

# Living in an Unfair World

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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## 2 Corinthians 8:9

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

Because of the presidential campaign being in full swing, we are hearing a lot about fairness. Some candidates and their supporters complain that it isn't fair that the wealthy one percent live in luxury and the poor seem to get poorer. They call it income inequality. Others complain that it isn't fair for certain minorities, while others crusade for greater rights for other voting blocks. Some are even complaining that the election process itself isn't fair.

Fairness is a big deal these days. Political correctness demands fairness for all, unless you don't think political correctness is fair, then the PC wants to silence you, which doesn't seem very fair.

Psychologists discovered that even among monkeys there is a great dislike for unfairness. In 2003 a couple of psychologists did a study of monkeys and their sense of equity. They had trained the monkeys to use tokens and get food. They would give the monkeys the tokens and the monkeys had to give the tokens to the psychologists in exchange for food. In this particular experiment they used grapes and slices of cucumbers. Monkeys have a passion for grapes. They gladly eat cucumbers but they greatly love grapes. When all the monkeys received the same kind of food for their tokens all went well, but when one monkey received a grape and another a cucumber slice there was trouble in paradise. So they concluded that monkeys have a sense of fairness. They called it "disadvantageous inequity aversion," DIA Syndrome. When I was a boy we called it the GTSEOTS Syndrome, "getting the short end of the stick." The article said that this same disadvantageous inequity aversion was in humans at the earliest age. They concluded it wasn't a learned trait but an innate one.

It's amazing how some sciences are getting so smart. They can actually discover things for themselves they could have read in the Bible a long time ago.

In another study they gave a child the choice between one piece of candy for he and his friend or two candies for himself and three for the friend. Every child chose the first option even though the second option doubled the candy for himself. The psychologists concluded that fairness has nothing to do with right and wrong but it is all about "Me," and how I rank in status. Again, something already stated in Scripture.

This is the problem. Our complaints about fairness have nothing to do with right and wrong, in the end it's really all about me and what I can use for my advantage. I could care less about my neighbor as long as I get my fair share.

Now I have to tell you how this sermon came to me. The way a sermon comes to a preacher is varied. It may be something he read in his own devotions, or it may be in response to a particular need in the church, or it can be given to him as something welling up inside of him, a burden or deep impression. I've had all of these means of delivery. But this message is quite unusual and very rare in that it came to me in a dream Friday night and Saturday morning. I kid you not. And when I awoke from the dream this text, 2 Corinthians 8:9 was in my mouth. I was reciting it as I came out from the sleepy world of dreams.

But before I share my dream with you, let me deal with the fact that life in this world in its present form is not based upon fairness. The world does not have equity as its foundation. Remember that this world has been itself unfairly subjected to corruption and misery. The Apostle Paul says to the Romans,

*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:20-22 NIV)*

The Bible tells us even this planet we occupy has been unfairly subjugated to corruption and misery and problems. So when our ancestors Adam and Eve took out on their own and did not heed God's warning all equity took leave. Why is that?

## **I. Sin Destroys Equity**

In a world less than perfect, much less, there can be no fairness. There will always be someone better looking, more wealthy, more athletic, more intelligent, more popular, more loved than you. And you will have some advantages over someone else in some way. Life is not fair.

There will always be people dying young, losing fortunes, and suffering rejection. In this present evil age there will always be some deformity, some contortion, some kind of inequity. What we want and desire is not possible right here and right now.

### **A. Sin is an Imbalance.**

When God created a perfect world, everything was in perfect harmony and symmetry. And God Himself made man to occupy this perfect place. When man sinned and disobeyed God, at that moment, the symmetry and balance and harmony were disrupted, life was broken, society and man himself was turned upside down. This is what we see now.

## **B. Sin Created an Imbalance in Us.**

Our text says that Christ was rich and we were not. There was an inequity, a deficit, a shortage.

He was rich, we were poor. There's the imbalance. He doesn't say what created the imbalance but it's there nonetheless. God in His infinite richness and we in our poverty. What caused the poverty? What caused man's deficiency? One thing and one thing only—our own sin. Sin has disrupted the harmony God created. That's what sin always does. The injustices, the inequities, the unfairness of which you often complain has come about because man has chosen to do life his own way and man is insufficient to restore wholeness and balance. We are not capable because this very sin has created an imbalance within us. We are imbalanced.

There is an inequity in your life and that's what this verse tells us. You were poor. You were without certain things needed, in fact, without the very things that God gave in the garden, but were taken from you when our first parents sinned. Sin has taken wholeness and beauty from you and now there is left emptiness.

It doesn't matter how happy you are at times. Even when you're enjoying life and there is some sense of satisfaction, there still remains this horrible haunting of dissatisfaction, discontentment, and unhappiness. Where is it coming from? It comes from within. It's the stain and plight of our sin. When you and I reject God's ways and reject not only His commandments we reject God Himself and all that is left is imbalance, inequity, and injustice. When you break the commandments of God, you're not just violating the commandments, you are violating God.

This is a problem we have theologically. We think sin is the breaking of a commandment of God but the Bible says it's much more than just violating or transgressing His ways or commandments. Every one of those commandments is a reflection of God Himself, so, in the end, when I say "no" to God and "yes" to myself and disregard His commandments, I am rejecting, pushing away, refusing God. And here is the source of all imbalances—I have rejected the only person who can bring wholeness to me. This is our condition. This is where the text finds us. We were totally deficient, without, lacking all that was necessary to be right with God and have peace with Him.

So the Bible says Christ willingly suffered inequity "for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich for your sakes He became poor." Christ willingly suffered inequity.

## **II. Christ Willingly Suffered Inequity**

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor ..."*

## **A. The Richness of Our Savior.**

How rich is God? Our calculators and computers don't tabulate that much. There's no way you can estimate the wealth of God, but let me give you one word that theologians used hundreds of years ago. It's been pretty much ditched by modern man but it's still a good word. I don't care if you don't remember this word, it's not the word itself that's important, it's the concept.

The **aseity** of God. That word was invented to convey "from self." How rich is God? Well, the Bible tells us that God is self-sufficient. From His own self comes all sufficiency. He doesn't need anything. God needs nothing because He satisfies Himself. He has everything He absolutely needs so He never has a need. From within Himself is the sufficiency and satisfaction of His own heart so that God's heart is always content.

This is a hard thing to grasp because none of us are satisfied completely with our self. We would like to change something about ourselves. Harken back to last week. We always try to imitate someone else or desire something different about us because we're not quite satisfied with us and yet God is so perfect, so whole, so just, so complete that He needs nothing and is therefore most satisfied and delighted within Himself. That's amazing in itself but think about this.

The word *aseity* also tells us that God is far richer than being self-sufficient. God's own existence comes from Himself. He is the uncreated Creator. That is amazing. That's how rich God is. He is so vast in His wealth that He needs nothing, not even a creator. He is not the cause and effect of something else. Out of Himself. Perpetual generation. This blows our minds. No wonder we can't calculate the richness of God. Yet this same God came to us.

## **B. Christ Willingly Came And Lived Sin's Imbalance.**

This God of all satisfaction and self-existence has made everything. How rich is God? Well, He made everything. The Bible says the earth is His and the fullness thereof. Even you belong to Him. It doesn't matter whether you're a Christian or not, you belong to Him. He has a title and deed to you and one day He's going to call it in. He owns us. Everything about you, every possession, the shirt on your back, the automobile by which you got here this day, and if you didn't get here by an automobile and had to walk here, those two feet were given to you by God and He owns them.

He owns everything. This God came willingly to be gestated in the womb of a virgin and to be born in absolute poverty. This God who is rich beyond description knows privation, He knows poverty, He knows what it means to go without. He said of Himself that He didn't have a house or a bed or even a pillow to lay His head on at night. He went completely without all of what we call the "essentials" of life and He did it willingly for you and me.

He knows what it's like to lose a loved one. He lost His earthly father and upon Him, the eldest son, was the responsibility to keep house and home together for His mother and younger brothers and sisters. And when it came time for His short and brief ministry on this earth, you talk about injustice—Jesus suffered every known injustice that man's evil heart can create. They spit

upon Him, they ridiculed Him, and they falsely accused Him time and time again. The religious people found Him unacceptable to their religious traditions. You know why He couldn't meet their religious traditions? Because He surpassed them. Finally one day they falsely arrested Him, falsely accused Him, spit upon Him, poked Him, jabbed Him, stabbed Him, and finally they nailed Him to a cross unjustly, unfairly. Why? For my sins.

*“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,” (Galatians 4:4)*

When you hear or read the terms “under the law,” that's the Bible's way of saying not only was He subject to the law of God Himself, His own law, but He was also subject to sin. He was subject to sin's injustice. Everywhere He turned there was sinful injustice and misery. He had to choose enemies as friends. Those 12 men that followed Him those three years, you could literally say of them, “With friends like these, who needs enemies?” They hardly obeyed Him, seldom trusted Him, and they really didn't believe what He said about Himself. Finally one betrayed Him, one denied Him, and the rest forsook Him.

Here He is, the innocent Lamb of God without spot. Don't talk to me about how unfair life is to you. Look at Jesus and you'll know what unfair treatment is all about.

Have you ever seen a lamb? A truly innocent, spotless lamb? They're darling things. I wouldn't want one but they are cute. I'll never forget the ice storm in 2009, the Crawford family stayed with us and they had in their possession a little lamb. It was so small you could put it in a small dog cage. We kept him out in the garage. He wasn't so innocent that he could come into the house.

Have you ever seen one slaughtered? I've seen a lamb, not a sheep full-grown but a lamb, have the knife taken to its throat and the blood collected. I watched it one time. I wasn't there; it was by video. It was in the city of Jerusalem. It was the first time an animal had been sacrificed in hundreds of years and they were honoring the Day of Atonement. It was one of the most gruesome things I've ever seen.

I've hunted, I've killed things, I don't know how many animals I've killed over the years to put food on the table. I've seen that. I've skinned animals. I won't gore you out but I've done all of that. That day as I watched the lamb get its throat slit, my stomach began to turn and tears began to roll and I got on my knees. I saw in a small way, innocence.

Did you know a lamb cannot not bite you? It doesn't fight. It won't even kick you. It has no means by which to fight off prey and it certainly will never be the pursuer of prey. It's totally innocent. It has no means of self-support. The Bible says this is who Christ was and is—the Lamb of God. It was announced at the beginning of Jesus' ministry by John the Baptist and it was once again announced in the Revelation as John saw a Lamb that had been slain standing at the throne of God.

It's not just imagery. This is not just a metaphor. Jesus was as innocent as a little lamb and they brutally crucified Him. The only thing He had was His clothes and they stripped Him of those and left Him hanging on the cross naked. The soldiers who were killing Him used dice to gamble away those clothes. You talk about unfair treatment? It is Christ who has known unfairness like no other. Why did He do it? Why did He willingly subject Himself to the injustice of sin? It's because He loved you and me. He was willing to be the innocent one who could therefore receive your sins, your injustices, your unfair treatment of others and suffer for the payment and penalty of those sins. All that Christ is and His richness therein can now be given to you. That's what this text says.

### **III. Equity Has Been Restored to Us**

*“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)*

#### **A. All of Christ's Richness Has Been Given to Us.**

All of Christ's richness has been given to us so that whatever I lack now I can experience in Jesus because Jesus makes up for it.

Please listen. You may have found yourself complaining about your lot in life. You don't make enough. There never seems to be enough money to spread out sufficiently. You struggle. Listen to me, I'm not promising that if you accept Christ you'll be healthy, wealthy, and wise. I'm not promising you wealthy prosperity and earthly goods. I'm telling you something better. I have a better prosperity Gospel than some of those folks on TV. My Gospel is prosperous. Here it is: You get Jesus.

You may work for pennies, you may put in a full day's work and not get a full day's wage in return, but Jesus is more than enough and He can satisfy the heart. My dear friend, whatever is lacking, do not be anxious, He keeps good books and the Bible tells me one day when He returns He will return with those books and they will be open and every unfair thing, every inequity, every injustice will be made right. You will never suffer more than you will receive from God. God will give you more than you suffer.

Some of you feel like life has given you an unfair turn. Your body can no longer function as it once did and you say to the Lord, “But I've served You, I've given You my best years, is this how You repay Your servants?” Listen to me. Christ is your health. The Bible says this outward man is perishing but the inward man is being renewed day after day. Let me tell you something. When this body ceases to function and you leave it behind, oh my dear friend, you will then know that what I'm telling you now is true. You'll know that within you is already the wealth of heaven and you've not been cheated. You've been seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Every good thing in Christ has already been deposited within you. Let wealth go, let's health go, you still have more than you deserve. Isn't that the point?

## **B. Spiritual Now and Physical Later.**

This isn't just spiritual blessings that I'm talking about, although most of our wealth at this present is spiritual. There is coming a day of retribution where God will restore balance to this world. Dear friend, until that day, do not think God is dealing with you unfairly or dealing with you unjustly. He is not. Which leads me to my final point.

## **IV. Inequity is the Gospel's Opportunity**

Now to my dream. I was at a huge outdoor sports complex. There was a track with races occurring and there were other types of sporting competitions. But in the middle of the complex was a football field with a game in progress. The two teams were young, perhaps elementary or middle school aged. As I watched I saw a great commotion in the stands among the parents of the children.

If you have attended a youth sporting event you know that there are those parents who are quite vocal. They're either yelling at the referees or at the coaches or at their own child. Sometimes they will even yell at a child on the opposing team. Those are the parents that really embarrass their youngster.

This particular problem was with one team's parents. They were arguing with one another as well as the normal accusations of the referee's poor vision. I noticed that the team was bi-racial and I overheard that there was a good deal of frustration with the coaches and charges of unfairness. The main indictment was that the coaches were given preferential treatment to some of the players based upon skin color. But the most startling thing I noticed about this team was that it was a church youth football team.

In my dream I spied a young man who seemed totally overwhelmed by the confusion. Although I did not know the man, I was instantly aware, in my dream, that this was the pastor of the church. He walked up to me and told me he did not know what to do to bring order and asked if I would do something.

I got the attention of the angry mob and began to speak to them. I told them some of the things I've told you today. I told them life isn't fair but that they were wasting the inequity to display the Lord Jesus Christ. I explained that the unfair things and injustices of life are some of the grandest, God-given opportunities to demonstrate Jesus and the Gospel. However, they had chosen to do the opposite. It was doubtful any of them were saved, by watching their actions and behavior. I told them they didn't take the opportunity to teach their children how Jesus suffered innocently for us by being willing to be treated unfairly for the injustices they deemed were occurring. I told them Jesus suffered wrongs even when He was right and that's what He calls us to do and in so doing we proclaim the Gospel.

As I awoke watching myself preach to them, this verse, our text, was on my lips. I want to tell us here today, that all of life's unfair turns and twists are not negatives altogether; they are opportu-

nities, the best opportunities to demonstrate the Christ and His Gospel. Here's the Gospel: "that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

Jesus suffered wrongly when He was right. So many times the same happens to us. We suffer injustices. I'm not saying that what happened to you is fair and isn't unjust, you probably are accessing it correctly, and if you are right and you have suffered wrongly—remember Jesus! Remember Jesus who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return. When He was spit upon, He didn't gather from His dry palate all the spittle He could muster and spew upon those who had put nails in His hands. No. He prayed for them. The One who was right and accused of wrong and treated wrongly prayed for His executioners.

Beloved, listen to me. When you suffer wrongly, when life turns on you and deals you a blow that is not what you expected or believed you earned, it is an opportunity from God to show this world Jesus. Listen. When God saved you, when He saved me, He did not change the world, He changed us.

This world is still not fair. This world is still inequitable. This world is still imbalanced. Sin rules this place. There is a dark lord and he jealously hates our Creator and he's doing everything to soil, corrupt, and destroy what God has made. This world has not yet been changed. One day God will make it right but not yet.

The reason He allows unfair treatment of you is because it's now your opportunity to demonstrate to the world in real time who and what Jesus is like. The innocent suffering the injustice. Stop and think about it. We complain sometimes that life isn't fair and we've received a bad blow and treatment we didn't deserve, well, you've doled out some injustice and inequity on others. Don't forget. I remember and it haunts me to this day. I've been saved 29 years and I still can't get over it. The lies I told, the injustices I brought to people and those who were wounded by my sins. Before you think I'm a saint who never sins now, no, many times since I've known Jesus as my Lord, I have acted in ways that were unfair toward others. I treated them unjustly and with unfairness. Yet Jesus never marked me out.

He may have a pen but He doesn't have an eraser. Hallelujah. He's still suffering innocently and unfairly. He is still suffering our sins and rebellion and disobedience, and what has He done in return but give you lovingkindness and mercies? He has put up with you, forbore you, tolerated you. And not just tolerated you by ignoring you, no, but He continues to cause the sun to shine upon you and give you the dew of the season, the rain and the fruits of the harvest. He is still suffering our injustices and yet He continues to love us.

My dear friend, that's your opportunity. When God allows unfair treatment to come to you, don't complain; don't think God is mistreating you—no! He's giving you a grand opportunity to be like Jesus. You say, "I'm not so much like Him." No, but you have Him. The riches of Christ have been given to you. You were poor, yes, you had lack and deficiency, you could never have done what



we're talking about, but this Jesus of all mercy dwells within you and you can give good for evil. You can and you must. It is the Gospel's opportunity.

Listen, the Gospel and evangelism and missions is not just explaining some plan so that somebody when they die can have some sort of assurance they're going to heaven, it's much greater than that. Evangelism and missions is the opportunity to show them who Jesus is and what He's like. This is what this is all about. You are afforded the opportunity to demonstrate that God is merciful to the unkind, He is gracious to the evil, and He is good to the hateful.

Let me tell you why you find this message difficult, if you're a Christian at least. You don't think this way purposefully but I'm telling you that innate self-centeredness those psychologists that I referred to, it's still in you and it thinks this way. It tabulates your goodness. It does. You think, *You know, I've lived this way for so many years and I've lived a good life, a clean life. I've tried to obey You and I've sinned now and again but, Lord, I hope I've done enough good.* You don't believe your works saves you, you know better, but something is inside us begins to think just like that elder brother who said, "You didn't kill the fatted calf for me. In fact, you didn't even kill me a goat. I would have been happy with that but you didn't do that for me, and lo, I've obeyed you all of these years."

Your sense of unfairness comes from thinking you deserve better. There's the problem. The truth is for every one of us, including this man, is that I don't deserve one ounce of His goodness or fairness. That's why I want to hold out hope to you, my dear Christian friend.

When God allows unfairness to creep into your life, He's giving you an opportunity to demonstrate to the lost the Gospel. "Jesus was innocent but He suffered wrongly and here's how He did it. He did it with joyful contentment." They're going to see that and they're going to know something is different because they know that's not how they respond. God will ordain one day somebody to ask you, "How is this possible? How are you able to endure?" And now you have the readymade opportunity to say, "Ah, this is how Jesus was. Here's what I did to Him and He took my injustices and inequity and unfair treatment and He suffered for them. He did it willingly and gladly so that I could know Him and be restored to Him in balance and fairness. God has restored that in my life." It's an opportunity for the Gospel.

Before I conclude, I have to say to those of you who are not yet followers of Jesus, I have held before you the essence of the Gospel, the substitutionary sacrifice, how that Jesus was unfairly and undeservedly treated and received the ill-treatment of God for the guilty. God's holy justice was satisfied in Christ.

Would like to propose a question to you dear friends who are not disciples of Jesus. How fair is it that you should be forgiven and given Christ's riches? Think about this for a minute. How fair would it be for God this very moment, before you leave here, do something internally where you leave here knowing you are forgiven and right with Him? And not only that but know that you have all of Jesus and His wealth? Let me ask—how fair is that when you have scandalized, scorned, and rejected Him? How fair is that when you have hurt not just Him but others? When you have

knowingly disregarded what He has asked of you and His plan for your life? How fair would that be of God to not give you what you deserve but give you His mercy?

It wouldn't be fair, would it? Isn't it true that the whole fairness issue is really muted? It's not about being fairly treated. The Gospel is about you being unfairly treated all the way around. God gives you, instead of His wrath and retribution, His grace and His lovingkindness. He crowns you with His goodness and sets you free and restores to you what sin stole. He leaves you whole rather than imbalanced.

Who here wants to be treated fairly when it comes to God? Why don't you just cry out to Him at this moment? Why don't you just call on Him and admit that He's right and you've been wrong? Tell Him the truth, He already knows it, and receive of His lovingkindness. Receive His goodness. Receive His forgiveness. Receive His wholeness. Today, what you think is so impossible will be possible—you can actually reflect Jesus. "For you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Amen.