

It's Not Fair!

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How often have we spoken the phrase, “It’s not fair”? Are we so used to hearing it that we fail to realize how damaging the self-important sentiment of discontent that lurks within can be? What does it say about a society when this phrase, and the idea behind it, is expressed and accepted so readily?

Walking around most shopping centers and seeing little children in the toy or candy stores, we witness often their excessive displays of pride, discontent, and distress when a parent denies them of something they want. In fact, one could be forgiven for thinking that such behavior is just a part of our culture. For when a child denied protests loudly and bitterly toward his “offending” parent, screaming, “It’s not fair!” is it not our typical reaction to shake our heads, shrug our shoulders, and say, “Well, that’s just how kids are these days”?

Yet, it seems that as we age, we develop even more effective ways of expressing our displeasure for perceived unjust treatments. Teenagers may not kick and scream like their younger siblings, but they have their own persuasive ways of making a parent, teacher, or an employer feel guilty for some “unfair” slight.

Furthermore, by adulthood, after many years of experiencing injustice (actual or perceived), most of us have perfected the “art” of displaying our displeasure to the world. In fact, upon closer inspection, it is obvious that our kids have been learning how to exhibit their resentment from us!

The Seeds of Discontent

Right from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve apparently thought God was unfairly keeping them from partaking of the fruit of the Tree of the

Knowledge of Good and Evil. They seemed happy to submit to God's commands—to begin with—but after Satan tweaked their pride, their actions “cultivated” the first seeds of human discontent (Genesis 3:1-6).

From I Kings 19:1-4, we witness the prophet Elijah's discontent, after fleeing from Jezebel's threats, imploring God to take his life. He implies that he had served enough—and suffered enough. For God to ask more of him would simply be unfair.

Consider the actions of Jonah, who displayed his indignation over God's will for him regarding the Ninevites. To begin with, when God directed him, “Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it” (Jonah 1:2), his initial response was to flee in the opposite direction (verse 3). Then, after relenting and submitting to God's direction, Jonah displayed further discontent and pride when he cried out against God's merciful sparing of the great city (Jonah 3:10; 4:1). Later, when God destroyed the shade plant, Jonah, much in the manner of Elijah, begged God to take his life. Apparently, God's mercy was too unfair for him to bear (Jonah 4:3, 6-9).

Down through the ages, nothing has changed, as men still remain discontented, considering their lot in life unfair. Can we find a correlation between this and all the adultery and crime in our time?

Most people marry with the best of intentions, but they too often become discontented after some perceived slight from their spouse. Then, armed with the alleged accusation of maltreatment, they justify seeking sinful solace and comfort in the arms of another.

Murder, theft, and violence take place on a daily basis, and much of this occurs because the guilty party has thought the circumstances of his life that led to this action were unfair. In fact, people from all walks of life—rich, poor, sick, healthy, and from stable or unstable homes—can fall victim to this common disease of discontent by thinking life is unfair. But even though we all complain of injustice in our lives, not all turn bitter and not all turn to a life of crime. Why is that?

If we contemplate the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, we learn that two men, generously given multiple talents by their master and

recognizing that these talents came with additional responsibility, felt compelled to use them to produce even more. Conversely, the one given fewer talents, and thus an easier assignment with less responsibility, produced nothing but bitterness.

Just look around us in the church. Some among us God has chosen to bless with more talent, or perhaps have had better training or opportunities to start them out in life. However, when all is said and done, so much hangs on the way a man views his relationship with those he must answer to—his master, or indeed, God. Anyone can find grounds to complain, as there is always perceived injustice to be found, but does that perception really provide legitimate grounds for complaining?

Job's Example

Consider what the Bible has to say about Job. Job 1:1-3 reveals he was blameless, upright—he shunned evil and feared God. A successful businessman, he had ten children and owned a great deal of livestock. He was so wealthy, he “was the greatest of all the people of the East.”

But even while living a blameless life, Job lost it all, because God allowed him to be burdened with perhaps the greatest trial ever given to any man, other than Jesus Christ. If ever a person could protest the unfairness of life, it was Job. However, confronted with enormous, almost unspeakable torment, without any understanding as to why it was happening or how long it would last, he refused to cry foul (Job 2:10).

Have we ever had one of those days, where everything that can go wrong does? The alarm clock dies in the middle of the night (so you oversleep); the door knob comes off the bathroom door trapping you inside; the toaster burns your breakfast; you cannot find your keys, but when you do, the car will not start, making you late for work, and the boss threatens to fire you; the air conditioner quits; the toilet backs up; and while arguing with your spouse, you crunch down on a cracker and break a tooth!

As bad as that may seem, such trials are actually quite frivolous in light of what Job was experiencing. After Satan challenges God concerning him (Job 1:11), the story continues with four reports of increasingly tragic news. First,

a band of rebels had stolen Job's oxen and donkeys and killed many of his servants. Before Job could finish digesting the bad news, another man rushes in, exclaiming that "fire of God" had burned up Job's sheep, killing even more servants. Directly on the heels of that messenger, a third man rushes in to report that the Chaldeans had conducted a violent raid, stolen all the camels, and killed even more servants (Job 1:13-17).

Job must have wondered what was going on!

But as awful as the news was, the worst was yet to come. While Job was still reeling from the tragedies he had heard so far, a fourth messenger declares abruptly:

Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you! (Job 1:18-19)

We can only wonder at the emotions Job felt as he listened to this most distressing message. For those who have lost a child, there is an immediate state of unbelief, a heartfelt denial that such a thing could be true, while deep down realizing that it is. Then, a dark, unfathomable well arises, filled with emptiness, anguish, anger, and many other intermingling emotions that would cause even the strongest to exclaim in indescribable grief, "This is not fair!"

How many of us could lose everything as Job did—all that we are proud of—and avoid accusing God of being unfair? At times, our torment can give way to discontent or displeasure with God or the human governments He empowers. It can overwhelm and dominate our minds and thoughts. To a lesser extreme, even a cursory viewing of the nightly news can spawn thoughts of grievance and outrage against God.

Satan Exploits Our Vulnerability

In such moments of weakness or vulnerability, Satan loves to catch us off guard. If we leave God's sovereign will out of the picture—even

momentarily—we leave ourselves open to our adversary’s ability to fill our minds with thoughts of inequity that seem so easy to justify.

But as we should learn for our own benefit, God will occasionally remove a portion of our protective hedge, just as He did with Job, allowing Satan to get at us to do the things he thinks will hurt us the most. God does this to humble us. All Satan’s malignant hatred for God and man is displayed in what he did to Job—and what he may do to us as the end approaches, especially in view of the fact that he is targeting God’s called-out ones (Ephesians 6:12-13; I Peter 5:8).

While we may justifiably consider some things in life to be unfair, it is interesting to see Job’s reaction to all that had happened to him through the events of that one, fateful day. Job 1:20-22 reveals:

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

In the following chapter, we see that Satan, obviously disappointed with Job’s righteous reaction, goes before God to challenge Him once again, saying in Job 2:4-6:

“Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However put forth Your hand now and touch his bone and flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face.” So the Lord said to Satan. “Behold, he is in your power, but spare his life.”

Satan must have waltzed out of God’s throne room, delighted at his prospects, thinking: “We shall see how faithful Job is by the time I have finished! When he loses his health, when he becomes exhausted and weary from all the agonizing pain, then he will lose control and curse God for being so unfair!”

Indeed, while Job was still grieving the sudden loss of his children and his empire, God allowed Satan to ravage Job’s health. In many ways, this is the

worst trial a man can face. He can cope with all sorts of losses and failures, given time, but once his health begins to fail, he must devote so much time and effort to finding and maintaining his strength, managing pain, and focusing on life's most basic needs, that many necessary things often fall by the wayside.

Job Maintains His Faith

Job was in misery. Satan caused him to be covered in painful boils from head to toe, his only relief coming from a shard of pottery he used to scrape the oozing sores (Job 2:7-8). In verse 9, his wife, finding him sitting amidst the ashes of the local garbage dump, scornfully utters: "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

Surely, such an outburst would provoke Job's pride to denounce God or even his wife for being unfair. Instead, Job's reply in verse 10 reveals his humility, self-control, patience, and faith in the face of adversity: "But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips." Despite what had to be an overwhelming assault on his emotional, physical, and spiritual state, Job refused to castigate anyone but himself—he abstained from crying out, "Unfair!"

In fact, throughout the account of Job, he maintained his loyalty and reverence toward God. In the face of all that he had to endure, including "help" from three well-meaning but misguided friends, Job remained faithfully steadfast.

Are we like Job, accepting of our lot in life without complaint? What do we do when we are cheated or lose something or even someone we love? How do we react when something we desire passionately is withheld from us? Are we willing to accept God's will graciously? Or do we focus instead on our discontent and how "unfair" life is?

God knows what our individual needs are—physically and spiritually—and He promises to provide them for us (Philippians 4:19). Accordingly, He withholds things that He thinks will not be good for us. Do we accept His decisions, or do we allow the bitter root of discontent to form within our

hearts (Hebrews 12:15)? All too often, Satan will feed our minds with such arrogant discontent, knowing that if he can persuade us to see ourselves as victims, he has a chance to devour us (I Peter 5:8).

Satan's Power and Pride

We should never underestimate Satan's power nor his hatred for God and man. He surreptitiously broadcasts his evil, spiritual intents into our minds, subtly working to turn each member of the "little flock" away from God (Ephesians 2:2). We should carefully consider the account of his actions in Ezekiel 28:12-16 as typical of his *modus operandi*. Although nothing was withheld from him, as he was created by God as the ultimate in beauty and function, "perfect in [his] ways," he did not remain true, turning away from God, a picture of cancerous discontent.

In verse 17, we see the source of this discontent—pride: "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor." Satan was full of pride, the very thing we must guard against so that we do not corrupt the wisdom God has given us.

Satan is called "an angel of light" because he has a talent for presenting evil in a good light, which can confuse and deceive us if we let our guards down and drift away from God's truth (II Corinthians 11:3, 14-15; see Revelation 12:9). Without this truth as our guide, we can easily fall prey to Satan's darts of discontent. After all, this is Satan's world for a while longer. So while we continue to witness the growth of discord and discontent based upon his false notion that life should always be fair, we should anticipate and be thoroughly prepared for life—occasionally and even frequently—to be *unfair*—for now.

However, as we head into the final stages of the age of man, we should keep in mind that each of us was created by God, complete with everything we need to function according to His will. While we may lack the power, wealth, talent, and beauty that Satan—or perhaps a brother—has been gifted, we will soon be given so much more, if, among other things, we learn to be content with what our generous and loving God has provided us.

We should always remember that discontentment is common and hurtful, while contentment is rare and of great benefit (I Timothy 6:6). For true

contentment is a byproduct of the gift of faith that each of us, as the elect, has been granted by God.

Foolishly comparing our lot in life with that of anyone else's can never bear any good fruit (II Corinthians 10:12). We should, instead, only measure ourselves by the Word of God—the life of Jesus Christ. In doing so, we will discover a proper perspective, finding peace, security, and contentment within God's sovereign plan (Philippians 4:6-11). Like Job, our focus need not be on what seems fair—what we possess or lose today—but on God's promises for our future, when we will take possession of the most indescribable gift of all, eternal life with our just and loving God!