

## Living By Faith: God's Justice

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 12-Nov-11; Sermon #1074

Turn in the New Testament to II Corinthians 5:7-10.

**II Corinthians 5:7-10** For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

I am going to continue today to cover the elements I believe are necessary to continuously living by faith, and I emphasize the word “continuously.” Living by faith is not easy because just as gravity pulls us toward the earth, human nature pulls us spiritually toward living by sight. The theme of this chapter is that we are a new creation and the kind of life required of us from this point on is one of living by faith. Living by sight is natural while living by faith is unnatural, so unnatural that God must jump-start it by graciously and miraculously calling us. By comparison, simply believing that a creator God exists is easy, but living day by day by faith is no easy matter.

In relation to God, those who are living by sight do so in a state of unbelief. What this section in this chapter is leading up to is that the new nature must be cultivated, tended to, fertilized (we might say) to feed that nature so that it will grow, produce fruit, and be seen; and therefore glorify God in our witness before this world.

The challenge here is something that needs to be met if we are going to grow and produce fruit. What is it that can hinder us along the way? Turn back to Hebrew 3:12 because I want us to see, as we begin this sermon, a witness from our forebears in the wilderness.

**Hebrews 3:12** Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

Drop down to verses 17-18.

**Hebrews 3:17-18** Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?

Now we see the conclusion of this in verse 19.

**Hebrews 3:19** So we see [Paul says] that they could not enter in [that is into the promise land] because of unbelief.

The Israelites in the wilderness could not accomplish living by faith even though they occasionally had strong visual evidence of God’s nearness to them.

For example, He killed the firstborn of Egypt and they knew that very well and could see the effects of what God did. He divided the sea and they saw the effects of His power. He provided water from rocks, not just out of shale or something like that, but out of rocks when it was necessary.

One of the biggest and most consistent witnesses that He ever gave them that they could see with their own eyes was the manna He provided for forty years, every morning except the Sabbath. And each Sabbath was a witness within itself that the manna was not there. On occasion, He triggered earthquakes or caused poisonous snakes to invade the camp, and He sent many to their deaths because of their unbelief.

There is even more, but I think that is enough to make the point. The conclusion Paul is reaching here is that those who lived by sight fell by the wayside. To live by sight was not enough to submit to God in the manner that He wanted.

We have now covered in this series three interlocking spiritual realities that I believe are needful for living a life by faith. Those three are: 1) God's sovereignty, which provides a foundation for all living by faith; 2) Man's pride, which we can very clearly see is a hindrance to living by faith (it is a real drag that pulls people into sin); and then 3) Man's humility, which can actually cancel out the human pride. There are two more necessary ingredients and they are: 1) God's justice and 2) God's grace.

If this package of spiritual realities is in order in our belief foundation, they serve as constant prods, moving our hearts toward making proper judgments to consciously, deliberately, and carefully trust Him. Today we will continue expounding God's sense of justice to complement this mix of three other vital spiritual realities.

In the New Testament, I want you to turn to a significant verse in Romans 11:19-22.

**Romans 11:19-22** You will say then [Paul writes], "Branches were broken off that I [the Gentiles] might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they [the Jews] were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

This was spoken to the Gentiles as part of a warning that Paul wanted them to seriously consider regarding their calling into the church. I want us to seriously consider God's goodness and severity as we begin the fourth element of this living by faith series. God not only loves, God IS love. That is the way the apostle John described Him. It is, in a way, an all-encompassing generality, but there is more to God than love. His character is perfectly balanced in a sense of justice for all concerned. To be just is to be fair, evenhanded, and impartial.

God will always be fair to His purpose; even His justice is done in love, and it is love. God is not only supreme in power and authority, He is also supreme in judgment. His mind pierces through all of our justifications made to excuse our bad attitudes and conduct. Because of this, if we desire to live by faith, His sense of justice must be carefully considered, and this is because what we may think

of as being a small matter or an event of no great magnitude may trigger God to react with terrible swiftness and severe consequences that leaves us wondering, "Why?" Brethren, we must begin thinking and understanding that we do not see the entire picture as God sees what is going on.

A number of these sudden, violent reactions have been recorded in scripture, and we are going to go through a couple of these, plus a good bit more. There are three important factors to living by faith that God's justice helps us to perceive, to grasp, to understand, to really be brought to the forefront of our own thinking.

Number one is the reality that the wages of sin is death. Remember I am giving these because this is what God's justice teaches us. Number two is the fact that we are headed toward death, and we do not know when that will occur. Number three, which is in a way an overall statement, God means exactly what He says at every time, all the time. There is nothing wishy-washy about God.

Luke 12:47-48 contains a very common statement Jesus made, but it is important to consider with regard to God's justice, because it has to do with God's judgment of us. It is at the tail end of a parable.

**Luke 12:47-48** And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

My purpose as we begin this section of the sermon in this series is to help us think about the seriousness of our calling. Knowing that there is, in human nature, a strong strain of self-deception, I am using this verse to remind us that our judgment will be more stern because we have been given so much. God clearly states in Romans 1:18-20 (this is a verse we should all know very clearly):

**Romans 1:18-20** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them ["to them" it should read], for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...

God clearly states that mankind, and this is mankind in general, is without excuse regarding His existence. He may not require other things in this judgment of His, but the very fact that because He is God, and He always tells the truth, men should be able to come to the right conclusion that a Creator God exists. Man may not know all the details and technicalities of the purpose and plan God is working out, but he should know God exists.

However, it is clearly seen in the world around us that people are paying little or no attention to their responsibilities to God, and God is being seriously ignored as people go about their daily activities. They do not truly see a relationship with Him as being vital, an every day necessity to their living their lives. They may talk of Him, but they are not seriously committed to true devotion to Him, neither are they learning more of His truths nor further broadening or deepening their obedience to Him. Besides this group of folks, there are some who are openly, aggressively, antagonistic toward Him and His laws.

In the face of these attitudes, we cannot allow ourselves to disregard the fact that God is very serious regarding His intentions to fulfill His purposes in our lives. His purpose has been revealed to us. This is part of what is included in Jesus' statement in Luke 12:47-48. We know His purpose, and so to whom much is given, much more is required.

Look back in the book of Proverbs at an interesting scripture that succinctly captures something that is very helpful for us to understand and become part of our thinking processes:

**Proverbs 21:16** A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.

This is a solemn warning, and I want us to notice Solomon's use of the word *wanders*. I must say that this is of vital concern to me and the reason is because I think this is more likely to happen to God's children than a deliberate sin against God. We tend to wander in our thinking or the drift of our life because God's children do not ordinarily, deliberately plan to go astray.

However, whether we do it deliberately or not, the result if the sin occurs will be death regardless of the intention because the wages of sin is death. We will add a little bit from the book of Hebrews 2. A very interesting metaphor is being used here by Paul:

**Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we [Christians] must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard [the Gospel of Jesus Christ and extensions of that which came through the apostles and now God's Word], lest we drift away

Be cognizant of that word "heard" because it becomes increasingly important for a while, not right away but eventually we are going to get to it. The reference Paul makes here to drifting away is interesting because Paul is not expecting Christians to drive themselves away because commonly what we do is drift away. We wander away.

**Hebrews 2:2-3** For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just [fair] reward, how shall we escape if we [Christians] neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard [there is that word again] Him,

This provides us with a very useful illustration in a situation where there is no deliberate intention to sin. The metaphor is of a boat drifting away from its moorings, caught in the currents that it was formerly tied against. Paul makes clear that the drifting is the result of neglect of the priorities that are set by our calling into the Kingdom of God. Other parts of the book of Hebrews make clear the neglect becomes a factor because one is not consciously, purposefully, directing life. They are just drifting. Tie this to Hebrews 5 in this very exhortive letter.

**Hebrews 5:12-13** For though by this time you ought to be teachers [he is talking to the same people he addressed in chapter 2:1-3], you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

Do you understand these people are regressing? They are Christians, and Paul describes them as drifting because of neglect of their responsibilities to God.

**Hebrews 5:14** But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

One of the things we find from these verses is that, as a result of their drifting neglect, the people had become dull of hearing. In other words, as they declined in their enthusiasm, as they declined in the drive they had formerly to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and began drifting away, not exercising themselves in the Word of God and the spiritual discipline that they should have been using, they were becoming dull of hearing. In other words, their faith was degenerating because, as we will see in a moment, having faith depends on being able to hear acutely. What we are seeing is spiritually dangerous. They had drifted into a lack of faith through neglect. We are going to tie this to Romans 10:17. This is a key scripture, this thing about hearing.

**Romans 10:17** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

In a case like this, hearing encompasses reading. It is not absolutely necessary that one has to actually hear the sound of the words, but rather to get the message of the words, whether spoken or from the Bible itself speaking silently to them through reading. If we tie in this principal in Romans 10:17, it tells us very clearly that these people were losing their faith because they were not hearing the word. If we do not rightly hear God's Word, the result is unbelief, and along with that understanding and motivation to live by faith diminishes right along with it. The entire book of Hebrews was written to encourage a congregation of neglectful and drifting people to turn and get back on the track toward the Kingdom.

**Proverbs 8:32-36** Now therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death.

That is a pretty shocking verse. What happens when one begins drifting is that human nature deceives a person to wrongly regard two things: 1) the quality of his own spirituality, and what follows on the heels of that is, 2) how he uses his time.

Consider the Laodicean. Do you think the Laodicean stops to seriously consider himself as one loving death? I do not think so. In those verses we just read in Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as a woman giving sage and exhortive advice about the way of God. Since your calling, have you ever considered yourself as loving death? Well, those who do not consciously and purposefully direct their lives toward obedience to God in reality love death. That is what the woman is saying there. I mentioned this about the Laodicean, and we will read the description in Revelation 3:15:

**Revelation 3:15** I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

One of the reasons He says that is because you know where those people stand. The cold are on one side, and we will say that they openly hate God. Then there are the hot, and they stand on the other side, and they have really gotten it; God knows exactly where they stand. They are following after Jesus Christ. What about the people who are lukewarm? Nobody knows exactly where they stand. That is the issue, and that was the issue with those people in the book of Hebrews. Paul could see that they were drifting away toward utter coldness.

**Revelation 3:16-18** So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. [He does not know where they stand] Because you say, [notice the misjudgments here] 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— [they cannot see it, they have been self-deceived] I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Unless Jesus Christ did that, do you think that the Laodicean would ever stop to seriously consider himself as loving death? The Laodiceans are the poster child of people, inch-by-inch, drifting away from the Kingdom of God. And they hardly notice it because as they drift, they are accepting themselves just like the Laodicean is pictured. They are not aware because their faith is failing as they drift away, and they are comfortable with what they are.

Please make no mistake, this is a sermon on God's justice. How is God going to judge these people? This is my concern. The Laodicean's nature is selling him on what he calls enjoying life; but in reality, in fact, he enjoys it so much that he is fine with it and is inch-by-inch accepting what he is.

He is a person guilty of a very serious sin; it is called presumption. He is presuming he is all right. How is God going to judge that? What is ever going to shake him up to get him back on track when his own mind, his own heart, is telling him he is doing well? Now this sin, presumption, is a sin in which ignorance of the law, ignorance of righteousness, plays actually only a very small part. Presumption is a sin in which knowledge of what is right is usually available, but the person does not think his own conduct through.

If there is nothing else you get out of this sermon, please make the connection that presumption is a sin in which carelessness plays a very large role. Carelessness produces neglect. The Laodicean should have known better what their actions were revealing. Their lackadaisical approach to spiritual matters and toward their Savior, who died for them, earns His stinging rebuke.

Go back to Leviticus, the book of holiness, and we will see something there. This series of verses all say pretty much the same thing; and I read it so you can see that this presumption is, or can be, widespread.

**Leviticus 4:2** Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them,

Drop down to verse 13—it says exactly the same thing only it is applied to the entire congregation:

**Leviticus 4:13** Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which should not be done, and are guilty;

Drop down to verse 22:

**Leviticus 4:22** When a ruler has sinned, and done something unintentionally against any of the commandments of the Lord his God in anything which should not be done, and is guilty,

Down to verse 27:

**Leviticus 4:27** If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty,

The word *unintentionally* means more than you might think at first. We might first think of it as a sin. It is obvious, in these verses, that what is done unintentionally is a sin, but it is the kind of sin in which a person is very likely to say, "I really did not mean to do that." In other words, it is not deliberate.

That is not wrong; however, it misses much of the point because that conclusion is shallow and broad regardless of anyone's feelings regarding his intent. What he did was still nonetheless sin, and those terms regarding sin in the Old and New Testament mean almost exactly the same things regardless of the testament. They mean to break a law, turn aside, wander, err, to make a mistake, to miss the mark.

Consider the possible effects of such a sin. How many deaths have occurred where the person may say, "I did not mean for that to happen," and yet something very serious occurred? For example, a person is driving along, not concentrating on what he is doing and he drifts, through neglect, into oncoming traffic, smashing into another car and killing the occupant. "I didn't mean to do it," but it happened, though, and somebody ended up dead.

Often that is caused by what? Carelessness caused by neglect of responsibility. Very few people ever actually, deliberately try to do that. We call them accidents. How many people have been killed because one driver's attention was diverted by a cell phone?

What I am getting at here is that just because a sin is unintentional does not mean that it is not serious. This is often a sin of carelessness, impatience, or lackadaisical neglect. It is the careless neglect of a higher priority. Is this what the Laodiceans are doing?

It is the careless neglect of a higher authority, and they are presuming that they are okay. It is a sin of presumption, carelessness; and it is in reality an ignoring of God and very often an ignoring of His laws. This is a sin done with a degree of consciousness, and there is a level of awareness of what one's responsibilities are, and even though not arrogantly and deliberately done, it is done willingly. We just go along with it. These things can be quite serious.

We are getting around to some things that are more specific. The example here in Exodus 20:7, the third commandment, is broad but something we all have to apply to ourselves.

**Exodus 20:7** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Because we have been baptized and received God's spirit, we have taken on the name, *Christian*. We are a son of God, we are a follower of Jesus Christ, and as such we bear, we carry with us everywhere we go, the family name. This is an honor not lightly bestowed. To whom much is given, the more will be required of him.

This is an awesome honor to have the family name of God applied to us, and God warns here in the third commandment that we must not bear that name carelessly, that is, to no good purpose. He says He will not hold us guiltless.

I hope that I am helping to convince us that Christian life is serious because we have been given so much. That name must be borne responsibly in dignified honor to God and to His family, its operations, and its purposes. Can we afford to be negligent in this privileged responsibility? It is right here that the knowledge of God's justice should come into the mind of a Christian, and it does this because the Christian sees God. I do not mean this literally, but rather spiritually in his mind's eye because he knows Him.

There are three words in the Hebrew that appear in the Hebrew text 363 times, and the root of these three words is *tsaddiq*. It originally means stiff, unbending, or straight—straight as an arrow. In a moral context, it means to be right, to make right.

These three words are translated depending upon context as, “just”—Noah was a just man; “righteous”—God is righteous; “righteousness”—the law of God is righteousness; “justify,” “justice,” and interestingly “cleansed.” They all essentially mean, “conforming to a standard.”

A just person or a righteous person is one who does not deviate from a moral standard. They are stiff, strong, straight arrows. A judgment in a legal circumstance is an opinion or decision made based on a standard, usually existing law. In a Biblical context, the standard Himself is God. Lacking that, we have His revealed law as recorded in the Bible; and even if there is no actual statement, we can see His example. The standard of God's judgment is God Himself, His revealed law, and His example. We are beginning to see that God's judgment is made according to what He is, the way He acts, the way He lives, and also His law as well.

Going to Psalms we will see here we are moving slowly but surely into the area of judgment by this God who judges by what He is and by His word. On whom does judgment fall upon?

**Psalm 11:4-7** The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; [listen to what He does] His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. For [for this reason] the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.

Overall, this psalm is telling us God is judging, evaluating what is going on; and one of the major points of instruction in this brief psalm is that though it may seem to men that God has gone off somewhere, and He is not paying attention to what is going on, God is indeed (this is the way we should look at it) very patient and very aware, but He is judging.

The hammer has not fallen yet, but sometimes it does and very dramatically. There are people who believe that God exists and created all things, but they live as though He is not personally managing His creation, but rather that He is following the natural laws He created to do the governing for Him. This Psalm refutes that, as do many, many other scriptures. It is a foolish, careless, presumptuous belief.

Back to the Laodicean. Do you know what Laodicean means? The meaning of the word Laodicean can be taken two ways. On the one hand, it means "judgment of the people," which can be the way the Laodicean is judging, that is, a judgment of the people. How did the Laodicean judge himself? "Hey we're alright; we're okay." On the other hand, that word Laodicean can mean the way Jesus Christ judged the people; and in His judgment, they were falling way, way short. That is a very informative name for that church and shows you the problem with the Laodicean is the way he is judging himself in contrast to the way God is judging him. He is self-deceived, presumptuous.

We are going to look at evidence of the way God can lawfully act if He chooses to do so. I know you are familiar with these things, but I want you to see how thoroughly God revealed His desire, and when He acted, there were absolutely good reasons, maybe a dozen or more good reasons why He acted as He did. Maybe one of the reasons is to shock us as to how closely He is looking at what is going on. This is not to scare us, it is just a reality. Here we are in this book on the holiness of God once again, and this is the way a holy God has every right to act:

**Leviticus 10:1-7** Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: [notice this first line] 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; [can we go near to God? We can go right into His Holy of Holies] And before all the people I must be glorified.' "So Aaron held his peace. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord has kindled. You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

I think that you understand that Nadab and Abihu did not deliberately intend to sin. They did not set out to do it, but look how quickly God reacted. Just like that, His sense of justice sprang forth from Him, and lightning came out from Him and just cooked those poor men. I should not say "poor" because as we are going to see, He was totally justified in what He did.

The one that I really feel sorry for was Aaron because he had to look at that, he and Eleazar; and Moses told them not to even give any indication that they felt sorry this happened. That was a different judgment than was given to the rest of the people. The rest of the people could bewail what happened—the loss of Nadab and Abihu—but because Aaron and Eleazar had been given so much by God, Moses told them they better not show any agreement whatsoever with Nadab and Abihu.

God was totally justified in what He did. That is why Moses said the anointing oil was on their heads; and to whom much is given, the much more is required. God does not require the same thing of everybody. Look what he required of Nadab and Abihu—BANG! and it was over.

If we want to look very closely at God's sense of justice...first of all these two men were the sons of Aaron. and Moses was their uncle. One would naturally think that if anybody in the group of two to three million Israelites had a close relationship with God, it was that family, so that their might be some leeway in God's judgment, but there was not. To whom much is given, much more is required.

The charge against those two men was not that they consorted with prostitutes; there were no human sacrifices, just strange fire. Looking at this more closely, I will give you the scriptures to trace this out yourself. In Exodus 40, the entire chapter is devoted to the final steps for the erection, placing, and use of the tabernacle.

The book of Leviticus begins immediately after the last verse of Exodus 40. There is no break there. God then gives the instruction for the offerings: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and so forth. By the time we get to Leviticus 8, the priesthood was consecrated. Then in Leviticus 9, it even mentions the eighth day, meaning God was counting from the time the tabernacle was erected and only eight days had passed before the priesthood was consecrated; and the priesthood—mark this well—made the first offerings on the altar in front of the tabernacle.

**Leviticus 9:22** Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings.

Notice where this comes in the chapter. They were already offering and already had a fire burning under the brazen altar.

**Leviticus 9:23-24** And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

You can mark down Leviticus 6:12-13. The instruction there is that the fire under the altar was never to be put out. It was continually rekindled from its own ashes. God did not spark that fire under the altar. Aaron and the priests started the fire, not God. When the fire came out from God, it was not to start the fire, it was to signal to all of Israel that He accepted the offering.

Once He did that, what did it do to the fire the priests started? It made it holy. From that point on it was an exceptional fire. Why? Because God Himself had touched that fire. Just like when He was standing with Moses in Sinai, He told Moses to take his shoes off because He said the ground Moses stood upon was holy.

Once God touched that fire with the fire that came from Him, it made the fire different than it ever was before, and it became holy fire. We can see clearly now what Nadab and Abihu did. They put strange fire into that altar, the incense altar as well, and strange fire was simply coal that came from some fire that God had not touched. And you know what happened. This is why God said that those

who come before Him must treat Him as holy. That was the sin; they made a mistake, a very serious presumption, and what they did was to carelessly assume that any old fire would do. God was offended.

That happened only eight days after the building was erected. They did not forget; they were careless. There is a warning there for us. God wants us to treat Him, His word and His law, His example, and each other in a holy way.

The wages of sin is death. What are we getting at here? I will give you an overview of what happened to the family of one very beloved man. That man was David. But even when David did wrong God came down on him like a ton of bricks. You know the story about Uzzah's death. You know who was guilty there? Not only was David, but apparently at least another 100 men were guilty of doing what they did that led to Uzzah's reaching out to touch the ark and BOOM, the lightning came out, and that was the end of Uzzah.

They were treating holy things in the same kind of desecrating manner that Nadab and Abihu did. It was not fire this time; it was the ark, and when he reached out his hand, he assumed, presumed, that his hand was good enough to touch it when God's instruction was very clear that the ark was not supposed to be on a cart.

It was always supposed to be carried by the sons of Kohath and nobody else. God even stipulated that the bars by which the ark was carried were never allowed to be taken out of the rings on the side of the ark so that nobody, but those Kohathites, would ever touch it. That is how strict He was. Even when it was set up inside the Holy of Holies, those wooden poles that were in there to carry it were always mounted and ready to go. God means what He says, always, all the time, every time. He does not beat around the bush. He makes it very clear.

David committed a sin, a double sin: he committed adultery with Bathsheba and deliberately sent the faithful Uriah into battle to his death. God forgave that sin, but what about the severity of God? How much anguish do you think this caused David for the rest of his life? That sin with Bathsheba took place when he was about 30 years old. He lived another 40 years. The first thing that happened was the child of that adulterous union died. Death number one.

Absalom killed Amnon because Amnon had raped his sister Tamar. Then Absalom himself was killed when he revolted against his father David. One son was left, apparently who had visions of the throne, and that was Adonijah. Solomon executed Adonijah whenever Adonijah wanted Abishag to be his wife because he interpreted it, apparently correctly, as nothing but a political move because Abishag had taken care of David.

Are you beginning to get where I am going here? The goodness and severity of God in His judgments... He forgave the sin, but David and his family had to live with God coming down on that family very, very, very hard for at least three generations. Is not that what the law says, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations? God can judge all.

We will conclude by looking at something here so we can finish on a positive note, and we will do it quickly. Remember in Romans 11:22 where the goodness and severity of God is directly mentioned? Now we will go to Romans 11:33, and some aspects of that context continue right on through the following verse, and Paul is thinking about the judgments of God. Notice what he says.

**Romans 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! [God knows what is going on] How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

Brethren, we have grown up in a very permissive culture here in America, and thus we are for the most part almost totally unfamiliar with the tough love God uses with us because He loves us so much and the stakes are so high. He cannot permit Himself to be permissive. God is going to be stern with us because so much has been given to us.

Remember, He always promises He will never give us more than we can bear. That is a promise from Him. But neither is He going to be so easy on us that He is going to overlook the discipline that He needs to give us. He will always be judging fairly. As Paul says, "Oh the wisdom and the knowledge of God!"

Go back to Revelation for a final verse in the final book of the Bible. In Revelation 16, in a little bit different context, this time God is taking it out on the evil in this world.

**Revelation 16:4-7** Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, [all of God's judgments are righteous] the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." [it is fair.]

I will finish with this thought. There is no injustice with God, because God's justice is never divorced from His righteousness. He never condemns the innocent. He never clears the guilty without repentance. He never punishes with undue severity. He always rewards righteousness. His justice is perfect justice.

He does not require absolutely perfect obedience or nobody would make it. He does not always act with justice because sometimes He acts with mercy; and mercy is not justice, but neither is it injustice because injustice violates His righteousness.

Mercy manifests kindness, and grace does no violence to righteousness. God's justice must be considered by those who live by faith. It constantly reminds us that the wages of sin is death, and sin is disloyalty to God. When we enter into the covenant with God, we are pledging our lives to serve Him in gladness and faithfulness in order that He might create us in His image.

With this sermon we will move on to the next element helping us to continuously live by faith, and this is knowing and appreciating, without abusing, God's grace. Doing this begins with understanding God's sense of justice which continually reminds us that the wages of sin is death.