

It's Not Fair!

A Catholic friend asked, "How is it possible for a murderer who calls on Jesus at the moment of death to be forgiven and taken directly to heaven?" She argues further, "If God is just, the person will have to suffer for all the sins of his past life. It is not fair that this person should be rewarded with heaven when the next person who lived his entire life for God also receives the same reward."

What can we say about that? Is it fair that the apostle Paul and the repentant thief should both be with the Lord on the day of their death? Paul spent his life for Jesus; the other spent his entire life in sin. Is that right? Three basic thoughts come to my mind about God's dealing with us...

1. God is just

He deals with us righteously. His justice requires punishment for sin. Yet, we could never make up for our sin by personal suffering. According to the Bible, "the wages of sin is *death*" (Romans 6:23) - the eternal separation from God in hell. We cannot pay our debt even if we had to suffer for all eternity in the fire of hell.

Thank God, what we could never do, God did on our behalf. God sent His beloved Son to live a sinless life, and finally, to take upon Himself the sins of His people and die in their place on the cross. "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Christians know that they are forgiven because Jesus "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). God is perfectly just when He saves sinners because their sin was paid for by Jesus Christ.

2. God is gracious

Yet some feel that it's unfair that a sinner who repents on his deathbed should be as quickly taken to heaven as the saint who dedicated years in the service of God. But I say, why should anyone complain about the goodness of God? Is He not free to be good, kind and merciful? It would have been unfair if salvation was the reward for our works. But alas, salvation is by grace, through faith, and not the recompense for our good works (Romans 4:4,5; Ephesians 2:8,9). We can never be thankful enough for that since every one of us deserves hell, and not heaven. For us sinners, "fair" means "punishment." Thank God, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10). God spares His people the punishment they merit and instead He gives them the free gift of salvation - on account of His grace, and nothing else.

3. God is generous

We must add an important point to complete the picture. It is the duty of every man to obey the Lord, and as such we are unworthy servants. Yet the Lord promises to reward His saints according to their deeds. Here we are not speaking about salvation. We have established from the Bible that salvation is by grace, not works; because Jesus suffered and died in our place, not because of anything we do. We are speaking about people who are already saved and about the rewards that the Lord gives them for their obedience. The Lord rewards them proportionately to the love and service rendered during their lives on earth. Jesus said: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). Therefore the person who lived faithfully serving Christ will be rewarded in heaven more than the person who was saved by the skin of his teeth.

It's worth keeping in mind the following three principles:

1. Christ is the sacrifice for sin; not personal sufferings.
2. Salvation is by grace; not personal merit.
3. Saved people perform good works; the Lord rewards them accordingly.