

MATHEW 20:16 GOD'S JUSTICE

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

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Is God unjust in His treatment of men? This is the charge leveled against God by the willing and eager servant (vv. 10-15). Men often question and charge God with being unjust. Such an unholy charge is caused by religious and theological discussions and by wrong belief and unbelief. The charge is also leveled against God when a crisis arises and we question, "How could God do that or let that happen?"

The New Testament discusses the question of God's being unjust in three passages: Mt. 20:8-15; Rom. 3:5-8; and Rom. 9:14-33.

1. The parable of the workers in vineyard (Mt. 20: 01-16) is an illustration of Gods justice based on God's mercy, concern and care for all.
 - a. God's pay (reward) is not based on works and energy. It is based on God's grace and justice, and it is based God's concern and care for all.
 - 1) Note that God is gracious and just and caring. God's grace and care do not annul or erase His justice. God is not unjust (Rom. 4:5-6).
=> When God gives work to a man who is desperate for work, it is a caring and gracious act. Such was the case with the early call to the eager worker. Not to take advantage of the man's desperation is an act of grace. To offer and pay a full wage and not take

advantage of the man is not unjust but the very opposite. It is a just and gracious act, a very caring act.

- => Similarly, when God pays a man more than what he earned because God cares that the man has enough to live, it is a gracious and caring act. It is not an unjust act against the first or earlier worker. It is simply a gracious act that reveals God to be an enormously caring Person.
- => If God gives us what He promised us, He is not unjust if He gives something to someone else. He is not even unjust to us if He gives an enormous gift to another person. He is just, and He is enormously caring and gracious by keeping His Word and giving to us *and to the other person*.
- 2) Note that the complaining by the earlier workers causes some to apply the parable to the relationship between God and the Jews and the Gentiles. The earlier workers, representing the Jews, complain because God gives an equal pay (reward and position in His kingdom) to the Gentiles. Almost any commentary will give insight into this interpretation if the reader wishes to pursue it.
 - b. God's pay (reward) is not as man sees but as God knows and wills. Our eyes are evil because we are of an evil world. Therefore, we judge and understand from an imperfect and selfish stance. God is good; He cares and is full of mercy and grace. Therefore, He gives eternal life to all who come, no matter when they come, at the early call or the eleventh-hour call.

Acts 15:11 *No! We believe it is through the grace of our LORD Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.*

Rom 3:24 *And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Eph 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Titus 2:11 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.*

Titus 3:7 *So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

2. The question is, “Is God unjust if He punishes the unrighteous? (Rom. 3:5). If my unbelief and sin give God a chance to overcome (v. 4) and to show His justice, then my sin brings greater glory to Him. It gives Him a chance to fulfil His Word. How can He punish me for that? Is He not unjust in inflicting punishment?” The answer is fourfold.
 - a. Certainly not! (me genoito): away with such a thought! No! Never!
 - b. God is moral; therefore, He must judge the world. He would not be moral and just if He did not judge the world.
 - c. Such an argument is contradictory. Think about it. “If my sin and disobedience give God a chance to demonstrate His righteousness, why then am I called a sinner for that? My sin is really a good thing. It gives God a chance to show how good He is. I may sin, yes, but only good has come out of it. When God accepts me as I am, a sinner, God has a chance to show how gloriously merciful He is. You can’t condemn me for giving God a chance to show His mercy.”

- d. The condemnation of persons who argue this point is *just*, deserved: it is not unjust, undeserved. Such arguments are common among every generation of men, but the arguments are gross deceptions. A man exclaims: “A God of love cannot take vengeance. He is too good and loving. He will be denying His very nature of love if He judges me.”

What this argument fails to see is that *genuine love is just*. Love expressed unjustly is not love; it is license and indulgence. God’s love is perfect, absolutely unbiased and impartial. It is shed upon all (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:2). It is not license and indulgence; neither can it be, not in its perfection. Neither can it allow license and indulgence. God’s love is completely and perfectly just. It demands justice. In no respect can it be unjust by failing to judge. Neither can God be accused of being unloving when He executes justice (Rom. 2:2-16). God’s love is just; God’s justice is the demonstration of perfect love. The cross was where God exacted His perfect justice upon His Son, and it is the perfect example of the glorious truth. The cross is the perfect demonstration of both the love and the justice of God.

Thought 1. The cross is the perfect demonstration of God’s love and justice.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Rom 5:08 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Eph 5:02 *And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

1 Pet 3:18 *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

Thought 2. Men shall be judged and condemned if they have rejected the love and salvation of God provided in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Mat 16:27 *“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”*

Mat 25:31-32 *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”*

Rev 22:12 *“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”* □