

# **Praise God for Justice and Righteousness**

Psalm 9

October 10, 2021

Asking God for justice is a delicate business. Do we ourselves want to be judged? Or is it that we want God's justice only for others, perhaps certain others? Also at issue, will God see things the way we do? Might what we see as "justice" in God's eyes seem foolish? Cindy adds: Where we can run into trouble is, we ask God for fairness, justice or equity for the world. But when we really get it, we say, "What?? Why aren't you being good to us – we want you to answer our prayers, heal us, give us prosperity, etc." These kinds of issues make this a hard lesson. As someone who is a sinner, who falls short of what God intends in various ways, I will try to address this material with some humility. How else? After all, we all must stand before God someday, and trust that, as we say each week in church, "In Jesus Christ we are forgiven." So, here is the scripture selection Psalm 9:

## **Psalm 9**

### **God's Power and Justice**

**To the leader: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.**

**<sup>1</sup> I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;**

**I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.**

**<sup>2</sup> I will be glad and exult in you;**

**I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.**

**<sup>3</sup> When my enemies turned back,**

**they stumbled and perished before you.**

**<sup>4</sup> For you have maintained my just cause;**

**you have sat on the throne giving righteous judgment.**

**<sup>5</sup> You have rebuked the nations, you have destroyed the wicked;**

**you have blotted out their name forever and ever.**

**<sup>6</sup> The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins;**

**their cities you have rooted out;**

**the very memory of them has perished.**

**<sup>7</sup> But the Lord sits enthroned forever,**

**he has established his throne for judgment.**

**<sup>8</sup> He judges the world with righteousness;**

**he judges the peoples with equity.**

**<sup>9</sup> The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,**

**a stronghold in times of trouble.**

- 10 And those who know your name put their trust in you,  
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.**
- 11 Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion.  
Declare his deeds among the peoples.**
- 12 For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.**
- 13 Be gracious to me, O Lord.  
See what I suffer from those who hate me;  
you are the one who lifts me up from the gates of death,**
- 14 so that I may recount all your praises,  
and, in the gates of daughter Zion,  
rejoice in your deliverance.**
- 15 The nations have sunk in the pit that they made;  
in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught.**
- 16 The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment;  
the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. *Higgaion. Selah***
- 17 The wicked shall depart to Sheol,  
all the nations that forget God.**
- 18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten,  
nor the hope of the poor perish forever.**
- 19 Rise up, O Lord! Do not let mortals prevail;  
let the nations be judged before you.**
- 20 Put them in fear, O Lord;  
let the nations know that they are only human. *Selah***

Psalm 9 may have been intended to be part of a single psalm with Psalm 10. There are plausible arguments either way. “Psalm 9 is hymnal in character, Psalm 10 is a lament.” (William R. Taylor, *Interpreter’s Bible*, 1955 v. 4, exegesis, p. 54.) Sometimes in Psalm 9 the attention is on the national level, for example verses 5-6, and sometimes on the personal level, as in verses 13-14. It switches back and forth. Of course, a lack of justice on the national level, say, oppression by a foreign invader or similar, will cause personal level suffering as well. So, weaving both together in one psalm is not unreasonable, especially if the author is in fact David, the king who is directly concerned about both. (The ascription says “A Psalm of David,” though there is some reason to suppose that it was written later but from David’s point of view.) The point is that the Psalmist asks God for relief, and expects to receive justice based on the LORD’s “wonderful deeds” mentioned in the praise given God in verse 1.

Where I think we can potentially run into trouble is that the meanings of words change over time, especially words that may take on political meanings. Those putting forth political statements often change the meanings of words to suit the ideas that are being put forward. If you look at the “verse to remember” (cited in our lesson book) we find one of those words: “equity.”

**<sup>8</sup>He judges the world with righteousness;  
he judges the peoples with equity.**

So what does this word “equity” mean? Interestingly, it is absent from the 5 volume *Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary* that I use as a reference. Perhaps in 1950 the definition was considered so obvious that it needed no explanation. So, here I borrow some definitions of the Hebrew perspective found from a computer search:

“Equity is an important part of biblical justice. However, it's not given an exact definition in the Bible. The main Hebrew word for equity (mê·šā·rîm) **conveys ideas like uprightness, straightness, levelness, fairness, truth, order, and integrity.**” (Google without attribution)

... In *Isaiah 59:14*, the word equity relates to judgment, justice, and truth. The fact that the word equity occurs only ten times in scripture links it indirectly with the Ten Commandments. Within those ten occurrences, the word basically involves judging with equality based upon a just standard. Additionally, *Judges 1:7* and *2 Chronicles 6:23* reveal that the related word requite means to get even or to return evenly. The Lord will prove in the future that this is the standard by which He judges (*Psalms 98:9*) From <<http://www.learnthebible.org/what-is-equity-isaiah-5914.html>>

Here’s a modern definition:

What's the difference between equality and equity?

Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach **an equal** outcome. Nov 5, 2020 (Also from Google without text attribution)

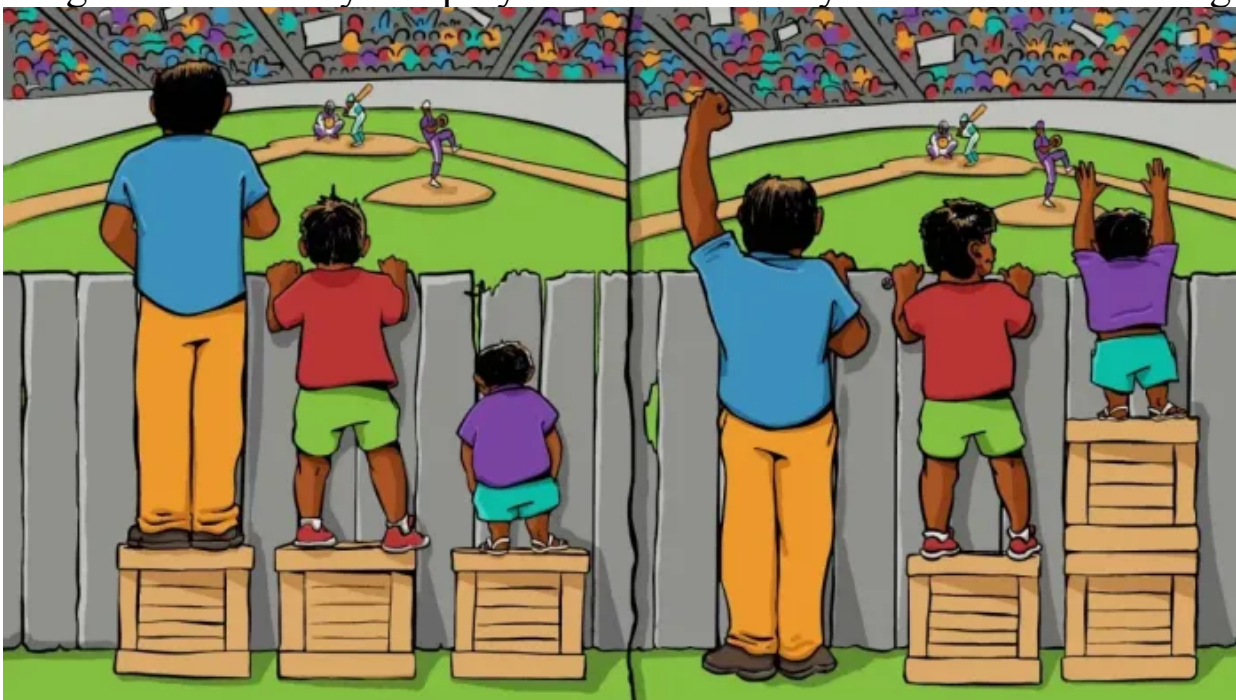


Notice in that last statement the appearance of the word “outcome.” So, here’s the issue: In modern political discourse, “equity” and “equality” are evaluated in terms of outcomes, like personal wealth, educational attainment, and political power. These are often assessed on a class basis rather than an individual basis. I’m borrowing here some material from an article “What Does the Bible Say About Equity vs. Equality,” December 10, 2020 by [neal.hardin1@gmail.com](mailto:neal.hardin1@gmail.com) posted at < <https://www.nealhardin.com/what-does-the-bible-say-about-equity-vs-equality/>>

“On November 1, Kamala Harris posted this [video](#) on Twitter discussing the difference between equity and equality. [I’m skipping the video. JBG] The text of the ad reads as follows:

“So there’s a big difference between equality and equity. Equality suggests, ‘Oh, everyone should get the same amount.’ The problem with that is that not everybody’s starting out from the same place. So if we’re all getting the same amount, but you started out back there and I started out over here, we could get the same amount, but you’re still going to be that far back behind me. It’s about giving people the resources and the support they need, so that everyone can be on equal footing and then compete on equal footing. Equitable treatment means we all end up at the same place.”

.....  
“You may also be familiar with this image depicting the commonly held view of equality (left) vs. equity (right).” [Cindy: Bad moral lesson! Didn’t pay to watch the game! Or – Maybe equity demands that they be admitted free and given seats!]



[Interaction](#)

“While these definitions and illustrations are helpful to an extent, they are often vague or carry with them assumptions that go unchallenged.”

Neal Hardin concludes his lengthy essay with:

“Based on the principles established in Scripture, pure equality of outcome is impossible and not how God intended this world to be. Thus, we should reject Harris’s assertion that we should “all end up at the same place.” God created us with diversity and uniqueness that would lead to different outcomes. Nevertheless, many of the different outcomes and inequities that we do see are the result of sin. Where we are able, Christians must strive towards combating sin and injustice and the inequity which often results. Simultaneously, even though we live in a fallen world and cannot fix all the ills of society, we are called towards generosity in meeting people’s needs, not because we desire equal outcomes but because we love our neighbor. How that will look like on both an individual and societal level can be debated, but Christians must seek the wisdom of God as we strive towards these goals (James 1:5).”

The world as it is includes many things which are inequitable. Yes, some of those things can be traced to sinfulness on an individual or societal level. But some can’t. People die of accidents, even things like lightning strikes, that, if they have to be blamed on someone, must be blamed on God. If equality of outcomes is our standard for justice, we will always be disappointed. We may be led to a conclusion that, if there is a God, He is not just or equitable. Jesus said: “*He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*” – *Matthew 5:45 NKJV* Is that fair? Is God wrong to do that? You see, the modern perspectives would have us judging God, rather than admit that God will judge us. It tries to make us gods, and thus necessarily dismisses any belief in a supernatural god. That’s not Biblical! We do not want to go that way!

One of the principles of justice I recall learning in school was that justice (as administered by the government) was supposed to be “blind.” That is, there should be no favoritism toward particular individuals. Throughout history, anything less would be to favor the rich and powerful – those in position to reward corrupt judgments. It seems like modern theorists would set aside that concern to let “justice” peek, in order to favor certain classes or individuals. That is dangerous. We can trust God to render fair and equitable judgments. Can we really trust human beings and human institutions to do so? History suggests not.

In Jesus's time, Jewish thought was that if one followed the Law, you would be right with God. The Law included provisions for the poor, the orphans, and widows. Jesus showed us that God expects us to go beyond the Law. In his parable of the Judgment, the "sheep and the goats," (Matthew 25:31 ff.) we are told how we would be judged. In light of that, how can we do other than confess our sins and throw ourselves down at Jesus's feet, asking for forgiveness in His name?

Jesus in his teaching recognized that inequalities exist. In one parable three servants received unequal allocations of talents to care for (Matt. 25: 14-30). But when Jesus's time with his disciples grew short, at the Last Supper, the command he gave was not, "Go out and make things equal." It was, "Love one another." If Jesus's disciples would love one another, and show that love from God to others as well, they will do what love requires, and help those who need help. They will be messengers of God's love and grace to others. Our purpose in life is not to achieve equal outcomes, but to show God's love. We need to do so in humility, and while thanking God for his good creation, and for the wonders of His grace.

Prayer from lesson book: *Lord, help us to pray truly for forgiveness and for relief from injustice. Let us be so filled with your Spirit that we are glad to be judged with equity, so that all the world would be fair. Amen.*

Postscript: This was a difficult lesson to deal with, since it brings up issues that are tearing at the fabric of our society today. People disagree, and have difficulty even expressing disagreement because they use words differently, and start with vastly different assumptions about what is right and just. For example, consider the last phrase of the prayer above, "*so that all the world would be fair.*" By whose standard is "fairness" judged? The modern focus on "outcomes," which seems to come out of modern management science but has spread everywhere to include education and now all social issues, takes us in a direction that seems to require a great leveling administered by the government. In contrast, Christians have lived most of the last two millennia doing the best they could for God's purposes in an imperfect world, looking for justice in the age to come when we will be accepted as God's children with him forever.