

**Is God Fair?**  
**What about Gandhi?**  
*The Gospel's Answer:*  
*Grace and Peace*

*“for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”—John 12:47*

Michael Riley and James William



AuthorHouse™  
1663 Liberty Drive  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
www.authorhouse.com  
Phone: 1-800-839-8640

© 2011 Michael Riley and James William. All rights reserved.

*No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author.*

*First published by AuthorHouse 09/06/2011*

ISBN: 978-1-4567-5704-5 (ebk)

ISBN: 978-1-4567-5708-3 (hc)

ISBN: 978-1-4567-5709-0 (sc)

*Printed in the United States of America*

*Any people depicted in stock imagery provided by Thinkstock are models, and such images are being used for illustrative purposes only.*

*Certain stock imagery © Thinkstock.*

*This book is printed on acid-free paper.*

*Library of Congress Control Number: 2011907968*

*Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.*

*Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright*

*© 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.*

*Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®,*

*Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,*

*1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation*

*Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)*

*Scripture taken from the American Standard Version is public domain.*

*As explained <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/American-Standard-Version-ASV-Bible/>*

*“Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights Reserved.”*

*Is God Fair? What about Gandhi? © 2011 by Michael Riley and James William (03/01/11)*

*All rights reserved.*

# **Chapter 1**

## **Is God Fair?**

### **Why Paul, Not Gandhi?**

Some years ago my father's favorite TV minister produced a sermon entitled, "Is God Fair?" My dad was so intrigued by the message that he bought a recording of it for me and asked for my opinion. At the time it seemed like a simple question worth some consideration. However, I had no idea of its importance and the many difficulties it would create. A few years and one book later, Michael and I now see that how we respond to that question tells us a great deal about our perception of God and His goodness. Before reading any further, please take a few moments to answer that question for yourself—Do you think He is fair?

Instinctively, it seemed to me that God is fair, but admittedly, it is very difficult at times to find reasonable explanations for many of the tragedies and sufferings universally part of the human experience. I appreciated this man's attempt to tackle the question, and I took from his sermon some nuggets of truth. But in the end, I was very uncomfortable with his conclusion: "God is not fair."

Unconvinced by his explanations, I wrote letters to two other well-known Bible scholars and authors asking for their thoughts: Did they think God is fair? Thankfully, both responded in personal letters, but neither of them agreed with the first minister nor with each other. So, I ended up with a full range of definitive answers: No, Yes, and Sometimes. Even among my friends, answers and explanations were all over the board. To my surprise most believed that God is not fair, and those who did believe in His fairness leaned heavily on blind faith. Curiously, every person in our discussions believed that God was just, as if that somehow made up for His lack of fairness. I heard it stated emphatically over and over, "No, God is not fair, but He is just!" That bothered me even more. I wondered how any judge worth his salt could be just and not be fair at the same time. Perhaps I was missing something.

So I consulted with Webster's Dictionary to ensure I had a correct understanding of fairness and justice. A fair person was defined as someone who does not show favoritism or partiality; and justice was described as the administration of law, especially in assigning rewards or punishment with "impartiality." Connecting the dots, those definitions confirmed my gut instinct that to be "just," God would also have to be "fair." Justice requires impartiality, the very definition of fairness. James Rachels, author and former philosophy professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, wrote on pages 13-15 of his book, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*:

Almost every important theory of morality includes the idea of impartiality. The basic idea is that each individual's interests are equally important; from within the moral point of view, there are no privileged persons. Therefore, each of us must acknowledge that other people's welfare is just as important as our own . . . The conscientious moral agent is someone who is concerned impartially with the interests of everyone affected by what he or she does . . .

Next, I went to the Scriptures to see what they would say about God in connection with fairness. I found three Scriptures in the New Testament: Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, and Ephesians 6:9, each plainly stating that our heavenly Father does not show favoritism or partiality. I also discovered two Scriptures in the Old Testament stating the same thing unambiguously (Deut. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7). Therefore, at least for me, the Bible left no room for misunderstanding. It stated emphatically that God is fair.

At that point, I was left with a perplexing question: if the answer was that easy to find in the Bible, why did two of the three noted theologians of our day and many of my family and friends answer differently? For people who genuinely trust the Scriptures as God's inerrant word, what caused this lack of consensus in the face of obvious biblical statements? I will not attempt an answer here, but Michael will definitely provide some insight in the first chapters of this book as he writes about the "fog and thunder" within the history of the church.

Later, after firmly establishing God's fairness from a biblical perspective, a second question came to mind that I wanted to run by these same scholars: "Why Paul, not Gandhi?" I was very excited about sending this follow-up question, and I did so along with the scriptural support I found for the answer to the first question. I was anxious to learn how each would defend God's involvement in the life of Paul in comparison to the life of Gandhi given God's proclaimed immunity to favoritism.

I was very grateful when two of the three experts replied, but I was very disappointed with their responses. Instead of taking a position so that we might have an intelligent discussion, each punted by appealing to "the mystery of God"—that we will find the answer when we get to heaven.

When faced with the dilemma of explaining God's fairness in relation to Paul and Gandhi, the two gentlemen gave up immediately. It was like punting on first down. Each deferred to Isaiah 55:8, where God tells us His ways and thoughts are above our ways and thoughts.

I don't think it would be a stretch to conclude that something was bothering these men concerning this subject, and they were not at all comfortable with discussing it. Maybe I'm jumping to conclusions here, but perhaps what bothered them the most, consciously or subconsciously, was what they believe to be Gandhi's ultimate fate as compared to Paul's. I'll bet neither of these two guys really wanted Gandhi suffering in hell forever or desired him to be permanently annihilated. I'll bet they would rather see him with Paul in heaven. And I don't think it would be a stretch to think that most Christians would want the same. How about you? What would *you* want for Gandhi?

Interestingly, the Isaiah passage was quoted to avoid the issues raised by the follow-up question, and in effect, to shut down further discussion. Yet, the context of this verse, far from teaching the overall inscrutability of "God's ways,"—and thus providing an excuse to halt dialogue—specifically teaches that what is unfathomable to our understanding is God's willingness to extend mercy and forgiveness! Yet these men, if they are consistent with their Orthodox beliefs, know that Gandhi has but one destiny—a dreadfully unmerciful one: eternal damnation. Perhaps, this is the real reason they were so uncomfortable with this discussion. And if I am correct about the desire of most believers for Gandhi, how is it not possible to conclude that *we* are more merciful than God?

The follow-up question was really meant to act as a test of traditional theology regarding God's plan for His creation in eternity. You will see that when we apply the principle that God is fair, the status quo will fall like a house of cards. Further, when we do appropriately apply this pillar of truth, we will have the legitimate right to replace the current popular "bad news" gospel where most of God's children end up annihilated or in hell suffering torments throughout ceaseless ages with the really "Good News" of the Gospel where His Kingdom will come and His will is done on earth just as it already is done in heaven.

Furthermore, Michael and I believe that if we can get our arms around His long-term intentions and place our faith in His ability to accomplish them, then His apparent unfairness in our present circumstances may be easier to understand. In other words, by pointing our intellectual telescopes to the great beyond, it may make current events easier to accept when we focus on issues under the microscope of the present.<sup>10</sup>

Have you ever had trouble putting something together and you had to

stop to look at a picture of the finished product to help you understand how the parts fit? To this end, let's get a picture of Paul and Gandhi in eternity (God's finished product) as viewed by current traditional theology. We will start with a brief discussion of Paul's story and his destiny. Then, we will move to Gandhi's story, questioning whether Orthodox beliefs have correctly described his ultimate fate.

In Acts chapter 9, we find a man named Saul (his name was later changed to Paul) on a journey to Damascus when suddenly a light shone from heaven around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice, which asked, "Why are you persecuting me?" Saul responded with a question, "Who are you, Lord?" (Notice the title of respect given to this yet unknown power.)

Saul, at the time of these events, had been participating in the arrest, persecution, and murder of innocent Christians, placing him in the category of an "enemy of Christ" according to Scripture. Further, Saul strengthened the indictment against himself in his first letter to Timothy (1:13) where he used the word *hubristes* to describe his old self. Aristotle defined the noun form *hubris* as a person who means to hurt and cause injury for no other reason than finding delight in the suffering of another. *Hubristes* therefore described a man who inflicted pain for the sheer joy of it. Such a monster was far more deserving to be a target of God's wrath rather than His mercy. But mercy is exactly what this sadistic, murder-condoning Pharisee received. On the other hand, Gandhi clearly exhibited none of these traits. Yet, Gandhi is the one who is lost and facing eternal damnation or annihilation?

It should be obvious that Saul was not pursuing Jesus or asking for a revelation at the time of his conversion. He had no idea who was behind the voice and had to inquire. Acts 9:1-20, provides a record of these events. Later, there would be an admission of ignorance, but it was very much apparent in his reaction at that point—he was "astonished!"

After Jesus revealed Himself and exposed Saul as an enemy, his natural response in fear and trembling was, "What do you want me to do?" At that point Jesus told him to go into the city and wait for further instructions. Understandably, Saul needed some time to absorb what had just occurred. Blind and helpless, his only choice was to be led meekly by the hand to Damascus. He was so shaken by the event he could not eat or drink for the next three days. Would anyone else react differently after such a powerful demonstration? Can you imagine the sheer terror that gripped his soul? As a well-educated man, I'm sure Saul asked himself repeatedly, "How could I have been so wrong?" Also during those three days, I'm sure Saul had in the back of his mind a constant unwelcome companion—the uneasy thought

that his blindness might very well be permanent—no doubt an appropriate sentence for his treacherous deeds. His only choice was to repent. There was no out. All he could do was ask for mercy and forgiveness.

The answer to his prayers came in a vision where he saw a man named Ananias lay hands on him so that he might receive his sight. And three days later, a man showed up at the door named—you guessed it—Ananias. He confirmed the miraculous Damascus Lane experience and then told Saul the Lord had sent him to lay hands on him so that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Ananias laid his hands on him, Saul received his sight and was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit.

What an incredible conversion experience! It included the following:

- A heavenly light
- A voice
- Instructions
- Witnesses
- A vision
- Confirmation of his holy highway hijacking from a total stranger
- Validation of his vision from that same stranger
- A healing
- A baptism
- A filling with the Holy Spirit

Most of us would give anything to experience just one of these miracles in our lifetime. Well, Paul received ten—in three days! Is it any wonder he would later write that the faith to believe is a gift from God? Note the gift was **given, not merely offered**, and it did not originate in the works or deeds of a man, thus eliminating any opportunity for boasting (Ephesians 2:8-9). And you have to love God’s teaching methods, for He not only explained with words, but He also used dramatic and demonstrative can’t-miss pictures of how salvation works with implications that rock today’s Orthodoxy to its foundation while bringing God’s fairness into the light.

Paul later wrote that his salvation experience was not an exception but served as a pattern of Christ’s “longsuffering” for others that would follow (1 Tim. 1:16). This pattern has given us a clear picture of how undeserving we are and about the depths and extent of His love for us. His love resulted in God pursuing us and dropping the faith into our hearts to believe when He decided the timing was right. Jesus knew what it would take to make a believer out of Saul. He controlled the situation from the start to the finish. God arranged the date, time, place, and the role of all the characters involved. And it wasn’t chance or man who produced the outcome. It was the will of the Father that resulted in the new-birth experience. John 1:

12-13 states the children of God are born, not “of the will of the flesh, nor of the [free] will of man, but [the will] of God.” What a fabulous example in Saul!

This was a classic case of the Potter molding the clay, irrespective of the clay’s desire, and of the Great Shepherd pursuing the one lost sheep until found. It’s really no more complicated than that. Anyone reading the story should easily see that Jesus did what was necessary to convince Saul to believe and follow Him just like He has done for us and is willing and able to do for others.

One of the ministers who responded to our questions characterized Saul’s conversion as an exception and felt God chose him because He needed someone to take the Gospel to the nations where many would be saved. Where is the logic in this assertion? First, a “pattern” is not an “exception.” Secondly, are we to seriously consider the proposition that God will save you if He needs you, but if He does not need you, you are on your own? Can you feel the love?

Albert Einstein couldn’t feel it. After astronomer Edwin Hubble provided evidence of an expanding universe from measurements of forty different galaxies, Einstein’s prediction of this expansion from his original general relativity theory was fully established. For years Einstein tried to find a new force in physics that would cancel out this continuous expansion notion. This would keep the “steady state” theory in place giving us a universe without beginning or end. Facing the facts of an exploding universe, Albert admitted his greatest error and acknowledged the necessity for a beginning.<sup>11</sup> This was an important moment for Albert. He reasoned that if the universe had a beginning, then, there had to be “the presence of a superior reasoning power,” who orchestrated its construction. However, Einstein denied that this power was personal, and here is what he said: “If this being is omnipotent, then every occurrence, including every human action, every human thought, and every human feeling and aspiration is also His work; how is it possible to think of holding men responsible for their deeds and thoughts before such an almighty Being? In giving out punishment and rewards He would to a certain extent be passing judgment on Himself. How can this be combined with the goodness and righteousness ascribed to Him?”

Albert’s superior reasoning abilities drove him to question whether the entity He thought responsible for creating the Universe could be the God of Christianity. His question and others like it have created a real headache for modern apologetics. In effect, he was asking, “Is God good? Is He fair? Is He just?” Unfortunately, the clergy of his day could not provide him with an adequate answer. Avoiding the implications in their

exegesis, they appealed to “the mystery of God.” Sound familiar? The answers we received from our two experts would not have helped Mr. Einstein either.

## THE MYSTERY CARD

by Martin Zender

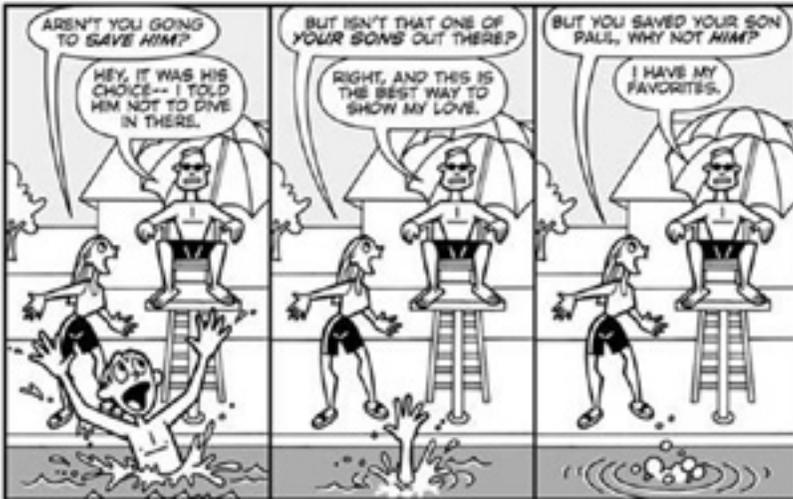


*“If the specter of logic or preponderance of scriptural evidence ever threatens your preconceived orthodox belief system again, Suzy, just say, ‘Well, I guess it’s just a mystery!’”*

Continuing our discussion of Paul and Gandhi, according to Romans 1:20 all men are without excuse because “*ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made*” (RSV). Therefore, prior to this experience, Paul was on the same level and without excuse just like Gandhi and all the other millions who died as nonbelievers in Paul’s time as well as the billions of non-Christians who have died since. With this in mind, here are some troubling questions for the current popular “bad news” gospel:

1. If we know that God doesn't show favoritism or partiality, then why did He give Paul an undeniable, hands-on, life-changing, miraculous experience and not do the same for others bound for hell or extinction?
2. Why would an arrogant, sadistic traitor to his heritage, Pharisee of Pharisees, and proclaimed enemy of Christ get the advantage of this incredible series of convincing miracles, and not others who needed it as much as Paul?

Common sense dictates that if a nonbeliever had the same or similar personal experiences as Saul, the outcome would be conversion. Would Gandhi have become a believer? Try to convince someone otherwise. Acting on the behalf of Paul but failing to do so for the benefit of Gandhi is a perfect picture of favoritism.



We realize that all have received the undeserved benefit of His death on the cross, but this sequence of events shows He went an extra mile—make that many extra miles—for Paul that He did not go for Gandhi and billions of others. Do we have an arbitrary, capricious, unfair God? Or we have jumped to the wrong conclusions about the outcome of His intentions? We are convinced the latter is the case.

At this point, many in the religious establishment make the argument that not all epiphanies result in salvation, insinuating that God did not use this method for others because it would not have worked. Attempting to justify God's fairness by using this line of reasoning is utterly hopeless. To prove the argument is flawed, all we need to find is one person who would

have been converted but did not get the same chance as Paul to prove that God showed favoritism—just one! Do you think there might have been at least one other convert in the two millennia that have passed had God crafted something so scary, yet so beautiful and personal, for each one of the billions of nonbelievers who have lived since the time of Christ? Or was Paul the one lone man out of the billions God could get to respond by use of such an epiphany?

We would like to take this absurdity a step farther by examining the implications of what Christians are expected to believe with some very personal examples. We have some Jewish family and friends that we love dearly. We have shared the intimate details of life knowing that if someone were in need, the family would be there for them. Religion has never been an issue because we love and respect each other. Some of them believe that Jesus was a real person, but they are not sure if He was really the Messiah. Now, our stone-cold hermeneutics requires us to believe that they will either suffer in hell forever or will be annihilated after judgment for failure to believe in someone they have never seen or heard. And what is just as awful is the idea that heaven will be a joyous place without them. How can compassionate people be held captive by such an utterly repulsive scenario? And there is no one who could convince us that ten very personal and miraculous confirmations within three days would not persuade any of these highly intelligent, sincere, and loving people to follow Christ.

Secondly, to believe that others would not be saved after a very personal revelation of Jesus such as the one Paul received would be in conflict with the Scripture where Paul said, *“I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern . . .”*<sup>12</sup> The King James verbiage sounds a bit clumsy, but the meaning becomes clear when we find that “all” means “thorough.” So, the idea was that Jesus’s longsuffering was thorough, adequate, or sufficient enough to complete the salvation of Paul just as it will be for others that follow. He couldn’t have given us better proof of His ability to mold, shape, persuade, and convince “free will” agents to follow Him. As others have stated, it is analogous to a grand master playing a novice in a game of chess. Despite all the free will of the novice to make any move he wants, eventually, the master brings the novice to checkmate.

This illustration brings another question to mind as to why Christians pray for another’s salvation. What is it that we are asking God to do? “Oh, God, please, will you try one more time with Homer? He’s so special!” Does God respond, “O.K., I’ll try one more time. But don’t get your hopes up; I’ve already made six other attempts.” Or does God say, “No, he’s 49.9 percent convinced, and if I give him any more evidence, I’d violate his free will.” Where does God stop? And if He does stop, is *that* fair? Where would

you have God draw the line as regards salvation? Our friend and mentor, Leo Boyle asks it this way: “How can a loving, infinite, all-knowing God hold a finite being with limited knowledge infinitely responsible?”

It seems so sad to us that many intelligent people seeking solace from the Great Physician have walked away empty due to the unanswered questions identified in this chapter. Some pulpits remain silent about them because they cannot make a clear and cogent defense of entrenched church traditions and/or because it is too harsh to dwell upon. Those ministers who try to justify God within the boundaries of this paralyzing paradigm unfortunately end up reflecting less love and compassion than what truly may be in their hearts. As Thomas Talbott surmised in his book, *The Inescapable Love of God*, generally speaking, church authority seems to be so sold out to this unfortunate mindset that over time our senses have dulled and our responses have become almost involuntary.



As we stated in the Preface, the purpose of our book is to replace traditional answers to our questions with ones that generate affection and faith instead of fear and doubt. But before getting into solutions, we want to discuss one more huge problem for present day church authority - let us examine how a belief in the doctrine of eternal damnation historically fosters un-Christlike behavior on the outside and girds the heart with darkness on the inside. Let us go back to a time and place when Jesus took the opportunity to rebuke the original Sons of Thunder—James and John.