

The Grad Experience

Week 8



Justice and How Unfair the World Is

Key Lesson: "God's justice is a saving, healing, restorative justice, because the God to whom justice belongs is the Creator God who has yet to complete his original plan for creation and whose justice is designed not simply to restore balance to a world out of kilter but to bring to glorious completion and fruition the creation, teeming with life and possibility, that he made in the first place. From the very beginning, two thousand years ago, the followers of Jesus have always maintained that he took the tears of the world and made them his own, carrying them all the way to his cruel and unjust death to carry out God's rescue operation; and that he took the joy of the world and brought it to new birth as he rose from the dead and thereby launched God's new creation." Wright, N. T.

Welcome to Week 8 of the Grad Experience. **Each week as we look at specific topics that are extremely present in your world today. Our goal is for you to spend some time discussing in a safe place so you ask questions and develop a stronger viewpoint on each of them.** Even if they are not present in your high school right now, they will eventually be present on a college campus, workforce, or military ... or just in the general culture of the world you live in.

Our goal isn't for you to leave here each week with a definitive answer to some of life's tough questions when it comes to living life after high school, but to get you at least **thinking about the topic and determining how that connects with whatever faith you claim to have.**

Last week we looked at the question of can you have a purpose and career that honors God but isn't necessarily a calling to be a minister or missionary. Can you choose a "secular" career and it still honor God?

This week we are going to look at how unfair the world is and what that has to do with us and God.

The Bible talks about justice a lot!

In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words appear throughout it which capture the biblical picture of justice: *mishpat* and *tzedakah*.

- ***Mishpat* [mish-pat]** refers to **treating all persons equitably**—particularly with respect to punishment or acquittal in legal matters.
 - *Mishpat* also speaks to defending the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the vulnerable.
- ***Tzedakah* [say-da-ka]** expresses **the idea of maintaining right familial and societal relationships**; not simply by being polite or refraining from quarreling, but by **engaging others with radical generosity, fairness, and equity**.
 - This facet of biblical justice goes far beyond judicial legality. *Tzedakah* compels us to honor others with a measure of dignity and well-being because they are our fellow image-bearers of God.

New Testament – sharpens the biblical idea of justice by insisting that **it goes well beyond legality**. It encompasses the ideals of **honor, generosity, and grace**.

- In other words, the whole matter of justice intersects with the gospel.
- Jesus died on the cross to atone for the ultimate injustice: our sinful rebellion against God.
 - The gospel doesn't just satisfy justice. It introduces a higher standard: **the standard of generous love.**

Have student read Matthew 5:38-41

³⁸ "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. ⁴¹ If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. – Matthew 5:38-41

Again and again in the gospels, we hear Jesus say words like these: "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." The **"you have heard it said" part of his discourse would typically refer to a legal or traditional standard of justice (from Old Testament Law), but the "I say to you" part would include something much more generous...and more challenging.**

True justice goes beyond merely ensuring people get what they demand, deserve or earn, or what others have. That's "entry-level" ethics, and not what Jesus taught.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS STATEMENT? True? False? Agree or disagree?

God expects us to be steadfastly committed to the well-being of others and generous in a manner that mirrors God's love for us, pointing people to him in every way. (See Matt. 5:16)

"We have this innate sense of justice, yet we haven't been able to eradicate societal injustice – even after thousands of years." Why?

God's justice, the kind of flourishing for all that we want so badly—resides at an impossible elevation. By our own strength, we cannot bring [it] down... – Sandra McCracken, "The River of Justice Flows Downhill," *Christianity Today*. **AGREE OR DISAGREE? WHY?**

We know justice is a reality, but we can't quite seem to reach it on our own.

- We all somehow share a kind of universal standard of behavior and know when it's been violated. (aka sense of justice)
- But even with that universal, shared sense of justice, **we live in a world that feels broken and unfair. Even if we manage to do what's right, things outside of our control still go wrong**— crime, bullying, poverty, infidelity, and prejudice don't just disappear because we want them to. **WHY?**
 - Because despite our good intentions, **sin and its effects have not been eradicated from the human race.**
 - **Sin rears its head and brokenness persists. And sin is at the root of all injustice.**

We can certainly make inroads toward a more just world, and we should try. **But we will never achieve perfect justice through human effort.**

- We can take hope in the certainty that **God himself will bring about full and perfect justice with the return of Christ and the arrival of his kingdom.** (see Rev. 22:3 - **No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.**)

Here's kind of a tough question to think about:

Does true justice require equity?

To answer this question, we need to understand the difference between **equity** and **equality**.

- **Equity** involves trying to discern and make available to all people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives.
- **Equality**, in contrast, aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in the same amounts to enjoy full, healthy lives.
- Like equity, equality is concerned with fairness and justice, but **it can only work if everyone starts at the same place and needs the same things. And they don't.** In truth, they never have.

Are all people equal in God's eyes in terms of their worth?

- All men and women are created in the image of God, and this is the basis of their equal worth.
- No man or woman made in God's image is any more or less valuable to him on the basis of any human factor—from gender or race to ability or ancestry. We all bear equal value in God's eyes as his image-bearers.
 - **HERE'S A CRITICAL PART: We are all equally valuable to God, but we don't all begin in the same place, with the same opportunities, natural abilities, or worldly goods.**
- Some of us were born in places where our very survival was threatened and where opportunities to better our situation were non-existent.
- Others were born into privilege, with numerous opportunities to pursue.
- Some were born with exponential mental and physical abilities; others with mental and physical challenges to overcome.
 - **As we navigate life, these differences often set the stage for favorable or unfavorable outcomes and positive or negative treatment by others.**

True justice goes beyond merely ensuring that people get what they earn. Sin and brokenness cause inequality, which means certain people have an unfair advantage over others. In the game of life, we're called by God to look around us, assist our brothers and sisters who are struggling - recognizing we don't all start at the same place in life.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS STATEMENT?

The Christian response to injustice requires that we seek fairness and restoration, not retribution; generosity, not greed; humility, not power; good not evil; love and not hate. It calls us to account not just for what we have done, but for what we have failed to do.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS STATEMENT?

However, **God did not order the world in such a way that only the advantaged have honor, or that only the rich have opportunity.**

- Each of us has honor as an image bearer of God, and He loves and has plans for both the rich and the poor, the able and the disabled, the young and the old, the powerful and the weak.

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. – Proverbs 14:31

Regardless of our situation or station in life, **God calls every man and woman to pursue justice in a broken world.** That means engaging evil or injustice in a redemptive way, seeking the honor and well-being of every man or woman created in the image of God.

- Will we be able to right every wrong? No, but one day He will.
- Will we be able to obliterate poverty or hunger or sickness? We won't.
- But **every day will bring us opportunities to do what our creator commands:** to love justice, to seek mercy, and to walk humbly before one another and before God.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? – Micah 6:8

What does the life of Jesus teach us about justice?

If we could earn our salvation by good works and moral effort, righteousness would belong almost exclusively to the able, the competent, the accomplished and the privileged.

- But that is not the way of the gospel. **Jesus' offer of salvation by grace through faith favors the failed, the outsider, the weak and the disadvantaged.**

*"The Bible does not show us story after story of 'heroes of the faith' who go from strength to strength. Instead, we get a series of narratives containing figures who are usually not the people the world would expect to be spiritual paragons and leaders." - Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God**

Jesus's own life demonstrates this: He didn't come as a wealthy, powerful, entitled king, but as an infant born into a poor family.

Did Jesus emphasize justice in His ministry?

- Again and again in his teaching Jesus emphasized not necessarily justice but demonstrating generous grace.

So here's an important question: **How does generosity connect with justice? Or does it?**

- Meticulous law keeping (or human justice) is what the Pharisees demonstrated.
 - Jesus taught generous grace – not just generosity in giving, but generosity in giving grace ... and generosity in living in grace and not living under the law.

Think about the end of Jesus' earthly life:

- Justice happened (**Jesus died unjustly for our sins that had to be paid for justly.**)
- But Jesus lived a life of grace and generosity and in His mercy, God saved us from our sin and from ourselves.
- Because sin lies at the root of all human injustice, **only when we are free from the strangle-hold of sin are we truly free** to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with [our] God." (Micah 6:8)

In the end – our “doing justice” falls on our experiencing God’s extravagant unending generous grace which allows us to extend the same grace to others in order to right wrongs in the world we live in.

- When we live for justice, we pave ways for others to not only experience grace and redemption from the injustice they may be experiencing on this earth, but also are given the opportunity to experience God’s eternal saving grace for all of their eternity.

Finish with looking at this quote:

“God's justice is a saving, healing, restorative justice, because the God to whom justice belongs is the Creator God who has yet to complete his original plan for creation and whose justice is designed not simply to restore balance to a world out of kilter but to bring to glorious completion and fruition the creation, teeming with life and possibility, that he made in the first place. From the very beginning, two thousand years ago, the followers of Jesus have always maintained that he took the tears of the world and made them his own, carrying them all the way to his cruel and unjust death to carry out God's rescue operation; and that he took the joy of the world and brought it to new birth as he rose from the dead and thereby launched God's new creation.” - N. T. Wright

What are any other thoughts you might have about dealing with injustice in this world?

QR Code for the church Darkroom website for podcasts, articles, etc.

Close with prayer.