

Living By Faith: God's Grace (Part 1)

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Job 31.

Job 31:1 I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?

Job is beginning here to put down some justifications for all the talking that he did, and all the questions he had been asked by his friends.

Job 31:2-9 For what is the allotment of God from above, and the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is it not destruction for the wicked, and disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps? If I have walked with falsehood, or if my foot has hastened to deceit, let me be weighed on honest scales, that God may know my integrity. If my step has turned from the way, or my heart walked after my eyes, or if any spot adheres to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat; yes, let my harvest be rooted out. “If my heart has been enticed by a woman.

What is he doing here? At first, he is beginning to go over things that he feels he has been accused of by his friends, and he has rejected the idea here in these first nine verses that he did not lust after another woman, that he is not guilty of what we would call today “sensual sin.”

Job 31:13 “If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant when they complained against me, . . .

He has started a section here in which he is saying that he is not guilty of abusing his power. He was a man of some means, and authority as well.

Job 31:16 “If I have kept the poor from their desire, . . .

In this case it is part of the same justification of the accusations that have been made against him.

Job 31:29 “If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, . . .

Here he is answering the charge that he does not care for his enemies, that he just writes them off.

Job 31:35-40 Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark. Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my Prosecutor had written a book! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder, and bind it on me like a crown; I would declare to Him the number of my steps; like a prince I would approach Him. “If my land cries out against me, and its furrows weep together; if I have eaten its fruit without money, or caused its owners to lose their lives; then let thistles grow instead of wheat, and weeds instead of barley.” The words of Job are ended.

Job was not aware of what *we* are aware of contained in the first two chapters of the book of Job, how God, in a way, unleashed Satan on him and Satan was the cause of the troubles that came upon him. Job, of course, was wondering, "What is the answer to all this?" His friends could not adequately answer him. They were full of accusations, and this is what his reply was to all these accusations: "I'm not guilty of those things."

Although Job *was* guilty of something, not a one of them fit what the problem was, because it was something that was not part of their thinking. God was aware, and of course God was still pursuing it, and we know by the end of the book that Job did get the answer, and that he was justified in his responses. He was not perfect, but he was justified in his responses and his so-called friends were very strongly put down by God for all of their accusations against him.

This will play on the remainder of the sermon. Now if it is going to play a major part, I just want you to see that the justification of ourselves in certain situations is certainly justified to some degree, and we have the right to ask God regarding things that are going on in our lives, wondering what the answers are.

In the last sermon we looked at some examples of divine justice, that at the very least have puzzled some. Maybe it is clear now to you, but there have maybe been some questioning, because God's sense of justice seems unusual, so different from what we are accustomed to. I am sure that from what we see in the book of Job that Job was questioning God's judgment of what was happening to him, he never allowed himself to really get into a bad attitude against God; but nonetheless, the questions were there. Was God being just? Was God being fair with Job?

For us, the concept of justice has a notion of fairness or equal treatment directly involved within it. It is almost as though fairness and justice are one and the same thing. Now at first glance it does not seem as though fairness was ever considered by God in His dealings with the examples we gave you last week of Nadab and Abihu, of Uzzah and of others.

"Justice" as defined by *Webster's*, is "the administration or maintenance of what is just." In actual practice it is seen by us as the restoration of equality with law, or family, community, and workplace tradition. That last word is important. It is from this that we get our sense of fairness. Justice balances accounts, and squares things, and thus whenever justice is personalized, we see a picture of a woman with a blindfold on, and this woman is holding in her hand perfectly-balanced scales. Justice is blind, and justice is the restoration of balance in a person's or a community's life.

The English word "just" is defined as "reasonable; conforming to a standard of correctness, or acting in conformity with what is morally upright or good." Synonyms for the word "just" are "fair" and "upright." Now on paper this seems very close to the biblical usage, but it's no cigar, and here is why. The biblical definition of justice is this: "Conforming to a rule or standard." It sounds the same, does it not? However, that must be taken one step further in order to clarify more specifically.

The Bible standard is *God's* own holy character and purpose, not a set of men's laws and community tradition. So that ratchets up the standard of justice considerably. God's holy character is shown throughout His recorded experiences with men, and more specifically, it is stated in laws such as the Ten Commandments, and we must always take into consideration Jesus' magnification of the law as shown in the Sermon on the Mount.

What we are going to do here is begin to build a platform of God's characteristics that will help us to see things a little bit more spiritually. We are going to do this through a series of scriptures so that we can see a level or a standard of God's holy and righteous character as it comes through the Scriptures. I am not going to expound it very much because these scriptures are pretty much self-explanatory.

The very first one of these is in the book of Hebrews, chapter 6. I suggest that you just take the scripture itself, and maybe one word so you can follow the line of reasoning that these scriptures give us.

Hebrews 6:17-18 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

It is impossible for God to lie. We will see this repeated in another scripture. That is important to understand in regard to His judgment, and the hope that we have in us is dependent upon God not lying—ever, for He judges what is going on on earth, and what is going on in our lives.

We are going to go now to Numbers 23. This is very simply and clearly stated.

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

He not only does not lie, but when He says something, He means it, and He carries through with it. So when He makes a judgment, because He does not lie, He really means it, and He is going to carry through with it.

Turn now to James 1:17. I am trying to put these into an order so that we can see that it is telling us a story about the character of God and the judgments that He makes.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

That is pretty clear.

Let us go forward to John 5. I am giving you these so that you will understand that Jesus was a chip off the old block. He was just like the Father.

John 5:19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

In everything! If you see one, you see them both. So when Jesus made judgments, they were just as right as the Father's.

John 5:30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Whether it is the Father or the Son, the judgment is going to be the same. They are one in terms of their mind and the way they see things.

Let us go to Malachi 3:6. This should be something that is in everybody's scriptural vocabulary.

Malachi 3:6 For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

That is a wonderful thing to rely upon. We will also look at Hebrews 13:8, again connecting it to the Son.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We are going to go beyond Hebrews 13:8 to I John 4. In a way this is a capstone for everything that preceded it.

I John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Every judgment of His, besides being *wise*, is also given in love. This has wonderful results for you and me. We will turn to a very familiar scripture in I Corinthians 10. In a sense, this is the way it concludes.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation [no trial] has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Often trials are the result of a judgment that God made regarding us in particular, personally. Every judgment God makes in regard to us personally is going to be one that is common to man, but God says that with the trial He will also make a way of escape so that we are able to bear it. I will tell you—How wonderful that is! Sometimes it puts us into a difficult spot, you might think, because God is judging. “Look what He gave me to do, and I can't do it!” You see, we are calling His judgment into account. Actually, in a way, by the back door, accusing Him of not being fair; but it is impossible for Him to not make a fair judgment. He takes *everything* into account, and in so doing, He removes our justification.

If we are honest, we will see it, and we will meet our failures by picking ourselves up, we might say, and going on and doing it again until we finally get it. He does this all in love. He is constantly urging us to grow and overcome, because He has evaluated us, and He says we can do it. We will find out *why* we can do it as we go on. Do you know what it is? It is grace. It is the single most important factor in our life.

His mind is such that He will not permit us, by His judgment, to trip us up. He is not in any way, shape, or form trying to hurt us or cause us to fail, but rather for us to succeed in growing. Most of the time, brethren, the problem is that we do not trust Him in His judgment of us. You parents especially, in raising your children, know that your children are capable of things, but they want to resist you. “I can't do it!” We can say, “I know better. You *can* do it.” That is the way God is. He knows better.

Every judgment rendered by God is tempered by all that He is, and that is by His holy righteousness, and so the conclusion is, it is impossible for Him to render an unjust, unfair judgment regardless of how that judgment may appear to men. I am sure there was a period of time there that Job felt that life was dealing him something that was unfair; but it was not really, because God was making the judgment, and between Job and God the problem could be met and overcome. As we know, at the end of the book Job finally got it, and he succeeded, and God blessed him.

One reason I went through the Nadab and Abihu episode so thoroughly was to show you that God had every base covered in that judgment, and that came out to, in God's mind, instantaneous death. At a casual glance, it appears to be violent and hasty, but He had them, as we would say today, dead to rights. They were guilty to the *n*th degree. They received then a perfectly righteous judgment because they sinned in carrying that out, and the wages of sin is death.

Now if it were not true, we would have a God who could not be trusted, so how could anybody live by faith? That is why I had to give you those verses. There is no shadow of turning with God. It is impossible for Him not to reach a right conclusion because He has everything covered in our lives as well, so He is utterly incapable of an unholy, unjust, unrighteous act. Now to God, to judge unfairly, He then would have to cease being God.

Let me throw you a curve ball. God does not only act with justice, sometimes He acts with mercy. In fact it is something He very *frequently* does, according to His will. For instance, when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, following Abram's pleas to Him, He acted with justice to all of the other inhabitants of those extremely wicked cities that so offended His tremendous patience. But He acted with mercy to Lot, to Lot's wife, and Lot's daughters who were also sinners. Now they maybe had not sinned to the degree that the other residents of Sodom and Gomorrah had, but they were guilty in terms of being sinners, but He gave them mercy. He did not give the other inhabitants mercy.

So you can begin to come to a conclusion here that mercy is not justice, but neither is it injustice, because injustice would then violate His righteousness, and God always acts according to His holy character, which is total, absolute, pure righteousness.

So mercy, which manifests kindness, goodness, and grace, does no violence to God's righteous standard, and thus we will observe much—*very* much—known justice in God's dealing with men as shown in the Scriptures, but we will *never* ever see injustice in God. Now why? Because His judgment will always be within perfect alignment with His purpose that He is working out. So we have a two-track thing going here.

Now we have to start exploring something else then that fits into this picture. Is God being unfair in His dealings with mankind? Let us consider another string of truths shown in His Word. We will see again, like the first string of truths that I gave you, that these are pretty much self-explanatory, and you will see it in a moment.

First of all, we are asking the question, "Is God unfair with mankind in general?" Not just His children, but with mankind in general. So is God being unfair in His dealings with man? First of all, His overall purpose is given right in the beginning of the Book—the Bible. In fact, in the very first chapter He tells all of mankind what He is doing. He said to His faithful Companion, Jesus Christ, "Let Us make man in Our image." That is what He is doing.

Now the whole story is not there, but He has already revealed why He is creating everything. Mr. Armstrong put it this way: God is reproducing Himself. “Let Us make man in Our image.” Brethren, to make that even clearer, before you actually get to verse 26 of Genesis chapter 1, God has already shown that the animals He had already created were reproducing after their kind. The implication is so obvious in verse 26 that God is doing the same thing that those animals He just created are doing. The animals reproduce themselves. God is reproducing Himself. That is pretty clear. How could He be fairer? But you see, people do not believe that. It is too fantastic. “Aw, He couldn’t be doing that.” But He made it clear that is what He is doing.

The next thing He does, even before we get out of chapter 2, He said, “If you sin, you die.” That is pretty clear. If you sin, you die. We know that the definition of sin is not given exactly right there, but it is in the book. Sin is the transgression of God’s law. It is the transgression of His Word. So even if you get out of the second chapter and you know a little bit more about the Bible, you can fit that in.

From there you take the third step so that we will understand even more clearly. In Exodus 20 He gives the basic foundation of His law—the Ten Commandments. That is Exodus 20. In Exodus 21:15-17, we are warned that striking or cursing parents will result in death.

Again, in Exodus 21:16, He said that kidnapping will earn one the death penalty.

In Exodus 22:19, if one practices bestiality, one dies.

In Exodus 35:2, He issues the death penalty for Sabbath breaking.

Do you see what I am getting at here? God is beginning to break down into smaller and smaller segments what sin is so that man will be apprised.

In Exodus 22:20, if one practices sorcery or sacrifices to a false god, one will die.

In Leviticus 19:8 we learn that if one desecrates a sacrifice, one will die.

In Leviticus 20:2, if one sacrifices a child in the fire, one will die. Today they do it in white laboratories to make it appear sanitary, but it is still the same thing.

In Leviticus 21:9, if one is a priest’s daughter and she plays the harlot, she is given the death penalty.

Now let us jump all the way to sort of an overarching statement that God makes, and what I am showing you here is one reason why He is able to make this statement with very clear affirmation, and we at least understand it. You should understand these and they should be in your scriptural vocabulary.

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, 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.

Because of the things that God has revealed in His Word, He can make this accusation against mankind, and be perfectly righteous in doing it. What men do is up to them. In what we see from the history of mankind, they just do not believe it, but they are without excuse before God.

There is even one more factor, and this is very important.

Romans 2:11-15 For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without [apart from] law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law [that is, having the law] will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles [the nations of the world apart from the Israelitish people], who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them).

So even above all of the things that are written in His Word, God has given mankind a conscience that teaches him by nature what sin is. There are things that men know just by being alive that they ought not do. Now God is faithful. He carries that out to all of mankind, and that is why He can so confidently say, “They are without excuse.”

Now He does not want us to expect converted works from those people, but certainly He expects something far greater than they are willing to give Him.

Some people with a measure of biblical knowledge claim that the God of the New Testament is easier, softer, not as judgmental as the God of the Old Testament. They make this accusation not understanding that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are one and the same Being. He does not change, and that judgment by God that they believe is more evenhanded is potentially even more severe under the New Testament. Now why? Because, in the New Testament, as Jesus was beginning His ministry, He magnified the law to include the spirit. Because God has given *us* His Spirit to enable our understanding and our obedience, this thus makes us more responsible than before this was done.

Part of the blessings of the New Covenant is that God gives us His Spirit, and it makes us more responsible than we were previously. You can see it in Luke 12:48 where Jesus said: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.” We are warned by Jesus Himself, that because we have the Spirit of God, God expects more from us than He did prior to our conversion. That is something we should be greatly appreciative of—very much so—for He has given us greater insight to a greater understanding of, and more strength to enable us to keep His law than we ever had before.

We are going to go back to Genesis 2. We mentioned these scriptures before, but I want us to begin to think now about the way *we* look at things. By “we” I mean His children. Is it possible that we make judgments regarding the things that He says, and that our judgment may not be correct?

Genesis 2:17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Let me ask you a question. You can answer it to yourself. You do not have to shake your head “yes” or “no” or whatever. I just want you to follow my line of reasoning.

When we read verse 17, do we not subconsciously read into what God said, thus perhaps softening the interpretation and the understanding of what He said there by saying to ourselves, perhaps on the basis of what happened with Adam and Eve, “Yes, I believe that, but He doesn’t really mean it. He means that we will *eventually* die”? It is very easy to do that. Very easy, because Adam and Eve did not die immediately, did they? They did not fall over in a heap right before Satan. Do you know why? We have a tendency to soften it, expecting God to not carry through with what He literally said.

Listen now to what I am going to give you. I am going to quote from the *Keil-Delitzsch Commentary*, Volume I, Page 85. I want you to listen, understanding that *Keil-Delitzsch* is a very conservative Protestant commentary. I am trying to be unusually careful by not twisting what God said. Listen to this quote: “Why then did God prohibit man from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, with the threat that as soon as he ate thereof he would surely die?” Do you see what they said that God said? They said that the Hebrew says that God said that as soon as they ate of that tree, they would die. That is exactly what He said.

We are going to move from that very conservative commentary and turn to the *Interpreter’s Bible*, which is one of the more liberal modern commentaries, and see what *it* says regarding Genesis 2:17. This quote is from Volume I, Page 504: “At the same time He was under the necessity of preserving the salient point of the original tale of which the warning of immediate death was one.” Immediate death was one.

There is no mystery here. When God spoke to Adam, God meant immediate death, and He still means immediate death by the statement that “the wages of sin is death.” Sin is not to be taken lightly, and neither is God’s merciful grace to be abused by a casual attitude toward sin and toward His word.

Let me explain a little bit further. We are going to go back to the New Testament, and we are going to let Paul explain this. We were looking at commentaries; now let us let Paul explain it in the book of Ephesians 2. It begins to become clear once we understand the spiritual application of it. Notice the first five words in verse 1.

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

To whom was this letter written? It was written to Christians in a Christian congregation. “And you He [God] made alive.” The only way He could make them alive is that God considered them dead before He made them alive. I want you to consider this because it is God’s judgment that matters, and God considers Christians, before they are converted, as **dead**. “And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

Brethren, when we sinned, we became dead men walking in God’s eyes, and in order for us to *become* alive, we have to be resurrected. We are getting into a technicality here, but it is very important to our conversion that we understand what is going on, because it is God’s judgment that counts. His is the one that matters.

We have to pick up on the understanding, and turn what we understand into following Jesus Christ and the Father with the right understanding. So when we sinned, God made a judgment, and we were dead just as surely as Adam and Eve were dead, and we have to be made alive.

We are going to go back to the book of I John, and we are going to look at a scripture that is important to this regard, because after being baptized we do not live perfectly.

I John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

These are serious words to you and me. God knew of course that we would not live a perfect life even after baptism, even after receiving His Spirit. In other words, He is telling us right off that He expected us to sin, and therefore to bring the death penalty upon ourselves once again. We are seeing plain, clear judgment from God. The reason I am going into this is I want us to see the seriousness of what we are dealing with in terms of sin.

It is true that the blood of Jesus Christ covers us, but these verses are telling us that after we have sinned, we have to acknowledge before God that we have indeed sinned, and once again come under the blood of Jesus Christ. God is fair. He is just. He is loving. He forgives. He gives us grace once again.

As we develop this, you are going to see that grace is constantly flowing from God to us, or we would never make it. But we have to acknowledge before Him in our life, humbling ourselves before Him that this is the truth, and striving with all of our being *not* to sin, not to put ourselves into a position where we once again need the blood of Jesus Christ. But when we *do* sin, to be very thankful for the fact that we can go back to God, and He is merciful and faithful not to carry through with what He can legitimately give us—the death penalty, and raise us, as it were, from the dead once again.

God made this available to you and me because He does not want to lose us, but He does want us to understand the seriousness of sin and what we are putting ourselves into when we live carelessly.

Let us go back to the book of Romans, and we will see why Paul wrote what he did there. We are going back to the place that is more in alignment with Ephesians 2:1.

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Jesus Christ never committed a sin in His life; however, as soon as the sins of mankind were laid upon Him, the death penalty came automatically to Him. And what happened? He was put to death. He died. Now we brought death upon ourselves by our sins. Jesus did not do that, but nonetheless, in order to *pay* for our sins, the Father made the Son experience death for all of mankind, and when He died, He then needed to be resurrected from that death by the power of God the Father Himself raising Him to life again.

In order to impress upon you and me the seriousness of sin, He makes us go through a burial just like Jesus did, only our burial is in water, not in a stone grave or anything like that—but He makes us go through the same thing in type that Jesus went through so that we will never forget: sin kills! If we really love the Son, and if we love the Father, we will strive with all of our being not to bring the death penalty upon ourselves again, but when we do, as we are growing and overcoming, He knows we are going to sin because He knows that we are just men, and our frame is weak. We have good intentions, but we do not always carry through, and so upon repentance He is once again willing, in His mercy, to make a judgment and forgive.

As we begin to understand the seriousness of this, I hope we are coming to understand that because of what we are reading here that our sins are directly against the Father and the Son personally. It is not just some opaque, vague thing. It is Their creation. It is Their law. It is They who gave us life. It is They who called. It is They who gave us their Spirit. The sins are directly against Them. He is counting on His love in us, given to us by His Spirit, to respect them to such a degree that we do not want to bring shame upon Them and Their family, and will fight sin tooth and toenail. He wants us to remember that at our baptism we covenanted with Him to do this very thing.

Romans 6:6-7 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died [spiritually] has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:16-18 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

The sin issue of this judgment by God is so important, that both before and after conversion, God commands that we experience a symbolic water burial, and a symbolic resurrection from it to reinforce the spiritual reality. We must not allow ourselves to grow careless about sin. In a sense, we might say, we are forcing God to make a judgment about us. His judgments are going to be perfect, and His judgments are never going to be injustice. But sometimes He very graciously gives us non-justice, which is grace, and that non-justice never in any way violates His righteousness. Why? Because He is working out His purpose in our life.

So God is not a hard-head at all. He wants to see us succeed, and He feels for us with a love that is so much deeper than we can even begin to imagine when He very quickly forgives, and we can go on.

Just to give you another little proof that we were dead, Jesus said—(and I know that you know this is true)—“Let the dead bury the dead.” Let those who are spiritually dead bury those who are physically dead. That is what He meant. That is the way *we* were before God called us. Before God granted us repentance, converted us, and gave us His Spirit, we were among the living dead.

It is God's judgment and His conclusion that matters to us. We want to make sure that we carry through on our responsibility.

The term for understanding grace has led some people in the more emotional Protestant fellowships to extol God's grace to amazing heights. They write stories and poems about it, and some of these are

even set to music. Probably the most popular and best-known one in our time here is “Amazing Grace.” That song reaches into the stratosphere of popular music in terms of being recognized and appreciated to some degree despite the fact that almost everybody recognizes it as a religious song. Even to them—the unconverted—God’s grace is amazing because they are able to understand it to a degree, in many cases maybe better than we do.

Now how may we be able to get a greater measure of value of appreciation for God’s grace so that it truly adds to *our* motivation to glorify God by living by faith? I think one way is by meditating upon what I intended to say as my final statement in my previous sermon. What I intended to say I kind of mangled it a bit. I got part of it right, but when I looked at it afterwards I said, “Uh oh! I’m going to find a way to go over that again.” What I said was this: Not until we have grown in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ to the place where we are thoroughly humbled, and understand to a high degree that what God is fully justified in doing to us, can we appreciate God’s grace.

Now what was God fully justified in doing that is so important to us in this series of sermons? If He wanted to, at any time brethren, He could do to us what He did to Nadab, Abihu, Uzza, and a host of others—just blast us out of existence until we were nothing but a grease spot on the ground. He has the goods on us the same way He had the goods on them. He was fully justified in doing what He did to them, so that there was no injustice in what He did.

We are guilty before Him to a degree that maybe would have put them to shame, but because in His mercy He has decided to work with us, to help us to overcome, to choose us to be in His family, He has restrained Himself according to His will to allow us to grow, to understand, and begin to act more and more like His Son. You have heard the saying, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” That is exactly where we are. It is a good place to start.

Let me give you another series of scriptures. I want us to see this, because it is not as though this is hanging over our head, but it is a reality that we have to deal with. I think we should be satisfied that God is not trying to get rid of us. He could do it at any time because He has the goods, but He has determined not to because He has other plans for us. He wants us to succeed and grow and overcome. Why, brethren? Because it is to *His* glory if we do!

We will see more of that as we go along, and when we come to understand that it is the glory of God that matters in this world—nothing else—and He wants us to be His glory. Out of the blue He decided to give us this opportunity. We have nothing to do with it. In our saner moments we can see that. We have nothing to do with it.

Here is something that we needed, and kind of have a part of our thinking so that we can continue on and grow and overcome in the right kind of appreciation.

We are going to go again to the book of Hebrews once again.

Hebrews 6:5-6 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

What is Paul saying here? He is saying that we can fall from the grace of God. It can be done. It is not in God’s will that we do so, but it can be done.

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot.

How does one do that? One does that by accepting the blood of Jesus Christ, having one's sins forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, become a servant, a slave of Jesus Christ, and then turn on Jesus Christ and is disloyal to Him, and tramples Him underfoot. Paul would not say this if it were not true. People do that. They turn their back on their Savior.

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Have you ever wondered what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is? We are going to see it now very clearly in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 12:31 "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is that against the spirit which is being given by God to us by which we are able to discern God's truth which we are able to use in growing and overcoming, and then turn on Jesus Christ and blaspheme the very spirit by which God made us His children. That is it. That will not be forgiven. Here is what happens when a person does that. It is spelled out so clearly to us by what happened to those people 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.

The only way a person can depart from God is to be part of God's family, have received His Spirit, and then turn his back. Then what happens to your mind? You cease to believe. You lose your faith.

Hebrews 3:18-19 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Now *we* believe. We have not been lost. But you see, there is a progression that Paul shows. People can fall from grace. A chain of events begins to happen as they begin to turn away. They begin to turn in their loyalty to Jesus Christ until the blood of the covenant means nothing to them, and they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit which God gave them to make them His children. The end result is they are incapable of faith. Salvation is by grace through faith. Those people can never live by faith, and if they cannot live by faith, there is no way they can please God. They will not be in His Kingdom.