

I come in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Bill Gates has been credited with the saying, “Life is not fair. Get used to it.” Karin Thebus Psy.D. (Clinical Psychologist) says that to have **life be fair** is to live in accordance with rules and standards. But, she writes, “Rules are subjective, meaning that each person, group, and society has devised a set of standards by which they deem to be “fair.” We create laws to decide what is, and is not, appropriate in regards to behavior. **Not everyone** believes or agrees with the overall standard of laws. We each set standards that determine what **we believe to be “right and wrong”** and when **we don’t get the desired result**, we assume the position of “not fair.””

That got me thinking. Life is not fair. But death is not fair, either. Good people die. Babies die. Innocent children die. It seems that some whose actions are evil continue to live, although it might be better for the world if they would die. Death is not fair. Get used to it.

I suggest that God is not fair, either. Get used to it. Remember, fairness is determined by conformity to a set of rules and standards, and may reflect the message of the Ten Commandments, or the law of love. We judge others on their adherence to rules and standards. But, we also judge those who judge them.

For example, in the confirmation hearings of Justice Jackson this week, judgments were made about what the appropriate (fair) punishment should have been for certain offenders. And Justice Jackson herself was judged for what was perceived as an inappropriate rendering of justice.

It is easy for me to be an armchair referee, to make judgments based upon my own interpretation of the rules and standards, and completely ignore the messiness of reality. My sense of “fairness” is biased based upon what I want – regardless of facts – regardless of reality.

In the well-known parable of the prodigal son, the younger of two sons demands his share of his future inheritance. In Jewish law, the eldest son receives twice the share of the inheritance as all other siblings. In this case, the eldest son would have gotten 2/3 of the property, and the younger son 1/3. The younger son’s demand posed no threat to the older son’s inheritance. When the younger son made the request to receive his share before his father died, he basically said, “I want what is coming to me right now! You are dead to me!” I know what my reaction to that would be, but his father grants the request. My fairness yardstick is measuring “UNFAIR” - unfair to the father, unfair to the family.

The son leaves, and severs all of his relationships. He abandons his family, goes to Gentile lands to avoid any Jewish influence and oversight, and lives a life that violates every rule and dismisses every standard.

He pushes his new-found freedom to the limit, ultimately finding himself in trouble. He squandered his inheritance, had to submit to serve a Gentile pig farmer (ouch), and dwelled with pigs (a ritually impure animal). He became physically, morally, and spiritually bankrupt. Empty! My fairness yardstick measures – “Good, you deserve it.”

He decides to go home, face the music, and take his punishment. We know what happens. The father welcomed him with open arms! He was dead, and now he is alive. He was met with forgiveness, rejoicing at his repentance, a given a huge banquet. What? No punishment? A party?

The older brother felt slighted, that justice was not rendered. UNFAIR! He behaved himself, was true to his father, and was the ‘model child.’ He became unhinged when his rules and standards about what is fair weren’t met by his brother, or his father. He didn’t see his father punish him or disown him. The threw him a party!

The father assured the older son that his love for him was unconditional, and that he could be secure in his own inheritance.

He attempted to convince his son that his brother's repentance outweighed his offenses. Nevertheless, the older son chose to go off and sulk.

The parable never reveals if the eldest son ever came to the party. Did his obsession with 'fairness' blind him to the joy that can be found in 'mercy'? Did he drive a wedge between himself and his father, never to be reconciled? We don't know. But how many of us drive a wedge between ourselves and God when God has not acted in a manner consistent with our sense of fairness?

Like the eldest son, we work so hard to meet rules and standards, seeking approval, that we totally miss God's generosity, love, forgiveness, and mercy. Remember, God is not fair. Thank goodness! God does not render what is fair, but rather showers us in forgiveness and mercy. Our response? Accept it.

Which of the two sons is worse off? The younger one who screwed up, repented, asked for forgiveness, and expected punishment? Or the one whose sense of fairness would not overlook judgment and punishment, and accept forgiveness and mercy? It seems that, at this point, the eldest brother is far worse off. He has turned himself away from his father and his brother. He did everything he could to 'earn' his father's love.

Are you like the older son? Do you feel that obeying rules and following standards earns you a share in the kingdom of God? Can you accept God's

generosity and mercy? Are you willing to give up judging others, and judging God? Can you let God be God, and trust Him to do God-things?

Or, do you tend to be the younger son that falls into a state of sin? You recognize your failings, choose to repent, and seek forgiveness, knowing it may come with fallout. Damaged relationships, lost friends and opportunities, and ‘burnt bridges.’ But you willfully accept the consequences. The punishment may be just and difficult! Yet, it is the only way back.

I suspect that at times we act like one or the other brother. In our own insecurity of God’s love for us, we believe we must earn God’s mercy, or can never be worthy. Be assured that your share of the inheritance in the Kingdom has been secured for you. Jesus paid off the mortgage. Know that God will never love you more than He does now, nor will He ever love you less than He does now. Even in sin, God is always with you, offering you His forgiveness and mercy. So, when you mess up, own up to it, go to the Father, and repent. Rejoice in God’s mercy! When mercy is extended to someone else, celebrate God’s generosity.

May you resist the temptations to judge others, and God! May you spread unity and healing by practicing forgiveness and mercy. May you find comfort and healing in God’s mercy, and joy in His generosity and love. May you be eternally grateful that God is not fair! Get used to it! Amen.