

## Are God's justice and mercy in opposition?

{The primary source for this talk is: Pope Francis on Mercy and Justice: A Short Primer – Catholic World Report }

If you have ever been seriously wronged or hurt by someone, how did you feel? Did you want revenge, and if so, how would you describe the justice you initially wanted? \_\_\_\_\_

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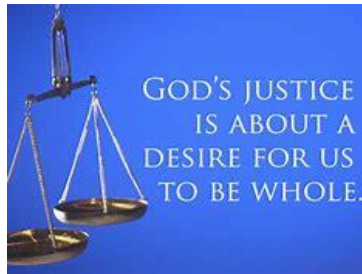
In secular terms, justice refers to the fair and impartial treatment of individuals based on their actions or deeds. It involves upholding moral and legal standards, ensuring that wrongs are righted, and maintaining order in the world.



On the other hand, mercy is compassion, forgiveness, and kindness extended to those who do not deserve it. It may involve withholding punishment or granting leniency, even when justice demands otherwise.

Keeping in mind your answer in the first paragraph, what if the person who wronged you immediately recognized what they have done and apologizes. Would this change the type of justice you wanted? If so, why? \_\_\_\_\_

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In the context of God, **justice** means that He holds everyone accountable for their actions, rewarding righteousness and punishing wrongdoing. It reflects God's unwavering commitment to righteousness and truth.

God's **mercy** is His loving response to human brokenness and sin and His willingness to forgive, redeem, and restore, even when we fall short.

Some struggle with the apparent tension between these two attributes. They ask how can a just God also be merciful? Or how can Christian theologians say that God is both just and merciful? To be just means to give someone what he deserves, but to be merciful means to give him better than he deserves. Given that perspective, some have argued that a person could not be merciful without being unjust or be just without being unmerciful. But what about God?

Pope Francis in his book, *The Name of God is Mercy*, wrote that mercy is the face of God's love turned toward sinners, searching them out, offering them pardon and salvation by giving them a new chance to look at themselves, convert, and believe. It is the expression of His fundamental love. Yet, to understand properly the reality of God's merciful pardon and how it is that mercy triumphs over judgment {James 2:13}, we cannot minimize the wrath of God. God's wrath is His response to the sins of men. {Ephesians 2: 4} His holy displeasure against their sin that entails the breaking of communion with Him as the expression of His fundamental justice, righteousness, and holiness. God is not merciful *at the expense of* His justice. Mercy does not exclude His justice, nor is it opposed to it.

Quoting St. John Paul II, Pope Francis said that God has shown us his justice and mercy "in the cross of Christ, on which the Son, consubstantial with the Father, *renders full justice to God.*" His death on the cross "is also *a radical revelation of mercy*, or rather of *the love* that goes against what constitutes the very root of evil in the history of man: against sin and death." {*Dives in Misericordia*, (Rich in Mercy):§8}

So, both justice and mercy have their origin in God’s holy love, but how so? These two, said St. John Paul II, spring completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love. Pope Francis explains that “these [justice and mercy] are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love”.

The way the believer receives the grace of Christ’s atoning work, his gift of infinite mercy, is by faith. {Romans 3:21-25} Approaching the Lord of mercy with confidence requires a shattered heart, meaning having “consciousness of our sins, of the evil we have done, of our wretchedness, and of our need for forgiveness and mercy.” {CCC 1861}

In other words, God’s justice is not penalizing but restorative. It seeks to save rather than condemn. While justice ensures accountability and fairness, mercy provides healing and restoration. As we navigate life, may we seek to balance justice with the transformative power of mercy.

**Reflective Questions:**



1. Think back to a recent event when you or someone you love was treated unfairly. How did you initially respond? Did you want justice or mercy or worse yet revenge? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Remember a time when you offended or hurt someone through your words or actions. Were you immediately sorrowful for what you had done? Did you set things right? How? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. People are much better than their worst acts and sins. How could you incorporate this attitude in your daily life? \_\_\_\_\_

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