

Justice and Mercy

Read Leviticus 19:9-18, 32-37

How can we live just lives? How can we help establish justice on earth? God is justice. We are just when we are like Him. Our actions are just when we act like Him. Our society is just as it takes on His character and His values.

I didn't begin to grasp the implications of that simple truth until I began preparing this study. In searching the Old Testament for passages emphasizing "justice" and "mercy" separately, I kept encountering them together. Over and over they seemed to be inseparably intermingled. Today's reading from Leviticus 19 is a good example. Yesterday's reading, Psalm 145, is another.

*The Lord is righteous in all His ways
And kind in all His deeds. (Psalm 145:17, NASB)*

The same passage that urges God's people to be compassionate also urges them to be just and fair. One is not optional and the other mandatory. Both justice and mercy are commanded. They are commanded together and repeatedly, in the strongest terms.

We often think of justice and mercy as opposites...or at least as two competing values that must be balanced. We see justice as absolute rightness, and mercy as a kindly compromise with justice. But when we realize that justice and mercy are both descriptions of God's nature, we see that they are not opposites to be balanced. They are two facets of the same jewel. God is always merciful and always just. Since He is our standard of justice, to be just is to be merciful as He is merciful.

Thus when we are called to seek justice in this unjust world, we are not called to a specific political or social agenda. We are called to think and live and be like God. We are called to be holy as He is holy, to live and speak the truth as He is the truth, to love as He loves. We are called to be His children, His ambassadors, His servants, His Body.

This truth has major implications for our daily lives. Realize that ultimately, fairness in human relationships is not God's law. Love is God's law. He expects us to think and speak and live like Him. He expects us to love other people as we love ourselves. He expects us to love them sacrificially, as Christ loved us. This is not only loving, but fair and just.

We cannot have a just society without God's love and holiness, enabled by God's Spirit.

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