

IS LIFE FAIR?

Most of us have watched baseball games or basketball games and we know a little about the rules of what is allowed and what isn't. If a baseball player scores a run by running from first base directly to third base and then to the plate without passing second and that run is allowed, then we all know it is just "not fair." I guess we have a well developed sense of what is *fair* and what *isn't fair* and mostly it is based on the premise "if you break the rules, then you should not be allowed to succeed and if you keep the rules, then you should enjoy some measure of success." We say things are unfair, when a "rule breaker" wins and the "rule keeper" loses. It really doesn't matter if the game is baseball, football, basketball, twiddle-winks or the game of life: the same sense of what defines "fairness" exists.

In the various sports, there are rule books and there are referees who know the rules. In fact, the serious players of the game also know the rules. Professional players would be laughed out of their profession if they did not know the rules. Every sport has a set of rules. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a rule book for the "game of life"? In that rule book, we could learn how to score points, what counts and what does not. We would find what plays are allowed and what are not. How much would you pay for such a rule book? There's good news --there is such a book and, in fact, the title of the book is "Good News" or the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are other false rule books around that people try to play by. I saw one such false rule on the back of a fancy pickup truck. The bumper sticker read: "In the game of life, the one who wins is the one with the most toys when the game is over." Not so! I guarantee that when the game is over, no one in their right mind is going to care about worldly possessions of any kind. Jesus asked the question: "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and then lose his soul?" We have people claiming we can gain points in the game of life (profit in the words of Jesus) by getting a good education. Can you imagine a person just finishing up with his college education and running over to God at the scorer's table to check out how many points he got for that. The expectation might be that such an accomplishment might be worth a hundred points. If we could check the score with God, we might be surprised to

find that we received zero points for all that work. If we cheated our way through, we might find we had a negative score. We might have the biggest house in town and think surely that is worth some points in the game of life only to find out that too rates a big zero.

Our lesson asks the question "Is life fair?" We can answer only from the perspective of knowing the rules and how points are scored. Since God is Judge and Referee, then I've got to believe life is fair in God's rule book and His is the only book that counts. The Psalmist who penned the 37th Psalm recognized this truth.

PSALM 37:1-2 Fretting and anxiety has probably killed more people than cigarettes and automobiles, and atomic bombs all together. We get so worked up about things that are not "fair" in our perspective. The guy who cheats in business and never goes to church, curses like a sailor and lie every breath seems to never get sick, has a big fine house and a fancy car. On the other hand, someone else is totally honest, supports the church, and is true to his word may be just getting by and can barely afford to pay rent and has to walk every where he goes. We look at that contrast and think, "It's just not fair." How can we judge that it is not fair? The scores have not been posted. Godly advice is for us to "not worry about it" and certainly don't think about swapping places with those who sin so you might participate in what appears to be prosperity. The truth is that it will not be long before they will come to an end and be cut off. Such appearances of prosperity are not permanent but there is permanence for those who put their trust in God.

PSALM 37:3-4 The message of the Bible is consistent throughout and really fairly simple to understand, but it can be very difficult to put into practice. The idea of trusting in God for everything is very difficult for us to do. We want to be in control. We try to hold on to what we can see and, in effect, we put our trust in ourselves and the material possessions we have. It seems that the more we have the less we trust God and the more we put our confidence in what we have. Even those who do not have much can look at the ungodly and see them gaining material things and they, too, can end up putting their trust in "things" and not in God. On the other hand, a person who

really trusts God and is not relying on status, fame, or wealth is not going to be trying to increase these things regardless of whom they hurt. If our trust is truly in God, then we are less likely to do bad things to others. Why should I steal if I have no confidence in money or wealth to "save" me. Why should I criticize another to tear him down relative to where I am if status has no value to me. If we can but put our confidence in God, there will be no driving force for our doing "bad" things. In addition to this, if we know God's commands, then we will be about doing what is good. Not only will we avoid the bad but we will also emphasize the good. As we live out our days on the earth in such trust of God, then He has promised to nurture us. This nurture will be both physical and spiritual--we shall be fed!

There is a progression here in these several verses. The first step is "stop worrying", the second is to "trust God", and the next is to "delight in God". It is possible (and maybe quite common) for people to obey God and resent doing it. There are people who feel that "being a Christian" restricts them from having fun in life. Real trust will be rewarded by joy and a change of attitude from a realization that what God wants for us is really best for us. When we realize we are the children of God and we are heirs of the Kingdom of God, then we can have a sense of ownership in what is doing in the world and, more specifically, in our lives. In another Psalm, David observes, "At Thy right hand, there are pleasures for evermore." As we see what God does is right and good, then we are transformed in our thinking as to what we want to see happen. Our values in life change and our desires are altered. We start agreeing with God as to what is important and then we can see God's will and our will being the same. He has no problem giving us the desires of our heart.

PSALM 37:5-6 The next step [after we stop fretting, after we trust, and after we delight] is to commit what we do to God. We are not to take the attitude "if I am trusting in God, then I will just sit here and do nothing." We should be active and doing. Someone once said it difficult to steer a ship that is not moving. The key is for us to dedicate whatever we do to God for Him to use so His purposes can be accomplished. We simply trust Him to make it happen. So often the world will think something is wrong with us if we are not trying to "score points" according to the world system. Given enough time, the wisdom of doing things God's way will be shown to be right. Take,

for example, the so-called sexual revolution. The world was saying it was OK to do whatever you wanted to and with anyone if both were in agreement. Then along came AIDS and the idea of faithfulness in marriage started looking as if it were the smartest choice around.

PSALM 37:7 After we commit our ways to God, then the next step in the progression is to "rest" in the Lord. When we rest in the Lord we cease our own labors and striving and we wait for God to initiate action. As an example of resting in the Lord, Philip was told by God to go down to Gaza. You know the story, Philip met the Ethiopian and led him to Jesus. Isaiah reminds us to wait upon God: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. If we are waiting upon God, then we certainly have no room in our lives to worry about what someone else is doing or getting away with.

PSALM 37:8-9 We may get caught up in worrying about others who break the rules and seem to get ahead. It can make us angry and we may even be lead to take matter into our own hands to "correct" the situation. That's not our job. God knows what is happening and He will take care of those kinds of things. We need to be preparing to rule the earth. We need to be developing Christ-like character so we are able to rule with Him. One day, as God's children, we shall inherit the earth.

PSALM 37:10-11 One day God will correct the seeming injustice. The actual score card will be shown and we will know who the real winners are. The wicked are not going to be included in God's blessing--there will not be a place for the wicked. Nearly everyone is talking about the possibility of peace with all the disarmament talks and the seeming demise of communism. However, there will be something else that will withhold peace as long as there are ungodly people around. It is only when the redeemed are the inhabitants and they are indwelt by the Prince of Peace that the world will ever know real peace. When that happens, it shall be something we can revel in and enjoy. In the game of life, are we keeping score with the official rules or are we like the guy who thinks that the one with the most toys wins. When the final whistle blows and the game is over, we don't need any surprises as to our eligibility to play. If we have not accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives, then we are not even eligible. It's

not too late to do what is right.