

Balancing God's Justice and our Mercy

There are joint Godly objectives which He has asked of us, which enhance our lives to encourage us to be kingdom ready. If we meet these objectives we imitate Him. If we imitate God we bless Him. God requires that we improve our environment and improve our relationships with one another. Both those objectives feed on one another and go hand in hand in service to Him. If we cannot care for one another in our relationships, it follows that we cannot care for our environment, as He has asked us. No care is “don’t care”, and that is sinful.

In Christ

Those “*in Christ*” have a common aim to be like Him. Hopefully, all our individual and collective energy goes into that aim. But we find we can’t wholly achieve that, individually, or in the church. We cannot achieve everyone “*fitly framed*” growing into “*a holy temple*”, Ephesians 2:21. We sorrowfully fail, and the balance is never right. The pieces of the jigsaw are all around us, some cemented firmly in, and others broken and out of place. We can pick them up to make the whole, but we cannot quite fit them. In our struggle to better re fit the pieces and accept the not so good fit, we make do. Other pieces are lost or abandoned, and never refitted. We compromise with some less fitting pieces and not others. We accept “*make do*”, with some, and not others.

Why do we not agitate for everyone to be fitted in?

Is it because we are “*in*” the group, so it does not concern us too much if others are “*out*”, or “*put out*”?

Or is it like the environment “*Well, that unsatisfactory circumstance is not happening to me or any of mine*”, and

“*God will fix it in the future when Christ comes*”?

Is our attitude to the left-out God valued pieces ambivalent, and we are not concerned?

Or do we really worry about the marriage of human justice and its offspring retribution, with mercy and its offspring compassion, and wish that everyone could fit in?

Compassion

We know justice and judgment and retribution are not ours to deal out, for they belong in “*the throne room of the Father*”, Psalms 89:14. So if we can leave the justice to God and be merciful of one another, we will grow “*full with compassion*”, Psalms 78:38, such as our Father does for us in our sin. If we can use all that energy in helping one another, being inclusive of everyone, and covering the deficiencies everywhere, the overwhelming wave will begin to grow, building to something that we thought was beyond us. Our good and concerned and concentrated building will have all the pieces fitly framed into a holy temple. Maybe we can change the erosive energy of control and ego and competition which we sometimes find amongst us, and harness the energy of forward progress together, and then we will be more successful in our presentation of God to those who observe us.

“*I can help you with your pieces and you can help me with my pieces*”, might be a better way to look at the two seemingly connected issues of justice and mercy. I can gracefully encourage you that this piece is a Godly piece and needs fitting in, and I can help you over your feeling of being

tainted by this or that fit. And so we can encourage one another in the judgments of what is a right fit, and what we might want to judge is a wrong fit. That is true reconciliation, a Godly work.

It was Tolstoy who said, *“The course of human events, even the greatest historical events, is not determined by the leaders, but by the combined wisdom and courage and commitment and discernment and compassion and love of its common and ordinary people”*. It is the small ordinary acts of common decency and compassion which make up the weave of social fabric. If all those *“in Christ”* can present a more united front of doctrine and practice as an interwoven fabric without the feeling that we are giving away the importance of doctrine, we will move forward and be more effective and well known for our compassion. We can hold up our heads in the face of others who wish to be exclusive with the accompanying restrictions and rules. A dysfunctional work culture can taint a whole company, which was readily understood after the Enron tragedy. It is so for a church. For good or for evil is the question about our culture and values. Culture can change through different stages in our lives, but the values which produce goodness should remain the same, and that should encourage wellness in any community.

Compassion in the Created Environment and the Social Environment

Compassion is looming as a longed for entity in our own use of energy and water. We need to think of others more than we do, and not only those in our own back yard, for *“global warming”* means we need to think globally with compassion. So it is more imperative than ever that we need to marry our beliefs with their outworking in our lives, in acts of kindness to each other, to the environment, to those who suffer in this world. In marrying those ideas to the role of preaching we will not so often hear, *“Yes, yes, let us do good, but make sure you have a full Bible knowledge and understand the Belief Statement”*.

Isaiah 61:11, *“As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations”*, or, in other words, as the creation works well, so men and women will praise God. So it is also that the list of doctrines is not the important factor, but their outworking in our lives in service to one another.

It was David Levin, November Tidings Magazine, US, who said,

“Doctrine” and *“character”* are integral. They are not two separate lists, being composed of discrete entries. People who relate to the printed word, such as a statement of faith and the commandments of Christ, not to a living God and His son Jesus, invariably fall into the trap of propositional religion. They struggle with the question, *“Just how much do we need to know?”* In order to be sure of *“protecting the faith”*, they usually add to the requirements and build their barriers higher and stronger, attempting to create a safe buffer between what they perceive as the *“Truth”* and the errors of Christendom. While the differences are indeed real, the theoretical basis out of which they operate is entirely unbiblical and does not promote spiritual growth. Keeping the resurrection at the center allows us to view Christian doctrine (as the word is used in Scripture) integrally, and to reject the paradigm of propositional religion and ethics.

Then with the resurrection of Christ at the centre, and Christ’s lessons on potential redemption for all ringing in our ears, we can see compassion and our doing good, as an integral part of our lives, using the Samaritan oil, pouring it on the wounded traveler.

Wounded Travellers

But why do we have so many excluded travelers, the lost and *“wounded hearts”*? (Psalm 109)

Is it the erosive energy of ego and control and competition, and the overwhelming need for justice, which stifles our collective role of mercy to prevent the wounding in the first place?

It is how the environment has been nearly destroyed, it is how we have damaged the third world populations of the earth, and it is how we have broken up the church down through two millennia since the birth of that Christian church, by those less Godly ambitions. How can we protect our members from the hurts and the wounding? More and more knowledge of the cruelty and the degradation which afflicts the poor and those with little education will test our understanding of grace. Why does it keep happening? The lord of the vineyard took the vineyard away from the husbandmen when they beat up His servants, and then His son, Luke 20, 12. So the vineyard is not ours to oversee, it is His, and He it is who will mete out the justice.

Surely we are ready now for God testing our grace, for we know of His gifts to us. We are struggling to imitate God with those gifts which He gave to us, as He asked. *"We become like what we love"*, (Plato) and *"if we bestow all our gifts if we have no love, we it profiteth nothing"*, 1 Corinthians 13. If we have worthy passions, together with love we can explore them, contemplate them more, exploit them and eventually imitate them. We can each help other to grow towards goodness, *"being of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful and courteous, rendering blessings that we should inherit a blessing"*, 1 Peter 3:8, 9. Then the fractious will have no foothold, and our united and compassionate front will be our trademark.

Justice and Mercy

Justice we love, *"fair"* *"that's fair"* we cry. *"That's not fair"* we cry, if we see an edge. But God uses His justice tempered with mercy. That's hard, much harder to cry about. It is hard for us to learn that God is never *"fair"* for He *"rightly divides"*. So, when we try to reconcile immoral imperfections with the need to achieve mercy it means balancing a conscience with an inclusive and generous spirit.

We might cry out, *"When will it be fair? How long?"*, and like Job, *"Why do those unjust servants prosper?"* But God reassured Job that He was in charge of the universe and Job could not complain. God will *"deny"* those who *"profess that they know God, but in works they deny him"*, in His time, Titus 1:16. With our time and logical frame, that is a hard concept for us - He will deal with the unjust when He will, not at our cry of *"unfair"*.

Habakkuk (2) also takes up the *"how long"* refrain, *Woe to the drunkard ... who enlargest his desire ... him which increaseth that which is not his ... How long?"* and with out a human logical answer to his query from God, Habakkuk (3) concludes, *"Although the fig tree will not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive will fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord"*.

John records in Revelation 6:9, 10, *"The souls of them, slain for the testimony, cry out, 'How long doest thou not judge and avenge our blood?'"*.

When the psalmist Asaph (73), was at last *"in the sanctuary of God"*, he understood how, for a time, the wicked are like *"clouds without water"* prospering in *"the slippery place"*. Asaph then predicts the coming destruction of the wicked with more confidence. So, in that Holy place, *"the sanctuary of God"*, there is an understanding for us if we will, as well, go in there with God. If we do not leave justice to God he will allow us in our ineffective way to do judgment and retribution,

but we will not escape being judged ourselves for it. No one understands the justice of God, nor His time frame, but the closer we are to Him the more we understand His way with men. Then in that Holy Place we will be more able to leave justice to Him.

Damaged and Disabled

The world, irrespective of what happens to it, is His gift and we would love it even in its damaged and disabled state. It is the same with the gift of humanity, and especially our brothers and sisters. We would love them, irrespective of their damaged and disabled state.

Even in these dark times of global warming and the destruction of the environment we would not give up on the world. We know the hearts of many will still turn to Jesus Christ so we do not, dare not give up. We struggle to grow equity with mercy and inclusion for all. Equity for all in this great covenant is overlaid with mercy. That is a beautiful thing and it demonstrates compassion. It is the over riding emotion God has for us sinners. So why do we wound and exclude those for whom Christ died, and forget to imitate His compassion to us? Compassion is the purifying force, not exclusion.

Mary Eyre's book "*A Mighty Flame*" about love in the Bible, posthumously published late in 2006 by her husband Alan, is a lesson to us in the marriage of God's justice and mercy with its outcome of compassionate love, and Mary endorses that as a mighty purifying and fiery force.

Mary talks about the eyes of love, Elroy, "*the God of vision*", "*the God who sees*", and they are "*the eyes of love*", and illustrates her point in writing about the outcast Hagar, tired and helpless, pregnant and thirsty, in a waste howling wilderness, who, in her greatest need, sees the vision of God, with His eyes of love.

It was God's messenger who spoke to Hagar and told of her future multiplying descendants and that she should name the child within her, "*Ishma El*" or "*God pays attention*" or "*God who cares*". Mary reminds us that Hagar, in her first exposure in the wilderness, repented of her leaving Abraham's house with Sarah's "*harsh and vindictive treatment*" and returned to the tents, refreshed and counseled by God, giving birth to Abraham's first child. Mary goes on to say how Jesus himself, in defending the adulterous woman, turned his own caring eyes upon her accusers causing them who were convicted by their own consciences, to drop their stones to walk away, retreating, one by one.

Mary says of her own experiences, and those experiences of her Biblical friends, that she knows that God cares for the lost. God wants us to know of His love for the lost, God wants us to forgive and restore those lost. He offers us true freedom in implementing the restoration and reconciling process, so that we can serve Him in love forever. In that way we also know He cares for His creation, the lost and the extinct. We know of His pleasure when we also join the effort to try to revive those animals and plants and rivers on the brink of extinction. .

If we were concerned with restoration, and if we were true brothers and sisters each to the other, the scars of rejection would have vanished by now. We know now that victims of the injustice of exclusion suffer not merely forms of natural harm in that rejection, but also a form of physiological or psychological damage from the injustice itself, which can last a lifetime. Because the injustice is a distinct and irreducible source of torment it does pervade like a firm, excluding blanket. Some people chose the security of such an unloving blanket, where the requests for justice to be administered are never heard. The cry does not diminish, but mercy

lies on the shelf unused and unheard. There is then no compassion there in that unlovely house for the door is shut tight.

What Do We Desire?

To love and to speak out compassionately about mercy is a courageous thing to do among the unforgiving servants, ministering the compassionate oil to the sufferers, remembering that deciding to speak out and pouring oil often reduces us to be scorned like the Samaritan, and to accept victimization as well. Reconcilers are often victims as well. It is good and noble and Godly pursuit to be truthful and loyal to the created world and its members, with realistic expectations. These make stories of hope in the human and in the environmental field.

So, God can judge, in our religious and social cooperation, what is acceptable, and what individual can flourish in our autonomy. We need to purge ourselves of the leaven which makes our own body unholy, 1 Corinthians 5:6, but we are not to weed out the plants which grow with us in the garden, and appear to us as tares, Matthew 13:30. Because He has asked us to allow Him to be the judge, it will then be God's responsibility to exclude an ill fitting piece. If we listen to the call of the Father through Paul, in 2 Corinthians 2:7 we will welcome and comfort the repenting sinners, for we know they are so like ourselves.

Then because of our inclusive autonomy where we can encourage more and more to be holy, there can be a collective outcome for good. That survival of the overall good where there is no exclusion might mean our survival "*in Christ*". Where God is the judge and where He delivers the retribution, there will never be judgment of us for an inclusion with love and wisdom. However, we conversely know that exclusion is a sin. Injustice and exclusion does not serve our needs and interests. We may not be judged now, but God does not forget that which is unjustly done, and unjustly not done, to one of His.

We desire mercy and love, not only because it is a beautiful thing, but also because the Bible recommends it for "*the righteous show mercy*", Psalm 37:21. If we are not righteous enough for that, or if we are selectively merciful, He will be the merciful one to our so called just cause, "*for His mercy endureth for ever*". We cannot claim ignorance like Paul did, (1 Timothy 1:16) for we are responsible and know His will for us now. That implies a punishment for us if we neglect mercy. James (3:17) reminds us that mercy and good fruit go together. The manifestation of mercy and compassion in our lives encourages others, and nurtures hope, a hope for the future, a hope that more will be converted to this way of mercy and compassion which He has demonstrated. That tinges then our concern that the kingdom will soon come, into a more hopeful concern that God will work His redemption over more time, because His mercy and justice have taught us mercy and compassion.

Leave It Until Jesus Comes

We do not have a series of beliefs. We do have a series of beliefs maintained by practice. If we say "*we will do this exclusion, and if we do wrong, justice will prevail when Jesus comes, he will sort out the dilemma*", then we do not understand that our hopes are sustained only by dreams of the future. If our dreams, mostly to do with human nature are only realizable in another lifetime, that is not showing fruit and being practical now.

What do we do with the space in our minds which wants love and mercy and compassion for all now? Do we forget it lying silent on the shelf and cover up the space and close the door on that concept, as if it does not exist? We might find then that we are unbalanced in our belief. God is

not the servant of our purpose to right the world with our brand of justice. That is why we are conscientious objectors to war. He is the instrument, God in us, by which we practice His will.

Compassion and Reconciling Now

Always, there will be a handful of people who would like to redeem humanity by the nobility of their vision, and they have the courage to continue to be true to that, even risking victimization. It might be something we are called upon to rise to with great courage, something like reconciling two groups. In that rising with the tool of reconciliation, there is a risk. Humanity is never fixed or secure, so those people take a risk. And, as well, evil is not always outweighed by good, and we have to accept that the outcome will not always be imminently positive. Even a decade might be a conservative prediction to change an attitude! The individual has to assess, with realism, a balance between a commitment and an assessment of what can be achieved, what is the best advice, and what it will cost. Our values inform our choices, and our responsibilities as brothers and sisters to each other cover the passions of those who are willing to stand out.

Some go into dangerous pit places to stand firm with those who are suffering, others try to do much better in saving an evil environment, speaking out against the ambivalent mass. Each of these represents God in the suffering pit. We should give them safety nets, rather than upbraid the Samaritan for reaching into the pit with some healing oil.

We do pray for the healing of the earth, for rain or for peace and safety. In our faith, some go to dangerous places to preach the Gospel. We, being enablers, can cover them with prayers and practical help. So also we can pray for reconcilers and facilitate their efforts, instead of trying to foil their efforts.

The Inheritance for our Children

We should not abandon a sense of obligation to love, nor should we abandon a dream of better things with mercy here on this earth, because we look to a future Kingdom to put it all right. Our sense of wanting love and mercy and compassion for all, should not be sustained by a sense of abandonment to the future. Now is the time when a sense of duty should prevail our way of doing things, when, if we, who are just ordinary, can all stand firm, we will bring about great change. Our sense of belief will be related not to our words on paper, but to the living God and His son in our hearts, if we stand within the veil with Him.

A call to protect and nurture our natural environment can be part of what it means to promote the Kingdom of God on earth. Our children call us to be responsible about their futures. We heed that call. That call is about the physical surroundings of this earth which our children will inherit from us when we place those children here.

At a deeper level we also teach them about the Divine in human affairs, not only in creation but in our relationship with God, our relationships with each other, and the restoration and healthy maintenance of them all. If "*God so loved the world*" should His followers love it any less? So our children also call us to be responsible about the health of the faith in which we place them.

Equity and mercy for all on this earth is for now, and extends to future generations of the human race, as it did in the past. It is not just for those who at a particular time and place have the money, or the means, or the power, or the numbers to own and control more of it than others, and to say "*you cannot come in*". It is morally indefensible to believe that the earth and the earth places are only for those with the strength to inhabit it now.

The fruits of creation were set up by God as a divine revelation, before Scripture, before any teaching took place. It was set up for all people from Creation into the future until the great covenant is fulfilled. God argued that the heavens and the earth and the sun and the moon were at His command so that Job was at last silenced of his unfair cry, and grateful that God did the universe of which he knew nothing. God did not answer Job's cry of "*unfair*", or the cry of Habakkuk, or the cry of the saints under the altar, for that answer is too hard for them/us to understand. God just keeps reminding us that He is in charge. That has to be enough and that helps us to build our faith with trust. It is the same for His moral laws set up from the foundation of the world for us to imitate now. They also help us to build faith and trust. He will deal with the immoral, if we all the time remember that we are also bent on immorality.

Because of that we are not the judges to use the tool of retribution, but we are asked to meet the Godly objectives of caring for the creation, and caring for each other as we imitate and become more like Him. He blesses us as we bless Him.

It is critical to remember that we ignore the example of mercy and love and its outcome compassion, demonstrated by His son Jesus Christ, at our peril.

But to reach the potential of "*the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*", Ephesians 4:16, is a truly noble gift which we can offer to the Lord.

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