



lyona bible church

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS – APRIL 18, 2010

Announcements – Please read these to your group!

Please check your bulletin and the website (www.lyona.org) each week for additional information.

- **THEOS/Life Group Leader Meeting:** We will be holding a meeting on Sunday, April 25 from Noon-1pm in B6. More information to following via e-mail. This will be a brown bag meeting (bring your own lunch).
- **THEOS:** A new semester starts Sunday, March 14 beginning at 9am.
- **Sportsman's Banquet:** This year's expo and banquet will be held on Saturday, April 24 starting at 4pm.

Losing Your Religion: Unfair, Part 3 (Romans 5:6-11)

Questions

1. What was the most interesting idea or principle about this Sunday's message?
2. As the speaker talked about his struggle with the "fairness" of Christianity, could you relate with your own struggles with the "fairness" issue?
3. Does the "fairness" issue hold water in other arenas of life (i.e.: marriage, school, poverty, etc.)? Is it true that just because something seems unfair it is true?
4. Why is it so popular, even among Christians, to use the word "mistakes" for "sin"? Is there a difference?
5. Have someone read Romans 5:6. Paul calls himself and all of humanity *ungodly*. Why do we compare ourselves with those worse off than we are and not to God?
6. Have someone read Romans 5:6-8. As sinners, fairness would mean equality, which means punishment for our sin. So we actually want God to be unfair by redeeming us. Why is the cross so unfair?
7. Have someone read Romans 5:9. Why do believers still live in fear of God's wrath when they are clearly saved from God's wrath?
8. Do you, after hearing the sermon this Sunday, need to confess anything or repent of anything? What in your life needs to change?

Prayer Requests

A place to write out your groups' prayer requests

SERMON NOTES

LOSING YOUR RELIGION: *Unfair*, Part 3

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INTRODUCTION

A few of weeks ago, I received an e-mail from someone who had listened to one my messages concerning God's generosity. The enormity of God's generosity was seen at the cross—as He sacrificed His Son on our behalf to restore us back to Himself. Apparently this message had this person asking questions about the “fairness” of Christianity and the reason for the substitutionary death of Christ. This person thought that Christianity was unfair because only some will know Christ. They also thought that it was unfair for Christ to die on the cross when He was innocent.

This was not the first time that I was asked about the “fairness” of Christianity. Throughout the last 8 years of ministry, I had been asked on many occasions why Christianity seems so unfair. It seemed that a lot of it was emotionally motivated. These people wanted their wives, husbands, kids, moms and dads to have a relationship with Christ. It also seemed that the Gospel collided with their world-view. Almost of all these people would question God's love—“If God were a God of love then why would He let people die without a chance at redemption?”

Each person that asked me about the “fairness” of Christianity felt that because the Gospel seemed unfair that it was somehow untrue. So if this is true then it should hold water in other arenas of life:

- If a husband woke up one morning and decided that he no longer wanted to be married to his wife of 15 years because she is no longer the person he married 15 years ago, does it change the fact that he is married? He feels that it is unfair to stay married to a different person. But this does not change the fact that he is married.
- If a student decides to skip biology class because the teacher is unfair and it is an uncomfortable environment, does it change the fact that she is his teacher?
- When children are born into Indian slums, they are born into a hopeless future because it is cyclical. Even though this hopelessness is unfair, it is true.
- When an earthquake rips through an impoverished city, death is certain for thousands of people. Even though this seems unfair, it is true.
- When the corporate CEO who gets a life-altering surgery from the best doctor and then receives the most effective treatment, yet it doesn't seem fair to the thousands of African women and children that die of easily remedied diseases. Even though this is unfair, it does nothing to change that it is in fact true.

The fact is that argument does not hold any water. Just because something seems unfair does not mean that it is not true.

For some reason, there is something in the back of our minds that causes us to feel that God should come up with a system that is fair. In our minds we feel that the Gospel is unfair because not everyone is going hear about Jesus. We ask ourselves about the native in the jungles of Brazil—“They haven't heard about Jesus, so what happens to them?”—but we do nothing to share Jesus with those in our community?

There is a reason why God's “system” of salvation seems so unfair to us. None of us fully understand the significance of sin—in our lives and in the world. All we know of the world is what we see and we see through the lens of sinners. We have become desensitized to sin. We cannot appreciate the Gospel because we have made sin normal. Our world is broken and has been since the Fall because of sin.

If you put on the news at night, there is crime and death. There are natural disasters claiming the lives of thousands of people. There are things happening that we don't even know about—human trafficking, online auctions for pedophiles, kidnapping—that are just despicable acts of depravity. Things are really worse than they really are. We can live in our safe 80-acre farmhouse bubbles, but it does not change the fact that things around

us worse than they really are. It is not wrong to live in a bubble—it just gives you a distorted perspective of the world.

I can remember that Jenny and I went to watch the movie *Taken* when it first came out. The storyline opened our minds to the horrific trade of human trafficking. I sat in the theater finding myself wanting justice for Liam Neeson's character's daughter. I find myself wanting these kidnappers and human traffickers to pay for their horrific acts of depravity. I want justice. I want fairness (punishment for the crime).

The reason why we need a Savior is because we are sinners. We are sinners who actually want God to be unfair. Fair means equality. We will not argue that the worst of the worst of society deserves punishment for their crime. But we will argue that we are nothing like them. Sin is sin. Sin deserves punishment. The punishment for sin is death and an eternity separated from God. So if God were fair, everyone would get the same punishment.

This is not the first time the "fairness" question was asked. There was a group of people who struggled with the Gospel and fairness and needed to be educated on the importance of the substitutionary death of Christ. Paul, who was a committed follower of Christ, wrote a letter confronting these people of the powerlessness to save themselves.

ROMANS 5:6-11¹

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.²

We were and are powerless to save ourselves from the punishment (consequences) of our sin. No matter what kind of plan or system we have in place to earn God's favor, it is powerless to save us. The world was powerless because we were still trying to use the law to restore our relationship with God. Because we were powerless to save ourselves, Christ died for the ungodly at the moment that God strategically planned.

Paul calls himself and all of humanity ungodly. None of us compare ourselves as ungodly. We compare ourselves with each other. We don't compare ourselves to God but to those who are worse off than we are. It may be offensive that Paul says that we all are ungodly, but he does so because he is comparing us to God. If someone is unlike something or someone, we use the prefix *un*. Since we are unlike God, we are ungodly. This is why the world needed a Savior because everyone was not born with a desire to be like God. We are born with a sinful nature that exalts us above everyone and everything—including God.

It is the nature that is evident in the way you lie to get out of jams. It is evident when we cheat to get ahead. It is evident when we get excited when someone gets fired so we can get the position. Our sinful nature is evident in the way we do things for ourselves while neglecting our spouses and kids. Our sinful nature is evident when we justify our sinful behavior as mistakes.

And it all actuality we all are that bad. We are all born sinners—it's in our DNA. Many theologians call this *total depravity*.³ It's why when someone, we really don't like, gets a promotion we clap but inside we are critical. It's why when someone, we don't like, doesn't get a promotion we sympathize but on the inside we are so happy

¹ All Scripture referred in this sermon, unless otherwise noted, is taken from: The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

² Some manuscripts add the following to verse one: "who walk not according to the flesh (but according to the Spirit)." This was a transcription from verse 4. With these added transcription, salvation can be seen as something that a person can do for himself or herself as they walk with the Spirit (i.e.: do good works, follow the laws, etc.). It is intended to be read as written in the message. This compliments the doctrine of Christ alone.

³ Total depravity is a theology term that means people cannot do anything to earn salvation because corruption extends to the entirety of a person. The English word "depravity" means to be perverted or crooked.

because it means we may be able to get the coveted promotion. It's why when we will lie to avoid the consequences of an action. Whether we admit it or not, we all are corrupt inside. Broken—needing to be put back together by our Creator.

⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Even though the highest form of human love is sacrificial, it is a rarity for people to sacrifice their life for that of someone who is innocent or worthy. Even though our military give their lives for our nation, it is still a rarity. This is Paul's point. Even when it comes to those who are innocent and worthy, we still cherish our lives to the point where we will see them die then for ourselves to die. There is nothing wrong to cherish our lives, but it reinforces Paul's point.

God, on the other hand, sacrificed His Son on our behalf. We were (are) ungodly—guilty and not worthy—yet God put His Son in our place at the cross, the place where He poured out His punishment for the sin of the ungodly on His Son. Paul is saying don't pat yourself on the back—as humans our greatest expression of love comes no where near to that of God's act of love. This was unfair and uncomfortable for God.

Going back to verse 6, God had planned this for a very long time. Throughout years of rebellion and hating Him, God still sacrificed His Son on our behalf, when we did nothing to deserve it. Nothing would change His mind. We could have rebelled further, yet it was not going to change His mind. We could have hated Him more, yet it was not going to change His mind.

⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

With Christ's substitutionary death and faith (5:1), we are justified or declared righteous. We are free from the punishment of our sin. We are no longer condemned. In spite of our sin and our sinful nature, God declares us righteous. God imputes or attributes Christ's righteousness on the believing sinner, which pardons the believer from being punished for his sin. We are saved from the wrath God has stored up for those who hate Him (1:18).

Many of you are still convinced that we, as believers, live this way—in fear of God's wrath. I've heard this all the time as a pastor: "God must be punishing me because I have cancer." "I lost my job, what did I do for God to do this to me?" "My marriage is falling apart why is God angry with me?" With this mindset, there's a tendency to blame God for the things that happen to us because He is angry with us. Whether we admit it or not, this is the default that many Christians go to when bad things happen to them. I didn't obey one of these laws, so God is punishing me. These are things that draw our attention away from sin and the brokenness of the world caused by sin. Then our attention is defaulted to play the blame game with God.

This does not mean that as Christians we will not experience suffering, hurt, and pain.⁴ Nor does this mean that there are physical/emotional consequences to our sins. But to think that God is somehow angry with us is unbiblical. It is like a paralyzing fear of God. Paul, who unprecedentedly suffered more than any other apostle, wrote that God is rich in mercy and gives us mercy in times of distress. God has compassion on His children—those who have been saved. Our punishment for our sin was placed on Jesus at the cross. As believers we live under God's mercy, not under condemnation or His wrath.

¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Paul adds that we were reconciled to God by the substitutionary death of Christ. So not only are we justified by Christ's death but we are also reconciled back to God. Paul describes us as the enemies of God. Humanity, who is ungodly, actively opposed and was hostile to God. During the time that Paul wrote this, the Greek word for

⁴ See Job; John 9:1-7; Romans 5:3; Philippians 3:8; and 1 Thessalonians 3:4.

reconciled literally meant, “being made friends again.”

Sin caused our relationship with God to be broken and it caused us to become broken. Our relationship with God needed to be fixed and we needed to be fixed. None of us were pursuing God, which is why we were actively opposed and hostile to God. All of us try to minimize our sin and maximize our worth, which is actively opposing God’s “system” of salvation. We try to work our way to heaven, which is actively opposing God. So there needs to be restoration between God and us.

We are sinners who can do nothing to earn salvation. Even on our best day we fall short of God’s standard of perfection. We are dead to sin and unable to initiate life. Dead people cannot initiate life. We desperately need God to restore us back to Himself. Without restoration there is no life in Christ.

Reconciliation starts with God. The purpose of reconciliation is for God to change the relationship of hostility into a relationship of peace. Reconciling to God involves Him breaking down our hostility and convincing us of the enormity of our sin and the consequences of our sin. The enormity of our sin is that we are powerless to do anything to save ourselves from God’s wrath.

Once we are convinced of the enormity of our sin and consequences of our sin, we will rejoice and worship God for restoring us back to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. Until then, it will really be hard for you to understand the cross. We will worship Christ for His sacrificial and substitutionary death.

CONCLUSION

Imagine the impact of never admitting our identity as “sinners”. Imagine the annoying guilt constantly on your mind. Imagine the shame never going away. Imagine a life with broken relationships, a hunger for something more constant, and an unquenched thirst for settling things right.

God’s “system” of salvation—the substitutionary death of Christ—is unfair and uncomfortable but it is true. When it comes to salvation everyone is:

- Welcome. Regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, or nationality.
- Broken. Everyone “gets in” the same way. It is only by Christ’s substitutionary death.
- Ungodly. Everyone can meet the requirement—they are sinners.

It is important for us not to allow the fuzziness and emotional problematic to cause us to see God’s system of salvation as untrue. No matter how unfair or uncomfortable the Gospel seems it doesn’t change the fact that it is true.