



Chapter 13

Jehovah's Good Requirements

6. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?
7. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
8. He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:6–8)

In chapter 6, Micah, in the name of Jehovah, announces Jehovah's controversy with his people. In that controversy Jehovah cries out to his people: "O my people, what have I done unto thee?" (v. 3). Jehovah even declares: "Testify against me!" (v. 3). In so doing, Jehovah strongly protests his righteousness and the people's treachery. Then Jehovah proves from history that he has always been faithful to Judah. He brings as "Exhibit A" his deliverance of his people from Egypt, his sending them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and his protection of them in the wilderness.

Jehovah's "Exhibit A" to us is the cross of Jesus Christ. Surely, then, neither they nor we have any excuse for ingratitude toward God.

The text contains a kind of dialogue between the prosecution and the defense in Jehovah's controversy or lawsuit. Judah responds to Jehovah in verses 6–7. She shows in her response that she recognizes the majesty and holiness of God, for she speaks of him as "the high God" (v. 6) and she confesses sin: "my transgression...the sin of my soul" (v. 7). But her response to Jehovah is false: she does not know (or claims not to know) how she should approach God. Micah, in Jehovah's name, responds to Judah's question (whether it is a sincere question or not, or whether it is a question designed to escape blame or not). "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee" (v. 8).

JEHOVAH'S GOOD AND CLEAR REQUIREMENTS

Before we look at the three requirements, we need to ask and answer some questions. The first question is: what are these requirements generally? The text says two things about them: they are good, and they are clear.

First, they are good. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good" (v. 8). We are not interested here in what seems good to us, or even in what seems good to society. We are interested in what is good *to Jehovah*. Good in the Bible is defined by what is pleasing to God, not what is pleasing to us, and not what is pleasing to the greatest number of people. Because God is the good God, what is good and pleasing to him will also be good for us: it will be good for us spiritually and will bring us blessedness.

12. And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require

of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

13. To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?
(Deut. 10:12–13)

Second, they are clear. “He hath shewed thee, O man” (Mic. 6:8). Jehovah is not a God who is impossible to serve because we do not know what he requires. He has shown us (each of us) what is good and what he requires. Jehovah has declared that to all of his people, not just to a select few. One does not require great insights, learning, or degrees in theology to know it. Jehovah’s requirements are clearly recorded for us in scripture that we might know them. Our calling is to do these things in thankfulness to him.

The second question we need to ask is: for whom are these requirements, or from whom does God require them? The text explains that these are what God requires from us, his people. “He hath shewed thee...what doth the LORD require of thee...thy God” (v. 8). This text is not directed to the Philistines, the Moabites, or the Babylonians. It is directed to the people of God: “my people” (vv. 3, 5).

This text is therefore not directed to the modern society in which we live, for God does not call all the inhabitants of the world in general to live the Micah 6:8 life. That would be impossible. God calls the church (believers, Christians) to live this way. For one thing, how can unbelievers walk humbly with their God? The calling of an unbeliever is not Micah 6:8 but repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Only then will you be able to live according to these requirements.

“He hath shewed thee, O man” (v. 8). The text has a very

direct focus: Jehovah is not addressing the nation of Judah or the church of Christ as a whole in verse 8, but he is addressing each person individually and directly. This is not a corporate calling but an individual calling. It is not the calling of the church as a body to live the Micah 6:8 life, to do these things as part of her official work in the world. Rather, it is the calling of the individual child of God. It is not merely the minister's calling, the elder's calling, the deacon's calling, or the calling of the church as a body: it is your calling (and mine) to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

The third question is: why does Jehovah require these things of us? The reason God requires that we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him is that these things are the way in which we show our gratitude to him. These three things are not radically new ideas that Micah invented, a new and trendy way of serving God, never tried before. These three things are a summary of God's law. These three things could be summed up by what Jesus said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37-39). The reason we find these three requirements here is that Judah was not living this way: the people were living in oppression and cruelty and not living in close fellowship with God.

These three requirements, then, are not the three requirements for salvation. Micah is not offering a three-part "way to heaven" plan. Micah presupposes that the people who do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God are already believers. Salvation is not by these good works. If it were, none of us could be saved, because none of us does justly enough, loves mercy enough, or walks humbly enough to satisfy God. Rather, salvation comes to us by the unmerited favor or grace of God, who has

adopted us to be his people and forgiven our sins in the blood of Christ. If you have that salvation, this is what God is seeking from you in response to him: a life of gratitude that consists in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God.

Given the answers to those three questions (What are these requirements generally; from whom does God require them; and why does he require them?), we can immediately rule out the most popular interpretation of this text for our day: social justice.

The “social justice” or “social gospel” movement is very popular among evangelicals today. The basic idea of the Christian social justice movement is that the church as an institution should be involved in ending injustice in society. The call from social justice churches is not to preach the gospel of Christ crucified, but to get out into the streets in order to make our city, our nation, and the world a better, fairer, more just, and more compassionate place. We must, urge the advocates of social justice, do justly by addressing income inequality, by campaigning for a higher minimum wage, and by campaigning for the rights of the disadvantaged in our communities. We must love mercy by helping the poor and homeless, by volunteering at the rape crisis center, by building hostels, hospitals, and schools in the third world, by bringing disadvantaged children to play sports, and so on.

That is not what Micah is saying here, and the Bible never teaches that such things are the calling of the church. If we think those activities and causes are the calling of the church, we will neglect the *real* calling of the church. The calling of the church as an institute and through her officebearers is to preach the gospel, to administer the sacraments, and to exercise church discipline. If an individual Christian wants to get involved in such humanitarian or altruistic activities, some of which are in themselves not wrong, he must understand that they are not the calling of the

church as a body. The church in the New Testament never did these things. The charitable work of the churches in the New Testament was to collect alms for impoverished Christians.

Also it is very dangerous for the church to join hands with the ungodly to help make the world a better place. You cannot walk humbly with your God while you join hands with the wicked to help them in their causes. Remember the prophet's rebuke to Jehoshaphat: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD" (2 Chron. 19:2).

Having looked at the three requirements generally, we look at the three requirements themselves.

The first good and clear requirement is "to do justly." The word translated "justly" is the Hebrew noun for *justice*. Justice in the Bible is to give someone what is his due under the law. In the Bible justice needs a standard. That standard is God's standard as revealed in God's law. That is one of the major problems with social justice. It makes no effort to discover what God's law determines justice to be. The idea of social justice is whatever seems just to man or to the greatest number of men. So, for example, today social justice is campaigning for homosexual rights or for reproductive justice for women (a euphemism for the evil of abortion). But justice is very simple: whatever God commands is good, and whatever God forbids is evil. All men must be judged equally by the law of God and rewarded or punished accordingly. That is justice.

We encountered this concept of justice or judgment in Micah 3:1 ("Is it not for you to know judgment?") and verse 9 ("Hear this...ye...that abhor judgment"). In Judah the people were defrauding, cheating, and stealing from their neighbors. They were living in blatant dishonesty and fraud. This was evil, and Micah condemned it very strongly. Christians must never

be dishonest. But we must not think that biblical justice is that everyone has the same standard of living; we must not champion liberal political causes such as the redistribution of wealth or income equality.

Judgment is to treat your neighbor fairly and equitably, to give him what is right and proper. Do you do justly regarding your spouse, your parents, your children, your siblings, and your fellow church members? Apply the ten commandments, especially numbers five through ten. The Bible is not asking you to solve injustice in society, but God requires you to do justice in your own life, which is harder.

The second good and clear requirement is “to love mercy.” Mercy is compassion, pity, or kindness. To love mercy is to delight to help those who are miserable by having compassion upon them. Mercy begins as an attitude, then it is a desire, and finally it blossoms into an act. Mercy must be something we love. We love to be kind, to be hospitable. We love to help others. We love to put the needs of others before our own. This mercy begins in our own families and is extended to our neighbors.

We must not misapply this commandment. It is not the calling of the church as a body or of the individual members to alleviate all misery and suffering in society. The church is not called to feed the poor, to help the homeless, or to promote government programs for social welfare. The church as a body does not have that calling. In fact, it is not part of the official ministry of the church to help the poor except through her diaconate, where she helps (primarily) her own poor. While the Christian does have a calling to help a needy neighbor, he does not have a moral obligation to support all charities that claim to help the needy.

The problem with government programs is that the

government takes the earnings of workers to pay for programs. The government never helps the poor with its own money.

In Judah there was no welfare program: the poor could avail themselves of the law (of gleaning, for example), but the law of God did not reward idleness and irresponsibility. The point, however, is clear: within Judah God called his people to have mercy on the weak and vulnerable, to alleviate the suffering of the needy, of widows, orphans, and strangers, and of the sick and the blind. We are called today to visit the sick, elderly, and lonely and to help the members of the congregation who need that help.

The third good and clear requirement is “to walk humbly with thy God.” To walk with God is a beautiful expression of life in the covenant. The idea of walking with God is a daily, ongoing, moment-by-moment, constant living in communion and fellowship with God. One who walks with God knows God, loves God, delights in God, and lives for the glory of God. One who walks with God has his affections directed toward heaven and the things of God. Because two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3), one who walks with God walks in harmony with God, walking uprightly according to God’s commandments. This walk, says Micah, is a humble walking with thy God.

Such a requirement rules out all forms of idolatry, which makes this requirement impossible for the unbeliever. Micah clearly does not mean that Jehovah requires each man to walk with the god of his choice so that the Philistine walks humbly with Dagon, the Ammonite walks humbly with Molech, and the Babylonian walks humbly with Bel. God is not pleased today when the Muslim walks with Allah, or the Hindu with Ganesh or Vishnu, for example. Micah means that Jehovah requires his people, who know him as their God, to walk with him.

That walk with God is humble. The Hebrew word for humble means “careful,” so that the child of God never walks in a way

that might offend God, never forgets the greatness and glory of God, and regulates his life to please God. Thus the believer, in walking humbly with God, walks against the world, loving righteousness and hating wickedness in all his works and ways.

In the midst of the social gospel movement very little is heard of this third requirement. Yet this one is fundamental and lies behind the other two. To walk humbly with thy God is simply a summary of the law: love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. But social gospel or social justice tends to be at best ecumenical and syncretistic, and at worst atheistic and openly hostile to God. How can you walk humbly with your God while holding hands with those who are hell-bent on destroying morality and the family and promoting promiscuity, alternative lifestyles (sexual perversity), and the murder of unborn children? How can you walk humbly with God and with idolaters of all kinds? The more you walk with the wicked, even if the cause seems right, the more you will lose that close fellowship you ought to have with God.

God, then, does not require some great feat, some impossible work, but three simple things, which should be the way in which we are living anyway. Judah misconstrued what Jehovah wanted; she expected some great act of devotion, some extravagant worship practice, but Jehovah's requirements are clear, simple, and good.

Do not allow the social justice movement to burden you with false guilt: God does not require you to open a soup kitchen, end world poverty, find a cure for cancer, go on a mission trip, or renew the inner city. God requires of us the simple, everyday activities of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

By God's grace, we are doing that already. Especially the mothers are doing that regarding their children: parenting in

the home is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. Of course, there are improvements we can make. Are those requirements unreasonable? Should God not expect obedience out of gratitude for what he has done for us?

THE HYPOCRITICAL RESPONSE

Judah responds to Jehovah's indictment in Micah 6:1–5 with religious hypocrisy. Judah asks in verse 6, "Wherewith [with what] shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God?" When the religious are indicted for their sins, their first recourse is more religion. They think that God can be pacified by religious devotion. The religious devotion that Judah offers is both extravagant and costly. She lists various offerings that she could make, each one more extravagant and costly than the former.

The offerings suggested in verses 6–7 are exaggerated. The first offering proposed is whole burnt offerings. Of all the offerings this was the costliest, because it was offered in its entirety to the Lord. The other offerings were eaten by the people and the priests in a fellowship meal, but the burnt offering was given only to God. Moreover, calves a year old were most valuable because a farmer had to care for the calf—feed it, prepare it, and provide for it—for a whole year before he offered it.

The second offering proposed is even more extravagant: thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of oil. If one ram is costly, how much more costly are not a thousand rams? Pure olive oil, which was offered with many of the sacrifices, was expensive. If a small amount of oil is costly, how much more extravagant would not thousands of rivers of oil be?

The third offering proposed is the costliest yet: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for

the sin of my soul?” (v. 7). Some of the Judeans, such as King Ahaz, had done just that. They thought they could please God with the supreme sacrifice, but in so doing they did something abominable.

Underlying these words in verses 6–7 is an implied accusation: Jehovah is unreasonable, impossible to please; nothing we offer is enough. A wicked accusation! But Jehovah did not demand such extravagant, costly worship, and God could not be appeased by such sacrifices if it all served as a hypocritical cover-up for sin.

That was the real issue: why did Judah want to appease God with worship? Because she did not want to be godly. Judah did not want to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Judah wanted to do unjustly, hate mercy, love cruelty, and hate God. But she wanted to do it with a religious mask. She wanted to come to the temple and then defraud her neighbor, be cruel to widows and orphans, and live like the world throughout the week.

That is true with us as well. We think that if we simply go through the motions by coming twice or even once to worship on Sunday, we have satisfied God for another week, and we can live as we please throughout the week. John Calvin put it well: he said that hypocrites treat God like a child whom they hope to pacify with a toy or a rattle. That was Judah’s attitude, and that is often our attitude too. At the end of Sunday or even after the second service on Sunday evening we say, “That is over for another week. Now back to what I really love.”

God is not fooled by that worship. God’s requirements are clear and good. He will not be fobbed off by hypocritical religious observances and activities. He demands our heart and life.

JEHOVAH’S MERCIFUL PROVISION

When Saul proved to be an unfaithful king, Jehovah provided

himself a faithful king, namely David. When Judah proved to be an unfaithful servant, Jehovah announced the coming of a faithful servant, namely Christ. We have seen throughout Micah that Christ is promised by way of contrast. Jehovah seeks a people who do justly; the people of Judah do unjustly and even abhor justice. Jehovah seeks a people who love mercy; the people of Judah live in oppression and cruelty. Jehovah seeks a people who walk humbly with him; the people of Judah walk in hypocrisy and mere formalistic worship.

Christ fulfills these three requirements perfectly. Jesus Christ did justly, for his whole life was in conformity to God's law. So much did he do justly that he bore the penalty of the law for us. Jesus Christ loved mercy, for he had compassion upon the sick, poor, and blind. He had mercy upon miserable sinners, and that mercy was displayed at the cross, where he paid for all our sins to deliver us from death and the curse. Jesus Christ walked humbly with his God. No one had greater communion and fellowship with God, and so much did he delight in God that he laid down his life to bring us into fellowship with God.

Do you struggle to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God? Jesus is not only our example, but he is also the source of the power we need to do that. Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit and grace in our hearts to live Micah 6:8. More than that, Jesus forgives us when we fall short of the life that Micah 6:8 sets forth.

Jehovah demands, Jehovah requires, Jehovah seeks, and Jehovah gives. Let us live this way, not to earn our salvation, not in our own strength, but in the strength of our God and in gratitude to him. That is the good way, the way of blessedness.