

What did your parents expect of you? Why was that? And what about your employer, spouse, teachers or friends? How do you feel about the expectations of others? And finally, what are you own personal expectations? Is this all based on guilt or fear, or are there other reasons for such expectations?

Micah sounds like a courtroom attorney as he announces the charges against God's people and lists the expectations of faith that have been ignored. His words were directed to people who had lost their way; whose decisions and lifestyles had not been compatible with faith. In other words, they had failed to meet expectations of God, and had disappointed themselves.

When sacrifice (or my actions) are the attempt to cover up a wrong, there is one rule that is always true. The greater the sin, the greater the sacrifice that is needed to cover the wrong or to right the relationship that has been disturbed. No sacrifice can make right what we have wronged! To restore the relationship of loving trust takes more than we can give to erase the memory and the guilt.

My first wife died of cancer. Facing the inevitable, she told me one day she was afraid she was not good enough to get into heaven. I couldn't believe she (of all people!) felt that way. She was someone everyone loved and respected, and so I started to dismiss her fears. But she was serious. As we talked I realized that as a child, her pastor had told her that if there was ever a sin she had forgotten to confess, that could be held over her by God. (Are you kidding?)

After we talked about many of the parables and promises of Jesus and God's love for her, she said that for the first time, she was beginning to understand grace – undeserved love and undeserved forgiveness. But the fact that she felt she hadn't "done enough" to earn God's favor troubles me to this day. Grace is all about what God has done for us, rather than what God needs us to do for Him. Our actions are a response to God's love, not a motive for God to love us.

In the end, there is nothing we can do to make right our relationship with God. We can't restore the paradise that is lost or avoid the death that ends every life. Even if we were to sacrifice the greatest gift of all, our very life, we could not undo what is broken, and the righteousness of God would remain offended.

So we are left, day after day, with the reality that our broken world remains broken. That we can't change, but Micah says there is something we can do differently as we wait for God's response. His words are clear: "do justice, be merciful, and learn to be humble before God." In other words, love as you have been loved. That won't restore a broken world but will remind you how powerful God's love feels to you!

Suppose a husband or wife has been unfaithful to the other – would a dozen roses or a new diamond ring, undo or make up for the loss? What about a child who says, "I hate you!" to mom or dad? Can those words ever be taken back?

The pain of living is that we cannot change what we call sin. We can try to cover it up or keep it in perspective, but it will always be a symptom of the difference between the paradise God created and the reality which we impose upon each other. It will take more than the greatest

human action of all to restore any of these wrongs, but Micah's words remind us of God's expectations of people of faith, as he says: "do justice, be mercifully, and learn to be humble before God."

That explains grace, as God says, "no matter how great the disappointment, your living can still reflect the priorities of faith. I do not love you more or less because of what you do ... but because you are loved, here is the lifestyle that shows acceptance of the gift of grace. It is like a child who has been embarrassed by mom or dad, and hugs anyway; or a friend who has been let down yet continues to be a friend; or a spouse who has been disappointed but finds a way to show mercy.

In an imperfect world we can never make things right. Oh Congress, and Presidents, and laws, and well-intentioned folk will go out of their way to say "we can make things right." But no one can. The gulf between us and God is too great, and the pain we inflict on each other can never be completely erased.

Only He who is capable of creating sun and moon, deserts and seas, animal and man and ordaining the purpose and expectations of life is capable of restoring what has been lost and renewing what has been corrupted. And the Good News is that God will pay any price to make things right, and he has shown his intent by the miracle of Jesus accepting our death sentence and conquering our tomb.

That is why Micah proclaimed that God needed no sacrifice, for only His sacrifice can make any difference. Instead, what God asks is that we trust in his love and begin to learn a new dance step or a new language and that is what it means to love as we have never loved before.

Jesus is the last lamb ever to be offered on an altar and the only sacrifice with enough power to make a difference. And that is the love that has set us free!

Instead, we are asked to respond, affirm, and renew our daily desire to be faithful, restore justice, show mercy, and learn humility before God. That doesn't earn love from God but shows God's love in how we learn to live.

To show mercy means to relinquish my rightful control, or advantage over someone who has wronged me. It means that I might not give what is fair or receive what is deserved, but in all things am moved solely by servant love.

You see, "walking with God" is the key that is what that word about being humble is all about. For we are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps rather than demand that He walk in mine. And what has Jesus done for my guilt other than to show mercy, undeserved forgiveness, and a new relationship of everlasting love?

*God's justice (what makes things right again) is different than it is for the world, for ultimately God shows mercy – and that is usually not deserved.*

So, what does God expect? Nothing more than knowing his love alone has changed a broken world. His breath of life is a gift that will change how I live. What does God expect of me? Nothing he has not already done through Jesus, And that love now becomes my life for those around me as well.

Doing justice doesn't mean I am judge but that I live in the right way. Being merciful is not being weak but sharing the same love that has been given even though I didn't deserve it. Walking humbly isn't being embarrassed but acknowledging that I am not God.

You know God doesn't expect that much, but what he asks makes perfect sense. He says, follow in the footsteps that Jesus has already traced on this earth for you. Do justice, be merciful, and learn what it means to be humble before God."