

Justice on God's Terms

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Recently the editorial pages of our local newspaper were filled with angry comments over a plea agreement that was made in a nationally publicized murder. A teenager had murdered his girlfriend's parents and then, trying to avoid capture, fled to another state with the girl. In the plea agreement, he confessed his guilt for the murders. In return the District Attorney agreed that the teen would be sentenced to two life terms in prison without the possibility of parole, thus escaping the death penalty. Many felt the sentence should be much harsher for such a horrendous crime.

Dr. Joseph Stowell, former president of Moody Bible Institute, correctly reminds us, "God's justice guarantees that ultimately all that is unfair will be dealt with." But secretly we hope that it will be dealt with the way we think it should be and at the speed we would like. However, God's ways do not always match ours. God's justice is revealed in the words of Isaiah. The prophet says to a sinful nation, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:6-9). God desires repentance before judgment. God thinks and acts with mercy and abundant pardon; our thinking is so different. Chris Tiegreen observes,

Our sense of fairness is easily rankled when God's timing does not equal our own. We're hardly content with the thought that things will be made right at the judgment seat of Christ. That's too far off in the future. And what if the offender repents! Then there's never any payback, just a free ride. Never mind that we received the same free ride the day we accepted Jesus's sacrifice. When we're offended, we're all for justice.

Paul reminds us, "We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." (Ephesians 2:3-4). The justice we deserved was satisfied because in mercy Jesus bore the penalty of our sin and God pardoned us as we trusted what Christ had done for us.

There are human justice systems established by God

to maintain order in this chaotic world (Romans 13:1-4). At best they are limited by the imperfections of humanity (i.e., limited wisdom, knowledge, insight, prejudicial or false testimony, etc.). This results in justice being carried out less than perfectly. What do we do then? Tiegreen proposes,

We are left, at least with some offenses, either to steam and stew about them or to let them go and forgive, trusting God to handle them well. We often choose anger over trust. God seems much less urgent about our complaints than we are. We want restitution now...we who have received a clean slate from our Savior can have no complaints against our God of justice. Justice once directed at us was poured out on Another. We can hardly insist that others must receive it.

Mercy receivers must be mercy dispensers. In a pointed parable Jesus illustrated this principle, and He included this admonition:



"Should you not also have compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" (Matthew 18:33).

Seen an injustice? Been treated unjustly? How will you respond? After all biblical options have been taken, it becomes imperative that we fully release the injustice to the Lord. Can we say like Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25) Or are we wrongly concluding that we are called to clean up injustices that God has missed? The just shall live by faith...and by forgiveness too!

