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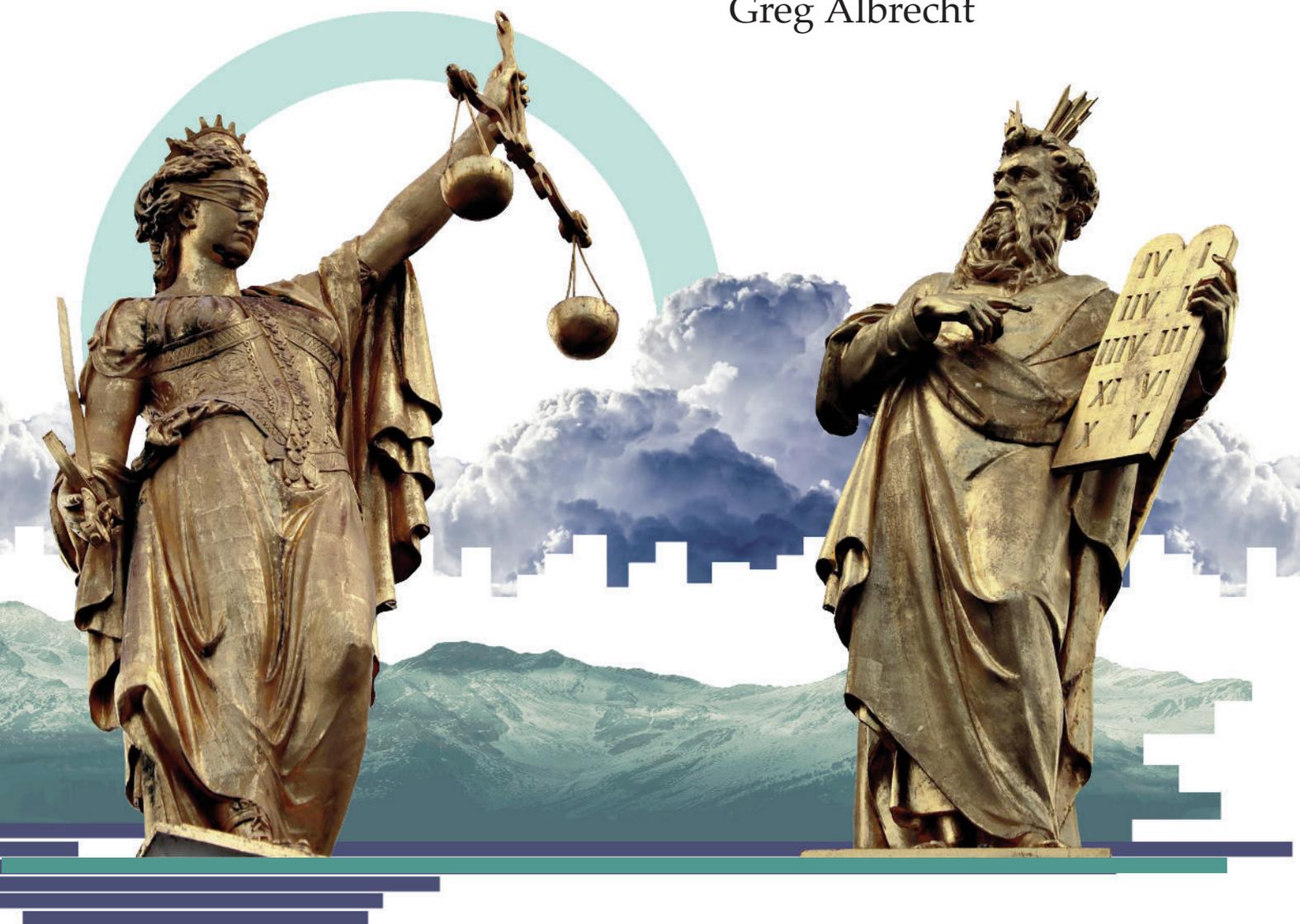
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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



God Is *Not Fair!*

Greg Albrecht



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God Is Not Fair

Greg Albrecht

The equality and fair-play Lady Justice supposedly oversees is illustrated by scales or a set of balances she holds in one hand and a sword in the other. The scales, or balances, portray unbiased equity, and the sword in her other hand a stark reminder of the deserved and earned penalty to be paid for those who fall short of the standards of law.

Originally, and in many cases still today, such representations of equity and justice did not include a blindfolded Lady Justice. A blindfolded Lady Justice came to be known as fearlessly objective and impartial, unable to be moved by prejudice.

triumphs (as we define virtue) we are satisfied—it's a happy ending and everyone lives happily ever after.

We see rich people with far more than they “need” (as we determine) and feel that equality would redistribute their wealth to all. Many believe God to be like Lady Justice. He is absolutely impartial—he does not have favorites. In Acts 10:34 Peter says, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.”

That assertion by Peter does not level the playing field to our satisfaction, does it? It is easy to become disenchanted or angry with God because it seems like he hasn't been fair—many hold a grudge against



Ideally, Lady Justice is not swayed by anything other than the weight of evidence in the balances she is holding—if the good and positive outweigh the bad then she gives a favorable outcome to the situation or the person seeking justice.

The human soul yearns for even-handed impartiality. But life is not fair, is it? As the old country song goes, some people get the gold mine while others get the shaft. When we see a movie or television show, we want to see wrong righted. We love to see the good guy win out in the end and the bad guy get what's coming to him/her. When virtue

God because, given all they have experienced in life, they don't feel he has been fair to or with them. Some say that they are mad at God because, in spite of everything they have done for him (!?), he hasn't given them what they feel they deserve. Is that what we want—really? Do we want God to give us what we deserve?

In Acts 10:34, when Peter says that “God does not show favoritism” he was concluding that God, contrary to his previous beliefs, did not restrict the gospel to the Jews the way the old covenant did. Peter determined that skin color, gender,

nationality, culture or religion was not significant in God's eyes.

God does love us all equally—he does not favor anyone more than another. He is absolutely impartial. However, the flip side of the discussion is that God is absolutely biased and relentlessly partial!

GOD IS BOTH PARTIAL AND IMPARTIAL

God is partial to his Son. Galatians 3:26-28 says that everyone (Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slaves) who receives Jesus, God the Son, is a child of God and clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ.

God is partial. He has no favorites, neither does he have "unfavorites." God has torn the blindfold from the eyes of Lady Justice. God has broken down the barrier of partiality based on performance—which is why the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news.

We might call this dimension of God's love the incongruity of God's grace. Were God, his love, mercy and grace, congruous then he would conform to our notions and perceptions of fair play and justice. But Jesus is God's gift to us, the unworthy. We can never in a gazillion lifetimes earn the gift of Jesus Christ. Without white-washing or minimizing our failures, our heavenly Father is always on our side, always partial to us and always forgiving.

If our ultimate and eternal goal is to receive human justice, every time that Lady Justice weighs our deeds, our bad deeds outweigh our good. Every time! If that is the justice we wish, we are in for a world of hurt.

We can never compensate, through the good we might produce, for the spiritual penalties we incur through our shortcomings and our failures. In Christ, God tears off the blindfold—he isn't blind when he looks at you and me. He sees exactly who we are, and who we are not. He knows all we have done and all we have failed to do. He gives us his all, out of his love, not because we have earned or deserve it.

Those great theologians, the Beatles, ask in one of their songs, "Listen, do you want to know a secret?" Let me tell you a secret—one that seems to be carefully kept by Christ-less religion. The secret is that God is head-over-heels in love with you! That's the mystery—the secret—of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps God is somewhat like

Whether it is draped in the clothing of Christendom or some other world religion, instead of being a culture of compassion, Christ-less religion is a culture of vengeance because it is based on law justice rather than love justice.

the mother of a poor family who is cooking a stew for her family. She empties her cupboards—everything in her pantry goes into the stew. As she prepares the stew she knows it will not be enough for the entire family to have equal portions, so when it comes time to serve her hungry family she announces she isn't hungry. God is absolutely partial to all his children.

HUMAN LAW-JUSTICE VS. GOD'S LOVE-JUSTICE

When it comes to justice, God chooses to see only what Jesus

has done. Jesus is God's partial and biased and prejudiced "Justice"! Because you are, by the grace of God, in and through Jesus Christ, a child of God YOU are God's favorite—YOU are his beloved child. YOU are united in and with Christ and therefore God sees YOU as his only son. God is partial to you.

Of course, the reality is *you* are not his only child. Humanly we desire to own God and restrict his mercy and grace to ourselves, and to our religion and family and nation and tribe and culture and race. The gospel says otherwise. The gospel of Jesus Christ says that all who embrace the grace of God and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are just as highly esteemed and favored as Jesus himself is.

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) Jesus describes workers lined up at

the end of a hard day in the vineyard, waiting to receive their pay. The last are first (those who have worked "less") and the first (those who have worked longer and harder) are last to receive their pay, by God's design.

When "the first" see that others receive the same pay as they thought they would, they presume that they, because of their hard work, would be given more. When they receive the same "pay" (the grace of God) they grumble and gripe, whereupon the landowner asks, "What's it to you?" That is,

according to Matthew, he says, “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (Matthew 20:15).

Sadly, many within Christendom see “God’s justice” through the prism of human experience and limitations. They attribute human definitions and desires to God. God’s justice conforms, as they perceive it, to their own sense and definition of justice.

Divine love-justice is a culture of compassion. God always hopes for the best for us—he forgives, he loves without condition. He loves us though we don’t deserve it. He gives us what we can never deserve.

Whether it is draped in the clothing of Christendom or some other world religion, instead of being a culture of compassion, **Christ-less religion is a culture of vengeance** because it is based on law-justice rather than love-justice.

- Christ-less religion wants people who haven’t measured up to burn in hell for all eternity.
- Christ-less religion longs to see people get what’s coming to them.
- Christ-less religion tends toward retaliation and retribution while Christ-centered faith is all about divine reconciliation and restoration.
- Christ-less religion places the focus on the need for humans to

be unfair to itself, at least as judged by human standards, so that another might gain, profit or enjoy. Divine love-justice can often appear, to the human mind and eye, according to human standards of justice, to be unfair, unpredictable, arbitrary and capricious. God’s grace is incongruous, failing to conform to our sense of justice. Divine love-justice does not meet our human standards of fair play!

With human law-justice, the standard of justice is a behavior as measured and regulated by a law.

With divine love-justice, the standard of justice is God’s own nature, for there is no law that God follows—he is the law and his law is love.



Divine love-justice is a culture of compassion. God always hopes for the best for us—he forgives, he loves without condition.

Human law-justice is centered on people getting what they deserve as defined by the law. The idea of human justice, or social justice as many people call it today, is the leveling of all privilege and advantages so that every individual has the same opportunity and same “fair shake.”

reimburse and repay, to compensate and remunerate for damages inflicted whereas the grace of God we find in Christ-centered faith is all about forgiveness—writing off the debt—as Jesus said on his cross, “It is done,” once and for all.

Divine love-justice prefers to

God’s love-justice is his absolute faithfulness to his love and grace. God is just when he chooses to love us in spite of our behavior, because for God love is always far more just than the law and the penalties incurred by failing to observe the law. God does not give us what we are due—that is perfectly in keeping with his justice because his justice is love! □

Greg Albrecht is the Director of Plain Truth Ministries.



Irene Frances

My Desire to Be Like Jesus

RECENTLY as I thought about my desire to live an authentic Christian life, the words of an old hymn came to mind. Lillian Plankenhorn based her 1946 song, *My Desire*, on the words of Jesus: “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24, *KJV*). My desire has always been to be like Jesus and to live for him. Sadly, the church got in the way and I got lost in religion, so far removed from the simplicity of following Jesus and experiencing the wonder of who he is.

For decades I believed that the church had all the answers, that I could learn to be a follower of Christ simply by doing what was preached from the pulpit: repent of my sins, have a daily “quiet time”, pray and read the Bible, tithe, be totally committed to, and fully involved in the local church, attend church twice on Sundays as well as the weekly prayer meeting, obey the church leaders unquestioningly—regardless of what they said or did, be a good, submissive wife and honor my husband as the head of the home, deny myself, and love all people regardless of how they treated me. Even as I write, I am shocked at how much my life was consumed by the church. There was so little room for me as a person, a wife or mother. And there was no room for Jesus, the one I had been so attracted to when I first became aware of how much God loved me.

My life fell apart when memories of an abusive childhood erupted into consciousness. My understanding of God, faulty as I now know it to have been, disintegrated when my husband, a

supposed Christian who had been very much involved in the church, told me he would not be with me on what would be a lengthy journey to healing and wholeness. Shattered beyond comprehension, completely bruised and broken, I left the church and concentrated on the hell of healing, a story all of its own. I gathered up the crumbs of my faith and let the words of Jesus become a healing balm as I trod that long and lonely path.

During those dreadful years I clung to God as a drowning woman to a lifebuoy. I began to read the Gospels again, picturing myself with Jesus as he touched the lepers, healed the sick, brought sight to the blind, forgave the sinners, fed the multitudes and taught the crowds about how to live for him and experience his love, joy and peace. Through the richness of my developing relationship with him I grew in my walk with God in ways I had not known when I went to church.

Life was not easy and there were many tough times that would repeatedly throw me into confusion, grief and heartache. However, despite all I have been through, I have learned so much about the wonder of our awesome God and what it means to live for him. The words of that old hymn capture my heart's desire:

*My desire, to be like Jesus;
My desire to be like Him.
His Spirit fill me, His love o'erwhelm me;
In deed and word to be like Him. □*

Irene Frances blogs about “Authentic Christian Living” from her home in the Outback of Australia.

“God’s Creatures Great and Small”

Richard Rohr

Who could ever express the deep affection Francis of Assisi bore for all things that belong to God? Or tell of the sweet tenderness he enjoyed while contemplating in creatures the wisdom, power and goodness of the Creator?

—Thomas of Celano

Francis of Assisi is known for his love for animals, but too often the stories become overly romanticized or even magical in their thinking. The truth of Francis’ respect for animals is far more profound than mere “birdbath Franciscanism” lets on. Everything was a mirror for Francis. What he saw in the natural world, in the sky, in animals, and even plants was a reflection of God’s glory. His first biographer, Thomas of Celano, writes about how Francis was constantly praising creatures for giving God glory just by their very existence. They could simply be and be themselves. Eventually, nature mirrored back the same message to Francis himself: he could just be and be himself in all of his freedom and joy and poverty.

British biologist Rupert Sheldrake invites us to a contemplative exercise in which we share a “mirroring” experience with the animal world so that we might have a glimpse of the reality that Francis lived throughout his life.

BE PRESENT WITH AN ANIMAL

If a cat is purring while you stroke it, be completely present to the stroking and the purring—rather than stroking distractedly while having a conversation or watching TV. The cat is present; become present with it.

Or listen to a bird singing. I live in England, and my favorite birdsong is that of blackbirds singing in the spring and early summer. I listen to their songs, which change every time they sing. Often I hear another blackbird respond: they interact with each other and reply to each other’s tunes and variations. They are present to each other. We can be present through listening. Wherever you live, you will be able to find birds singing. . . .

GET TO KNOW ANOTHER SPECIES

If you keep a cat, dog, horse, parrot, budgie, rabbit, hamster, ferret, lizard, goldfish, stick insect or another kind of animal, you are already getting to know another species. If you have, or have had, more than one cat, dog, horse, or other animal, you will also know that each animal is different. Each expresses its unique individuality within the context of its species’ instincts.

If you do not have a companion animal, or even if you do, you can get to know a wild species by observing individuals that live near you—like birds in your garden or in a nearby park—watching and listening to them, perhaps feeding them, relating to them throughout the year.

The better you know your chosen kind of animal, the more you will appreciate its way of being, its form of life. You will feel connected to a world much wider than your human concerns, and with which you share a common source. □

Adapted from Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation. Used by permission.





BRAD JERSAK

Was Jesus a racist?

QUESTION: Why was Jesus so rude to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28? He seems to be downright racist when he numbers her among “the dogs.”

RESPONSE: To review the story briefly, Jesus has led his disciples to the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. There, they encounter a Canaanite woman pleading for help, as her daughter is suffering from demonization. The disciples want to shoo her away and even Jesus seems to object initially, but after some banter, he congratulates her great faith and heals her daughter.

The trigger statement that offends readers is when he says, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” The children, in this case, are “lost sheep of Israel.” Jesus makes it sound like his mission is for Jews only and that they alone are God’s children. We’re reminded of the ancient animosity towards Canaanites, way back to Joshua’s time.

Some commentators try to downplay the harshness of Jesus’ language, insisting that he’s actually just using the term for ‘puppies’ and that it wouldn’t have sounded as rude in Aramaic.

Others believe that Jesus was in fact rude and bore the same xenophobic assumptions of any Jew, and that the woman was both right and successful in correcting him.

I personally don’t see it that way. In an essay written by Dave McFadden, he points out some important points that I propose are the keys to reading this story rightly.

First, we know that even before this incident, Jesus’ vision for ministry was not restricted to Jewish followers. Great crowds followed him from the Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon, as well as Decapolis and beyond the Jordan (Matthew 12:24-25, Mark 3:8). He had already healed a centurion’s son in Matthew 8 and declared that “many will

come from the east and west” to the banquet of the kingdom of heaven (11-12).

Further, within the story, McFadden says, “There is a clear progression in the pericope, starting from a racial standoff and concluding in a granting of the woman’s request and a warm commendation of her “great faith” by Jesus.”

But is the progression we see happening in Jesus? Kenneth Bailey, in *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, suggests, rather, that he was “voicing and thereby exposing, deeply held prejudices in the minds of his disciples.” Jesus progresses “through the prejudices in the minds of his disciples” and obliterates them with a miraculous display of God’s grace for this foreign woman.

Meanwhile, the woman herself seems unoffended and progresses from initial pleading to emboldened faith. Jesus knew how to apply resistance that would not shut her down or discourage her resolve. Instead, as elsewhere, he geniously draws the “great faith” from the wellspring of her motherly love. And this is in contrast to the “little faith” of his Jewish entourage (Matthew 8:26, 14:31, 16:8).

So, we ask again: Was Jesus rude? Was he a misogynist (woman-hater)? Was he a racist? Not even a little bit. He was, however, continually working among disciples and opponents alike, drawing them out of their own ignorance into new ways of seeing those who did not look, speak or worship like them. He continually challenges them to see their value, their hearts and the surprising authenticity of their faith.

I wonder, as a Jesus-follower, how this story might expose my own prejudices and remind me that the bread of Christ is available for all. Who are the Canaanites in my world? Will I be too narrow-minded and offended to welcome them? Or will I make space at Jesus’ table for them, too?

Lord, open my eyes to see others as you do. □

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