

358 'It's not fair!' ... 'No, life's not fair'

Any parent will recognise this conversational extract. And it may even have occasionally reached the stage of, 'I hate you!' The parent loves the child, the child loves the parent, really, but some situations are beyond the child's understanding. Indeed, some situations are beyond the parent's understanding. Indeed, some situations simply do not have any understandability – and that hurts. 'Why? Why? Why?!' we cry (echoing the Psalmist).

Sometimes we give the child a simplistic explanation, and maybe sometimes, in our efforts to deflect the child's anger and to give ourselves an easier life, we may even lie to them. But then the child's knowledge grows, and it backfires. It's not easy being a loving parent.

Look in the mirror, folks, and think what it must be like for God!

Like any good and loving parent, God wants to guide us, to increase our maturity, to help us see the destructiveness of some of our behaviours. But it's difficult. 'It's not fair!' is a powerful driver.

Humankind's knowledge certainly is increasing, but what about our behaviour? What about how we treat each other?

Now to get back to one underlying question of my writing journey: how the hell – and I use that word advisedly – could followers of the way of Jesus ever justify using violence to sort out the world's problems? What went so badly wrong, when and why?

If there's one thing I've learnt, it's that God's heart is for restoration – totally and utterly. It's us humans who insist that evil must be punished; otherwise, 'It's not fair!' So, God wants restoration; we want punishment.

But God's restoration involves grace – people **are** forgiven, people are **not** punished as they (we) deserve, and frankly that is **not** fair – ask the prodigal's brother!

OK, the Bible does say that God 'punishes wrongdoing', but that is how **we** see it. As humanity matures over the centuries and, especially, as God demonstrates the 'better way' of the cross, we are hopefully (with many relapses along the way) able to work towards restoration of humans and of the world. But to do so, we have to accept a degree of unfairness.

In stages, over the second millennium, we have 'explained' God's way, so that we get our cake (evil must be punished) and eat it (we don't get punished).

What I'm beginning to see is that by insisting that everything has to be explained, by trying to explain our beliefs to outsiders, we've worked out a 'fair' version of the gospel where evil **is** punished – and we've illustrated that punishment in our art.

We're not willing to trust God and accept that the mystery of the cross is beyond our understanding; we can't 'work out' or 'explain' God. Trust God, accept forgiveness, accept that only God knows what is 'fair'.

The child**ish** response is a religion focused around punishment; the child**like** response is to trust that God knows best, we can't explain everything, and concentrate on restoration.

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