



"A society that puts equality before freedom will get neither. A society that puts freedom before equality will get a high degree of both."

—Milton Friedman

20-Mar-15

Is It Fair?

In our society today, a great deal of talk about fairness leads to laws and policies to address unfairness. In Matthew 20, in the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, fairness becomes an issue. The landowner hires laborers throughout the day. When the laborers are paid, those who started at the beginning of the day notice that their pay is equal to those who started later:

Then other workers who had arrived during the day were paid, each of them a day's wage. Finally, the workers who'd been toiling since early morning came thinking they'd be paid more, but the foreman paid each of them a day's wage. As they received their pay, this last group of workers began to protest. [*The Message* version describes their protest as "they groused angrily."]

First Workers: We've been here since the crack of dawn! And you're paying us the exact same wage you paid the crew that just showed up. We deserve more than they do. We've been slogging in the heat of the sun all day—these others haven't worked nearly as long as we have! ([Matthew 20:10-12](#); *The Voice*)

These workers *felt* that they were not *getting* what they *deserved*. This highlights the problem with how [the world](#) views fairness. First, it is an emotional, superficial response not based on any deep thought about the biblical principles that should govern equity and justice. Second, it is about getting. Most of us have heard about the two ways of life, so we know about the "get" way. As Herbert Armstrong pointed out, it is the foundation for Satan's approach to all he does. Third, the world's view of fairness is based on an inflated perception of what is deserved, a natural result when getting is the motivation. [Satan](#) *felt* he *deserved* to be a ruler over [God](#), and he is even now planning to try again to *get* that position by whatever means possible.

How does the world respond when faced with what it sees as unfairness? Because this world's people are unmoored from the Bible and its principles, it is not surprising that their solutions create even more of the problem rather than less.

A glaring example of this is affirmative action. God believes in merit, reward based on what one actually does with the talent and abilities He gives ([Matthew 25:14-30](#)) and not on a superficial criterion such as skin color. Because skin color is the major criteria of affirmative action, merit, a godly principle, becomes irrelevant. By design, those who have earned a benefit because of their hard work and accomplishment are passed over by one with lesser merit.

This law to address fairness, then, creates even more unfairness on two levels. First, one of lesser merit is advanced, while in the second case, one of greater merit is passed over. Often the person receiving the benefit has not actually suffered discrimination. Others before him may have, but not him personally. He receives an unearned benefit at the expense of one who has paid the price to earn it.

In another case of what many would call unfairness, consider our calling. In my case, mine began forty-five years ago. No one in either my immediate or extended family has been called or has even come close to being called. Is that fair? An easy case could be made that many others in my family are more deserving based on their success at living beneficial and productive lives. Is it fair that I and not they have been given mind-boggling eternal

opportunities? Could they not complain to God, grouching angrily, "Why this turkey and not us?"

Applicable here is the same principle God gives to the laborers in [Matthew 20:15](#), "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?" Just as the landowner is sovereign over that which he owns, so is God sovereign over His Kingdom. "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" ([I Corinthians 12:18](#)).

Bearing in mind what God has offered us compared to the rest of humanity, do we still at times ever feel God is unfair? Do we ever find ourselves complaining about our lot in life? Do we ever *feel* we are not *getting* what we *deserve* in this life?

[Romans 6:23](#) gives us a reality check to gauge what we deserve, what we have earned by our efforts: "the wages of [sin](#) is death." Yet in God's amazing grace and mercy, He has offered us instead life eternal: "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord [Jesus Christ](#)" ([I Thessalonians 5:9](#)).

That salvation comes at a price, however, "through our Lord Jesus Christ." His death paid that price. So as we approach [Passover](#), we need to give thought to what we deserve and what instead God has offered us, paying special attention to the great price God and His Son willingly gave while we were yet rebels and sinners ([Romans 5:8](#)). Fairness and justice require our deaths. Yet, only by the sacrifice of God and our Elder Brother do we have the offer of unearned eternal life rather than earned eternal death.

Because God could have chosen so many others, we should display a profound attitude of gratitude, "giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light" ([Colossians 1:12](#); *Holman Christian Standard Bible*).

Christ's sacrifice has enabled us. Why was so great a price paid for us, such an undeserving people? The simple answer: [love](#). God is love ([I John 4:8](#), 16). But with this offer of grace, God requires us to become like Him and His Son. We are to become love—to love God and man ([Matthew 22:36-40](#)),

and like Christ, to become a living sacrifice ([Romans 12:1](#)), willing to sacrifice the old man and "put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" ([Colossians 3:10](#)).

Human beings have a distorted view of what is fair. So we need to be careful to work on judging matters based on God's principles of equity and justice rather than the emotional, shallow approach detached from God, as practiced in today's world. In doing that, realize that the grace God has given us, an undeserving people, many would consider unfair. Only because God is good are we given these incalculable benefits—but at a great price. At this time of year, we need to reflect deeply on that price. That voluntary sacrifice—the torture and death of our Creator—is proof of the extent of God and Christ's love for us.

- Pat Higgins

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Myth of Fairness](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The new British Labour Party slogan is, "A Fair Future for All." The term "fairness," when used by the leftist Progressives, means leveling the playing field to guarantee equal outcome by taking from the productive and giving to the unproductive, or redistributing the wealth by grand larceny or communism, or "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." Thomas Jefferson, when he penned the expression "equality" meant equal opportunity, not forced equal outcome. Equity denotes impartiality or justice, not partial to one economic class. Fairness is an ideal, not a set of enforced equal outcomes or affirmative apartheid. Only God can proclaim a fair future for all.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Is All Fair in Love and War?

by David F. Maas

God gives us a great deal of freedom under His law, but do we have the authority to bend or break the rules under extenuating circumstances? David Maas shows that the law applies at all times to everyone.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
