

JUSTICE vs. FAIRNESS

CARRYING OUT WISE JUDGMENTS BASED ON THE LAWS AND CHARACTER OF GOD.

“Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.” Romans 3:4

DEFINITION OF JUSTICE

A root Hebrew word for *justify* is *tsadaq* (tsaw-DAK). It means to act right in a moral and legal sense. Significantly, the Old Testament writers often used this word for *righteousness*. *Tsadaq* forms the last half of the name Melchizedek, King of Righteousness. Righteousness means the perfection of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. His righteousness becomes ours when we receive Him as our own Redeemer. Jesus fulfilled the just demands of the Law by substituting His sinless life for our sins through His death on the cross.

The writers of the Hebrew Scriptures frequently used *justice* in conjunction with *judgment*. One Hebrew word for *judgment* is *mishpat* (mish-PAWT). It refers to following proper judicial procedure (Ecclesiastes 12:14), especially in maintaining the legal “rights” of individual litigants (Exodus 23:6). The Lord knew that many fallen humans would face the temptation to abuse legal procedures for their own selfish purposes. So He commands: “Keep ye judgment, and do justice” (Isaiah 56:1). (See also Psalm 119:121 and Proverbs 21:3.)

THE REWARDS OF JUSTICE

- “But the path of the **just** is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).
- “Teach a **just** man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:9).
- “The **just** shall come out of trouble” (Proverbs 12:13).
- “There shall no evil happen to the **just**” (Proverbs 12:21).
- “The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the **just**” (Proverbs 13:22).
- “For a **just** man falleth seven times, and riseth up again” (Proverbs 24:16).
- “The memory of the **just** is blessed” (Proverbs 10:7).

THE REQUIREMENTS OF DOING JUSTICE

The will and nature of God expresses itself in justice. Justice requires a person to verbally confirm God’s truth and carry it out. Therefore, the word *do* often precedes the word *justice*. Psalm 82:3 states “Vindicate the weak and fatherless; **Do justice** to the afflicted and destitute,” (New American Standard). “David...executed judgment and justice” (I Chronicles 18:14).

The Apostle Paul emphasizes the same point in Romans 2:13, “For not the hearers of the law are **just** before God, but the **doers** of the law shall be justified.” God provides a detailed description of a just man:

“If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right and ...”

- Has not looked to the false gods of his day
- Has not defiled his neighbor’s wife
- Has not violated commands of personal uncleanness
- Has not oppressed anyone
- Has not taken advantage of a creditor
- Has given food to the hungry
- Has proved clothes for the poor
- Has not gotten rich by high interest
- Has not engaged in iniquity
- Has carried out wise judgment between parties
- Has walked in God’s statutes and judgments

“...he is just, he shall surely live” (Ezekiel 18:5-9).

AN EXAMPLE OF A JUST MAN DOING JUSTICE

Matthew 20:1-15

1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

3 "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5 So they went.

"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

7 "'Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

8 "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.'

9 "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 '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.'

13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' (New International Version)

THE ISSUE OF JUSTICE

The justice in this case rests in the question that the householder asked the last labourers. "Why stand ye here all day idle?" Even though the labourers worked only an hour, they had made themselves available all day long. Thus, by engaging them for the one hour the householder assumed responsibility for their readiness all day. Those who are greedy tend to be unjust because they do not see the bigger picture or consider all the factors of a situation.

HOW JUSTICE COMPETES WITH FAIRNESS

Most people demand fairness. However, absolute fairness requires that all get the same things at the same time. This is impossible; thus, we must look to God, Who always acts in perfect justice. When we focus on fairness, we fail to see the just compensation of God. For example, if God gives more money to one, He will give more faith to another, who can appropriate needed funds. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith?" (James 2:5).

- Justice rests on the universal, unchanging principles of God's Word. Fairness relies on the variable will of the majority.
- Justice causes us to confess our failures and plead for mercy. Fairness causes us to justify our failures so we do not think we need mercy.
- Justice focuses on personal responsibility and yields revival. Fairness focuses on personal rights and produces rebellion.
- Justice expresses God's wisdom. Fairness expresses man's reason.
- Justice is impartial and objective. Fairness is partial and subjective.
- Justice requires swift prosecution of criminals. Fairness results in slow punishment of criminals.
- Justice limits the punishment of criminals. Fairness produces inconsistent punishment of criminals.

HOW GOOD JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE WORK TOGETHER

Solomon wrote Proverbs so that his son might “receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity,” Proverbs 1:3 (New American Standard). The ability to judge wisely is given to the meek. “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Ps. 25:9). Judgment is acquired through a sequence identified in Ps. 37:4-6: “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.”

HOW JUST ARE YOU?

- Have you read God’s Word, and do you memorize and meditate on it day and night?
- When you are dealing with a matter that requires justice, do you find comparable Biblical examples on which to base your decisions?
- Have you asked God for an understanding heart so you can make wise and just judgments?
- Do you have a meek spirit so God can guide you in justice and judgment?
- Do you understand the difference between justice and fairness?
- Do you cry out to God when required to make a difficult decision based on justice?