

1. Fairness

- a. It seems that we are hearing a lot these days about fairness. As our national debt increases, we are hearing from the president that rich people need to pay their fair share of taxes. We are hearing from the republican candidates that the 40%+ who pay no taxes need to pay their fair share.
- b. We are seeing an advancing social agenda that we are told is predicated on fairness. The same-sex marriage movement claims to just want to be treated equal and fairly, having the same rights as everyone else. Of course, they do have the exact same rights as everyone else- to marry any qualifying member of the opposite sex.
 - i. We want to marry who we love, they say. But that isn't the same as fairness. There is nothing in our legal statutes about heterosexual marriage that says a male and female "who are in love" can marry one another.
- c. Another area where we often hear about fairness is when people talk about God. The skeptic or unbeliever will say that God isn't fair because he sends people to hell.
 - i. One argument is that he sends people to an eternal punishment for a temporal crime. So, they would say, it isn't fair to be punished forever for something I did only once.
 - ii. Another argument is that God sends people to hell simply for not accepting Jesus. Since there are many who have never heard of Jesus, this isn't fair. But even for those who have heard of him, if they are good people who just don't accept Jesus, isn't it harsh and cruel of God to punish them eternally for simply not "accepting Jesus"?

2. God is fair

- a. Our generation isn't the only one to question the fairness of God. The Israelites in Ezekiel's day did as well. In the midst of the suffering and punishment that they were facing in exile- an exile that was brought on by their abject rejection of God- they turned to a position of God's unfairness. How could God treat his people this way?
- b. God's answer was to point them back to their sins and transgressions. Even the punishment of exile was brought on them with warning. The prophets came to Israel and Judah and said, "God is bringing a great punishment on you for your wickedness. Repent now and he will halt. Turn to him and you will be saved." And we know how that turned out.
- c. In the passage God laid out very clearly (specifically in the verses cut out from the passage) that those who reject him and live in sin will die while those who are righteous and walk with the Lord will be saved. He even goes on to say that those who sin and repent will be saved while those who are righteous then turn to sin will die.
- d. Not only is he fair, punishing only the wicked, but he is forgiving:
 - i. 21 But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²²None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. ²³Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?

- e. God isn't looking for ways to punish more people. Scripture shows us a God looking for any chance to be merciful. He calls people back to himself. He pleads with them. "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live."
 - f. He is a fair God, repaying each only as he deserves, and giving every opportunity to simply repent and be forgiven.
3. God is more than fair
- a. Not only is God fair, but he is more than fair. He doesn't just repay according to our deeds, but he is willing to forgive our misdeeds and forget them. Not only is he willing to forgive our misdeeds and forget them, but he takes it a step further.
 - b. "Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (v. 31)
 - c. But God doesn't just leave them to give themselves new hearts. He told them in Jeremiah 31:33, "³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
 - d. God promised to give them their new hearts himself. And likewise, Jesus promised to send his Spirit upon his people. So neither the Israelites nor we as Christians are expected to just conjure up a new heart or new Spirit. Instead it is the promised work of God in the lives of his people. And he didn't just stop by giving us a new heart or new spirit either. He didn't just call his people away from sin and to repentance. He also took the full weight of the problem of sin and placed it upon his own Son.
 - i. 1 John 4:9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.
 - ii. Romans 5:8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - e. The claim is that God isn't fair. God punished people in the OT- people he called his own, who worshiped other gods and turned their back on their own creator. God judges all at the final resurrection and sends some to eternal bliss and others to eternal punishment.
 - f. But do we really want God to be fair? He promises to judge each according to their deeds. He promises that the sinner- the one who sins- will die and the righteous- the one who doesn't sin- will live. If God were truly fair, who could survive?
 - g. God, in his eternal unfairness, went even further to grant the righteousness of Christ to those who repent and turn to him. He provides their new heart. He provides their new Spirit. He even provides Christ's righteousness. This is so far beyond fairness- this is the love of a God who knows that if he simply did what was fair and judged us according to ourselves, we would all be found guilty and left out.
 - h. This is the love of a God who goes beyond what is fair to provide for us even while we are still sinners. All of this just by coming to Christ for forgiveness and receiving his righteousness as our own. When God has done so much, it really gives weight to the question: Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.
 - i. Whether Israel or us, when God has gone so far to put our sins behind us, why will we fight so hard to keep them ever before us?