

Why?
Why Doesn't God Seem Fair?

I try to stay up on the political issues facing our country. I watch the news, I try to keep up with current events online, I try to read what I can from various points of view. I don't believe that politics is the answer to all the ills of this country or our world because politicians are sinful human beings like the rest of us so they easily fail. But I do believe that proper government and laws are important.

What's fascinating to me is how issues are often decided, not on their merits, but on how they're framed in the media. That's true in both liberal and conservative media. He who frames the question determines the answer.

What's become painfully evident lately is that you can win over public opinion by framing issues in the context of fairness. Americans are very sensitive to fairness and rights so they often make moral decisions on the basis of what they consider fair.

Actually, I believe one of the reasons we have so much confusion in our legal system and so many competing opinions about right and wrong in our culture is that we confuse fairness with justice.

Think about it, how do you decide a complex issue like aborting based on fairness? Fair for whom? The pregnant mother, the child's father, the grandparents, the unborn child, the couple anxiously waiting to adopt? If our basis for deciding is rights or fairness things get very confusing.

This week the Maryland legislature passed a gay marriage bill. The media has portrayed the issue strictly as a civil rights issue without giving any thought to all the ramifications of redefining marriage. Are we really ready to redefine marriage in a way that's never been defined at any other time in human history based solely on what we think is fair?

Deciding right or wrong strictly on the basis of what's fair is impossible. Yet with in all of us is this inherent sense of fairness. When something happens that doesn't seem fair to us we're bothered. Especially when it happens to us.

We're pulled over for speeding on the interstate and we're incensed that all the other people behind us who were speeding didn't get pulled over. That's not fair, right?

Your kid gets in trouble at school and he says, "It's not fair. I wasn't even the one talking and I got blamed for it." What would really be fair is if the other 99 times he was talking and he didn't get caught, he would have turned himself in voluntarily, right?

Fairness is a tough thing to determine because we have a hard time seeing things as they really are. In fact, we have such a hard time seeing things as they really are, that sometimes we question whether God is fair.

This is week 4 of a series we're calling, *Why?* We're looking for biblical answers to those nagging why questions that bother us, like: Why would God love me? Why didn't God answer my prayer? Why don't I feel God in my life?

Today we want to unpack the question, Why doesn't God seem fair? What's going on in life? If God is all good and all loving why did my marriage break up? Why was my nephew born with Downs Syndrome? Why are children as young as 10 being used as soldiers and human shields in the fighting in Somalia? Why is human trafficking a \$30 billion a year business? Certainly we'd all agree that those things aren't fair.

Why doesn't it seem like God is fair?

I. Our Understanding Of Fairness Can Cloud Our Understanding Of God's Truth

Turn to Habakkuk 1 page 921

Two weeks ago we were answering the question "Why doesn't God answer my prayer?" and we looked at the beginning of this chapter.

Habakkuk was a prophet who wrote at a time when Israel was in a real mess. God had a plan for the nation that they weren't fulfilling. They weren't even close.

Basically, they were religious atheists. They practiced the outward parts of their religion, but they lived their personal lives like God didn't exist. Kind of like the United States sometimes.

There was violence in the streets, dishonesty, cheating, immortality, all the stuff that comes along when we reject God's truth. You take the commandments of God, set them aside, and this is what you have.

So in the beginning of the chapter Habakkuk asks God, *How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?* (Habakkuk 1:2)

Here's God's prophet asking God, "Why haven't you answered my prayers?"

As you read through Habakkuk you find that no matter how intense Habakkuk's questions become, and he's got several for God, God never rebukes him for asking. God never says, "Hey buddy, you don't question me. I'm the authority

That tells me that it's OK to ask God questions. It's all right to look for answers. Even a guy like Habakkuk who was a godly man can have real questions. I believe one of the reasons God gave us the book Habakkuk was to show us that questions are OK.

But now notice how God answers Habakkuk's question...

Read verse 5 & 6

God says, "What do you mean, I don't listen? I'm going to answer your prayer in a way you're not going to believe. You know those ruthless, corrupt, ungodly, vicious, degenerate, obnoxious Chaldeans?" (Historically we know them as Babylonians.) "The guys are overrunning one nation after another? They're coming your way. They're going to steamroller over Jerusalem and that's how I'm going to get my people's attention."

Habakkuk thinks, "Wait a minute. This makes no sense." So the prophet asks his next question...

Read verse 12

"God this isn't like you! You're on the good guy's side and compared to the Babylonians we're the good guys. You're really not really going to allow them to prosper and us to suffer are you? You're not going to act unfairly are You?"

"Aren't you the eternal God? Aren't you the holy one? Aren't you the one who said *The soul who sins shall die.*"

"You've been around from the beginning. You never change. You're from everlasting to everlasting. You've always pronounced judgment on the unrighteous. So we should be the ones to live, they should be the ones to die. They're the *really* evil ones. God you are a rock. You are stable. You are reliable. You are solid."

"You are all those things and I've always been able to trust you before but now You're confusing me. I thought You would have marked them for correction, not used them against us."

Read verse 13

Do you see the dilemma Habakkuk's facing?

He's asking, "God, how could you who are so very holy, so holy that you could never wink at wickedness and evil, somehow allow these evil wicked people to prosper while your people suffer? It seems like such a perversion of justice." He's saying, "God, I don't understand any of this. God, You're not fair. This doesn't compute."

Do you ever think that way? Do you ever just feel like God's not fair at all?

You're not perfect yourself, but, hey, you're not so bad. You're trying to do what's right. You're trying to do what's right and everything seems to be coming down on you. You feel like God's put you in the box and the pressure is on when the really bad people seem to be prospering.

It's like they get a free pass and you get all the problems. What's fair about that?

Think about this. Habakkuk is a godly, serious, concerned-about-God's-glory, worshipping kind of guy.

He's not a rebel. He's not new in the faith. He knows Scripture. He wants to obey God in his own life. And yet, he's got a skewed perspective on God and on life. His view of fairness has clouded his understanding of God's truth.

You think there's a lesson in there for us? There is.

When we question God's fairness it's because we're projecting our view of life on Him. It's like the political questions we try to decide on the basis of fairness. We can miss the true issues, the bottom line issues, because we put fairness over justice. We only see the immediate instead of the bigger picture.

Why doesn't it seem like God is fair?

- I. Our Understanding Of Fairness Can Cloud Our Understanding Of God's Truth*
- II. God Participated In "Unfairness" In The Process Of Bringing Us To Himself*

Turn to Matthew 27 page 977

Matthew 26 records Judas' betrayal and then the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. First He's taken before the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin. There Jesus is accused of blasphemy for calling Himself the Christ.

In chapter 27 Jesus is delivered to the civil authority, Pontius Pilate.

Read verses 15-26

A Roman scourging was so violent many people died from the beating. Jesus was scourged with a cat-o-nine tails, had a crown of long, spike-like thorns pressed into His head, and part of His beard ripped from His face. Finally He was nailed, hand and foot to two rough wooden beams.

Innocent Jesus went through all that and guilty Barabbas went free.

Nothing was fair. Fairness wasn't an issue. Jesus didn't say, "Hey, wait a minute. This isn't fair." God the Father didn't say, "This has to stop. It's not fair."

God was carrying out His divine plan of redemption and His plan of redemption involved the death of His innocent Son for guilty sinners like us.

God isn't some distant, aloof deity who directs everything here on the planet by remote control. He's a hands-on God. He's personally involved.

If nothing about the cross was fair but it was all necessary, and God experienced the totality of the grief and pain for us, who are we to start pointing a finger at him and making accusations?

Who made us the arbitrators of what's fair and what's not?

In her book, *Amazing Love*, Jonie Eareckson Tada writes, *Where was the Father's kindness in turning His back on His only Son while Jesus cried out in horror and grief?*

On that terrible, wonderful day, God's goodness and kindness were directed toward you. God forsook His own Son... so that He would never have to forsake you! And because of those dark hours two thousand years ago, God can say to me, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you."

As I pondered that amazing thought, I felt ashamed. The goodness of God was indeed leading me to repentance. To think that God's anger for my sins was poured out on Christ--and that He has no anger left for me!

You know what that makes me want to do? Praise Him. Thank Him. Honor Him. Obey Him with all my heart and soul and mind.

Unlike Christ, I will never have to agonize over separation from my Father. And neither will you. God poured the full measure of His wrath--the terrors of eternal hell--on His own Son... so that you and I could be adopted into His very family. That's how much He loves you. And me.

Are we going to have answers for every “why” question? I don’t think so. But can we look at the actions of God and see a God who got involved personally and totally with our redemption.

I’ve had people ask me, “Where was God when I was sexually abused at the hands of a trusted relative?” I’ve been asked, “Where was God when my husband suffered horribly with terminal cancer?”

Those are hard questions. They’re gripping, emotionally wrenching questions. The last thing I wanted to do was give some trite, pat, pseudo spiritual answer. So what I said was this, “God was in exactly the same place He was the day the sky turned black and His Son cried out ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’”

He was in exactly the same place He was when He participated in the “unfairness” of the process involved with paying for our sins and providing a home in heaven for us.

If God loved us that much then we should be able to trust Him through the most difficult of times. God may not seem fair to us, but in the end He’s always just.

- I. Our Understanding Of Fairness Can Cloud Our Understanding Of God’s Truth*
- II. God Participated In “Unfairness” In The Process Of Bringing Us To Himself*
- III. In Reality None Of Us Would Want A God Who Was Completely Fair*

Turn to Matthew 20 page 966

Jesus was a master at using parables to teach. The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole*. The preposition *para* means “beside” (eng: paralegal, paramedic) and the

verb *ballo* means “to cast” (eng: bowling).

So a parable is a story cast down beside a truth to illustrate that truth. Let’s look at this parable and see what truth Jesus is illustrating.

In Matthew 20, Jesus paints a portrait of the Kingdom that looks and sounds so patently unfair that if it were a reality today, most Christians would scream out at the injustice. But, amazingly, Jesus used this as a picture of how God deals with His children.

Read verses 1 – 16

Talk about unfair! No wonder the guys hired at the beginning of the day complained.

This seems patently unfair but, when we look at this story through the lens of grace, instead of the uncertainty of fairness, we begin to understand the difference between our thinking and God’s thinking. Here’s Jesus argument. What’s fair to us isn’t always right in the eyes of God.

You and I would say those who worked the hardest and longest should be rewarded more. But Jesus saw it differently. Those complaining workers might have well been unemployed if it wasn’t for the opportunity that the master of the vineyard gave them to work.

Was it their right to question his generosity? Weren’t they paid their promised wage? We would scream at the injustice, but we’d be wrong. Jesus was illustrating an amazing truth of Scripture. He was illustrating God’s grace. Just like the idle workers in the marketplace, we were all in a position of need. They were looking for a job, we’re looking for God’s mercy.

The master of the vineyard wasn’t concerned with how long the workers were unemployed—He only knew they needed a job. God doesn’t see the amount of sin we carry. In His eyes, we are all sinners in need of salvation. We are all in need of grace. We all need the cross.

God’s grace is really mercy given when punishment is due. Its undeserved, unearned favor from God.

The Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

In his book, “What’s So Amazing About Grace,” Phillip Yancey points out that part of

our problem is in the nature of grace itself. Grace is scandalous. It's hard to accept, hard to believe, and hard to receive. Grace shocks us in what it offers. It is truly not of this world. It frightens us with what it does for sinners.

Grace teaches us that God does for others what we would never do for them. We would save the not-so-bad. Grace is a gift that costs everything to the giver and nothing to the receiver. It is given to those who don't deserve it, barely recognize it, and hardly appreciate it. That's why God alone gets the glory in our salvation. Jesus did all the work when he died on the cross.

Grace reminds us that God's favor is a gift. The "problem" in this parable isn't the injustice of some mean, cruel landowner. The problem is the scandal of a gracious and loving farmer. Verse 15 asks the question, "Are you envious because I am generous?" One of the most detestable sins that we can commit is taking God's grace for granted.

Grace keeps us from looking down on ourselves. How many of you have ever struggled with feelings of incompetence?

Think about those guys who weren't hired till the last hour. They watched and waited while the other workers were hired. They knew that they would probably not get paid much that day and that they probably wouldn't be able to buy any food for dinner that night

These workers were the leftovers, the least skilled. Who in their right mind would pick them?

These workers really represent each one of us. When you think about it, what do we have to offer to God? Does He need our intellect? Our strength? Our money? Our service? Is it just possible that the Almighty could get by without us?

Our confidence and joy in this life can't be based on what we have or don't have or on what we do, or don't do. Our confidence is on WHO we have!

No one is worthier than anyone else to receive salvation because we're all unworthy. Not worthless, but unworthy.

Here's what's so hard to understand about God's grace. We look at the person who's led what we consider to be a really good life. Maybe they've been sincerely religious. Maybe they were a sweet little old grandma who bakes cookies for the kids in the neighborhood.

Maybe they devoted their life to helping the poor.

The only little catch is they've never trusted Jesus Christ alone for salvation. At least to us it's a "little" catch. We're caught up with what they've done. And if they die we just can't bring ourselves to believe they would stand condemned before God. That wouldn't be fair.

Then there are the people that have said and done horrible things in their life. Grace says that if they truly receive Christ as Savior they're part of God's family.

The Bible tells us, *There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.* (Luke 23:32, 33)

Mark's gospel calls the two other men "robbers."

Luke goes on to explain, *Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."*

But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

And of course Jesus said, "That wouldn't be fair. You've lived your life preying on other people's weakness. You exploited people. You were a thief and a robber. You even admit you deserve death."

He doesn't say that. Instead Jesus says this: *Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.* (Luke 23:43)

Is that fair? No, but it's grace. In reality none of us would want a God who was completely fair

What's the ultimate in wickedness? Turning to the Lord of Glory who punished His only begotten Son for us and saying, "Thanks, but no thanks. I'll get to heaven on my own. I'll be good enough to earn my place in the Kingdom."

I am so glad that God doesn't operate on my standard of fairness.

Is life unfair? It is, in the way that we count fairness. So how do we respond?

Habakkuk questioned God's fairness. He said, "God, life's not making sense to me and I demand an answer from You." In fact he said this, *I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.* (Habakkuk 2:1)

"I'm up here on the wall watching and waiting because I want to hear from God. I want an explanation."

Here's God's answer, *For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.* (Habakkuk 2:3, 4)

God said, "I'm doing something that doesn't make any sense to you Habakkuk but it's based on my promises of faithfulness to my people. So even though it tarries, even though you're not seeing the future, I need you to trust Me. The just shall live by faith."

At the end of the book Habakkuk still is puzzled but here's his conclusion... *Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls--Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength.* (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Am I going to make it through whatever unfair circumstances life brings me? Are you going to make it?

Only if we know who God is personally, and have made a conscious decision to follow him.

It starts with a recognition of God's truth: *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...* (Titus 3:5)

We could be so religious and so moral, but that religion won't erase a single sin we've committed.

The one and only way was the cross. Jesus, the innocent one had to hang on that cross. His hands had to be nailed to the crossbeam, His feet had to be nailed to the post.

The God who would suffer that kind of unfairness for us is a God that we can trust in this life and in the life to come.