!

God sent a prophet to David's house to anoint him as king. David's father brought every son out to the prophet except for David – whom he left tending the sheep. They thought anyone other than David could be king. But God said, "I'm crossing my hands and I'm moving David from the sheep field to the battle field. In fact, I'm moving him all the way to the throne!"

Abraham said he was too old to have children, but God crossed His hands and made him the father of many nations!

And I want you to know today that a shift is coming!
 God can cross His hands and put you in a position that you could never reach on your own!
 God can cross His hands and move you from the background to the forefront.
 God can cross His hands and give you a job you didn't think you were qualified for.
 God can cross His hands and give you a raise you didn't think it was time for.
 Other people will say, "That's not fair" and you can say, "No, that's not fair, that's God!
 That's supernatural blessing! That's undeserved favor!"
 That's grace! And grace is so much greater than fairness!