

## God's Sense Of Justice

### God's Perfect Judgment

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We are going to begin this sermon in the book of Daniel:

**Daniel 7:9-10** I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

We read these verses in the midst of a context about "the beast." This particular verse deals with the hundreds of thousands of angelic beings assembled before God to witness a solemn judgment. Of course it is going to be the judgment on "the beast." All the arrangements have been made. One translation I read said, "The court was set." Everything was ready to go forward, and so all the arrangements for judgment had been made, and the judgment commenced whenever the books were opened.

Let us go to Daniel 12. Here the judgment is a bit further advanced.

**Daniel 12:1** At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.

If that last phrase was not in there, one would be within one's right to think that every Israelite is going to escape. No, only those who are written in the book. Again, I want you to see that judgment is proceeding.

The Judge is represented there in Daniel 7:10 as having before him a record of all the deeds on which the judgment is to be pronounced. Within the context of Daniel 7, the judgment is not of the entire world at that point in time, but of the beast in preparation for the transference of power to the Son of Man and His saints. If you would read all of chapter 7 you would see that.

In Daniel 12, this scene here is both a warning to those of us who are reading it not to allow oneself to get caught up in this judgment, and at the same time it is an encouraging promise to the saints of deliverance from the execution of the judgment referred to in Daniel 7.

In Daniel 12, with one exception, the scene is expanded to include the entire world, not just the beast power. So within the context of the book of Daniel, time has progressed. It is not just the beast; it is everybody.

Go now to Jeremiah 30.

**Jeremiah 30:4-6** Now these are the words that the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah. "For thus says the LORD: 'We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child?'

This is not just anybody, but a *man*. Did such a thing ever occur in the history of mankind, that a man would travail in birth? It never happened. But this is God's illustration through Jeremiah of what a unique time that we are looking at here within this context.

**Jeremiah 30:6** 'Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale?'

Everybody is scared spitless, as we say. The mouth is dry, and fright is written on the visage of every person.

**Jeremiah 30:7** 'Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it. . . .

Daniel said there is never a time since there has been a nation on earth that is like this time that begins to unfold in Daniel 7 and carries on through to the end of the book of Revelation.

**Jeremiah 30:7** . . . and it is the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.'

There is a little bit of encouragement there. We will not go to other verses that indicate that maybe only about ten percent of Jacob shall be saved out of it.

The Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, leading up to the return of Jesus Christ, is going to be the most violent, bloody, and destructive period of time man has ever gone through by the Bible's own proclamation, and God's Word is true. Whenever mankind lived, *nobody* has ever had to experience what is right now probably just a few years away from our lives.

In this prophecy the focus is on Israel and Judah, but the calamity, as we can find from Daniel 12 and many other places, is going to impact on all of mankind.

Turn now to Jeremiah 48. I want you to see that this prophecy is against Moab. Who in the world is Moab on the world scene? They are almost a nobody. We know that these are today the people of Jordan. But is Jordan a major nation? Are they really impacting on the world scene at all? They are in a strategic location for sure, but the reason I chose this verse is because really Jordan, or Moab, is just a tiny insignificant nation compared to the United States, compared to the East, compared to Russia, compared to China, compared to India. Who in the world is Jordan? They are insignificant, but that is just the point. All nations are going to get caught up in this. Now notice what he says.

**Jeremiah 48:1-8** Against Moab. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel" "Woe to Nebo! For it is plundered, Kirjathaim is shamed and taken; the high stronghold is shamed and dismayed [These are cities.]—no more praise of Moab. In Heshbon they have devised evil against her: 'Come, and let us cut her off as a nation.' You also shall be cut down, O Madmen! The sword shall pursue you; a voice of crying shall be from Horonaim: 'Plundering and great destruction!' "Moab is destroyed; her little ones [the

children] have caused a cry to be heard; for in the Ascent of Luhith the ascend with continual weeping; for in the descent of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction. Flee, save your lives! And be like the juniper in the wilderness. For because you have trusted in your works and your treasures, you also shall be taken. And Chemosh [their god] shall go forth into captivity, his priests and his princes together. And the plunderer shall come upon every city; and no one shall escape."

Is God paying attention to the sins of everybody, of even little nations? They are going to get caught in it, and they are going to be wiped out.

**Jeremiah 48:8-9** "The valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as the LORD has spoken. Give wings to Moab, that she may flee and get away; for the cities shall be desolate, without any to dwell in them."

Notice this curse in verse 10. This curse is against the destroyers that God has commissioned to destroy Moab [Jordan].

**Jeremiah 48:10** "Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood."

God has something against Moab. We find out later, if we would read, about their pride.

Go now to the book of Revelation as we continue to lay the foundation here. We go from a very tiny insignificant nation to one that is very great in terms of economic, political, and military power—Babylon.

**Revelation 18:1-5** After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

**Revelation 18:21-24** Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. [Babylon shall be completely wiped out, never to exist again.] The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman, of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of the bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were great men of the earth; for by your sorcery all nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

**Revelation 16:16-21** And they gathered them together to a place called in the Hebrew, Armageddon. Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air; and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises, and thunderings, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since the plague was exceedingly great.

Even right up to the very end, mankind is still blaspheming God. Are we hardheads, or what? How much does it take to convince mankind that there is a God in heaven who requires of men that they live up to the standards that He has set before them?

There is a kind of a backlash that comes from people reading verses of this nature. I know that they do not understand, but I want us to understand. I want us to understand that this sort of violence and death, all this description of these things that God so freely gives in His Word, brings God's judgment into question in the minds of men, because in their minds God can hardly be described as merciful, let alone be dispensing justice on a daily basis.

Are the accusations true? Is God sadistic and unreliable in His judgments, in His handling the affairs of mankind? Is He spiteful? Is He harsh? Is He impatient? Is He quick-tempered? Does He expect too much? Is mankind too uninformed to be held accountable to a degree end-time prophecies clearly reveal?

All these questions have their basis in assumption. The assumption is that mankind does not have a chance, that God's judgment is essentially unfair because He has not made an effort to reveal Himself enough, to an extent that mankind is caught in a "Catch 22" situation—between a rock and a hard place—in the use of his free moral agency.

Is there justification for this complaint that God is unfair and that He is harsh? Has God hidden Himself and His desires regarding what He requires of mankind to such a degree that He cannot righteously impose judgments for mankind's rebellious behavior?

Let us lay a foundation here regarding God's judgments and how they occur, and what their basis is, and whether He really is free to righteously do what He has said very plainly, since the Bible was written, is going to be the course of mankind and His relationship with them when we approach the end.

Go now to Genesis 2.

**Genesis 2:15-17** Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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."

Like virtually every other pattern in God's Word, the pattern of God's judgment is also shown in the book of Genesis, and has its beginning in this very simple circumstance. God clearly instructed Adam and Eve what He expected. There was no indication that He was expecting them to obey His Word in the spirit, as the New Testament requires.

**Genesis 3:1-3** Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

There is contained here something that is very interesting regarding Eve's response to what Satan said. She was careless with what God's command revealed. The first thing she did was she left out the word "freely," indicating right off the bat that within herself there were restrictions on these things. That is not what God said. "You can eat *freely* of anything except the one tree." So she left out the word *freely*. Then she also left out the word "all" as well. In Genesis 3:3 she added, "You shall not touch it."

You see the principle that is born here: "You shall not add, or you shall not take from God's word." In the very first sin that was ever committed, that is what happened. She added things, and she took things away from God's command. There is the pattern. This is the way we judge what God says. We subconsciously, in many cases, add to or take away from what He says, and *that* is *our* standard, not God's standard. She had already changed the standard of judgment, and of course that led her into sin.

Adam and Eve could not even keep the simple commandment that He gave in its letter. I want you to notice: He informed. They sinned. And He judged. There is the pattern. God always follows that pattern. He always informs people. As we are going to see, even the heathen are informed. Those He has called into His own church are informed better than anybody else, but everybody on earth is informed enough for God to judge.

**Genesis 4:3-7** And in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you shall rule over it."

From these verses it is very clear that they were instructed regarding the offerings. Abel simply followed God's instructions. Cain did not. Look at verse 7 again, and then we are going to look at verse 13 because we want to see Cain's reaction.

**Genesis 4:7** "If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

How can good and bad be judged unless He instructed them? They *knew* what was good. They *knew* what was bad. Abel did what was good, but Cain, like his mother before him, shifted gears a little bit and substituted his own thinking regarding what would be acceptable to God. Verse 13 gives Cain's reaction. He was angry.

**Genesis 4:13** And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment [judgment] is greater than I can bear!"

Again, God informed. Cain disobeyed. God judged. The pattern is followed. So it was Cain then, representing mankind, who was *unjustly* angry at God's judgment. In his eyes, he had become victimized by God. Thus we already see two patterns developing. First, God lets mankind know what He expects. His expectation is not even to the level of the New Covenant. At most it is the level of the Old Covenant. Secondly, mankind disobeys, and then feels unjustly treated in God's judgment.

Go now to Romans 1. A great deal of time has gone by from Genesis 2, 3, and 4, but we find that conditions have not changed.

**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 [or to 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.

Is God unfair to those at the end time? The wrath that is expressed here in verse 18 is not the judgments of Revelation. It is not the judgments of Daniel 7, or Daniel 12, but rather God's reaction to mankind's sinfulness as history moves along toward those final judgments given in the book of Revelation. In other words, these are simply the day-to-day things that we see occurring in life in which God has judged in some way, and brought some kind of calamity on mankind.

I chose these verses because even though all mankind is caught within Paul's statements here in Romans 1, they are primarily aimed at the supposedly uninformed Gentiles. Did you see what God said? This is aimed at the Gentiles. "*They* suppress the truth in unrighteousness." How can you suppress something that you do not know? The very fact that they are able to suppress truth shows that there are people who *know* the truth, but they do not deliver that truth to other people maybe in detail, and God's truth is suppressed.

Not only that, verse 19 says: "what may be known of God is *manifest* [is evident] to them, for God has *shown* it to them." This begins to get God directly involved in the instruction, and the instruction is primarily about the creation. God is shown here bringing it to the Gentiles' knowledge. They therefore have the opportunity then to suppress it. He gives them insight into His creation from which they ought to be able to think without any difficulty at all that there is a God in heaven who is Creator, and to whom they have to answer.

Paul reaches the conclusion that nobody, anywhere, at any time in history, is able to righteously accuse God of not giving them enough light to meet His judgment. So from the time of Adam and Eve on, Paul was saying that people have had enough for them to understand that there is a God to whom they are under obligation in terms of obedience. Even from observation of the creation there is enough there to hold them guilty. *Everybody* is under obligation to obey the Creator.

Is it fair that God should be accused because men do not stop to think on these things? If He has made it available, and they do not think on them, and they do not make use of it, whose fault is that? God is clear of any accusation, because He has made these things available. It is man's fault, but man's nature has the proclivity to turn himself into a victim. If he is cast in that light as the victim,

then you see, he is clear in his own eyes, and it is God's fault. How nicely human nature turns the tables. Really interesting.

After giving this list of all of these horrible sins, he says of those committing them:

**Romans 1:32** Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who commit such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

That is pretty clear. They *know* the judgment of God. Let us continue on in Romans 2.

**Romans 2:1-2** Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

Paul has shifted gears here, and he is now addressing the self-righteous moralistic Jews who are always finding fault with everybody else's behavior. He charges them with being inexcusable in what *they* do, because they have received far more light than the Gentiles, and yet they still sin.

What God is doing here is showing that regardless of what He does, men sin anyway. We could go all the way back to the beginning again with Adam and Eve, and there He was in person, standing before them—God, their Creator! How much plainer could He make Himself known to anybody but to stand right before them, saying, "I just created you out of the dirt here, and here you stand in this beautiful garden I have given to you, and you can freely eat of everything in here except for this one tree." They are without excuse.

So whether God reveals Himself through the creation, which Romans 1:19 shows that He is involved to the Gentiles, they still sin. When God codifies His law and speaks from Mount Sinai, and hands it to people through His servant Moses, they sin anyway. We are rascals. In fact, some of the sins of the Jews are of equal gravity to anything that the so-called uninformed Gentiles are guilty of. There is in us this tendency to turn ourselves into victims, and at the same time be too severe in our judgment of others who might be guilty of somewhat other things, but not guilty of the ones we are guilty of. We somehow feel we are better than they.

A real good example of this is David. Do you remember when Nathan came to David, and Nathan told David this story about the man who had the one beautiful little sheep, and the rich man came along and took it? What was David's reaction? This is David the sinner. David the adulterer. David the murderer. David said, "That man ought to be put to death." How quickly he forgot his own sin, and pointed the finger at others. That is what the Jews were guilty of here—the same kinds of sins of David. They were inexcusable. They had more light than the Gentiles, and yet they were doing the same things, and worse than the Gentiles, even though they had the light.

**Romans 2:11** There is no partiality with God.

Whether the Gentiles or the Jews understood the certainty of God's judgment at all, His judgment is according to truth regardless of who is doing the sinning. Wealth, rank, office, gender, appearance, ethnicity will not sway God one inch. God executes righteous judgment according to character and conduct always, forever and ever. There is no respect of persons with God.

**Romans 2:12-16** For as many as have sinned without law [apart from the law] will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in 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 the Gentiles, 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) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

The inference that is made to "law" in verses 12 and 13 is to the divine law that is primarily the Torah, and those "without law" are the Gentiles. What Paul means here is God never gave it to them in a codified form in the way that He gave it to the Israelitish people. Those "in the law" are the Jews, and Paul is showing that God takes into consideration what a person has been given, and that is why it is a bad idea to do any judging.

Let us continue on this thought for just a minute. We are going to turn to Luke 12. I just want to pick up a principle here.

**Luke 12:45-47** "But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and to be drunk, the lord of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his lord's will, . . .

Think of this in terms of the Jews there in Romans 2. Think of this in terms of *you* who certainly ought to be much better informed than the Jews that Paul was speaking of there in Romans 2, because he was speaking of those who were unconverted but still had access to the law, because in its codified form it had been given to them from God.

**Luke 12:47-48** . . . and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know [The Gentiles; they did not get it in a codified form.], yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much more will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

That principle there is pretty much self-explanatory in terms of God's judgment. You combine this with Romans 2:11, that God judges without respect of persons. However we can understand that God does take into consideration the knowledge that people have so that His expectation level of some is much higher than it is for others. So His expectation level for you and me is going to be very high compared to the expectation level that He had for the unconverted Jews of whom Paul was speaking there in Romans 2, and exceedingly higher than the Gentiles there in Romans 2, who have not the law.

God is fair in His judgment. He does not require of anybody, at any time in history, more than they are capable of delivering, and everybody is held in judgment, because everybody has some knowledge of Him. They may not have the specific details of His purpose, but everybody comes under that judgment, and He is going to judge them fairly regardless of who they are. His judgment, as we will see, will be according to righteousness.



I mentioned before that because we understand this principle, it gives us good solid reason why we should never judge ourselves against another person, because the amount that they have been given by God is *unknown* to us, and we may think their obedience is really at a low level when in reality it is right at the level, or may be exceeding the level that God expects of them, because He knows what He has given them, and what they do not have. What you may have been given might be exceedingly higher, and much more is being required of you than was ever required of them.

Go back now to Romans 2 again.

**Romans 2:13** For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the will be justified.

In practical application, what this means is this: Regardless of who a person is, whether he is a converted person, an unconverted Jew, an unconverted Israelite, or an unconverted Gentile, *everybody* must keep God's law to the extent of their knowledge. When I say "law," I am not speaking specifically of the Ten Commandments, but that is included within it. I am using *law* in the sense of the word *Torah*, which literally means *instruction*—God's instruction—which of course includes the law, includes the Ten Commandments.

Regardless of who they are, whether they are Gentile or Israelite, whether they are converted or unconverted, God is going to judge those people to the extent of their knowledge. This is especially aimed at the Jews, though, because their religious boast was they had knowledge of God, they had a relationship with God. Paul is arguing, "What good is it if one has His instruction but doesn't keep it?" No good at all.

There is a little bit more than an implication here. It comes from Leviticus 18.

**Leviticus 18:5** 'You shall therefore keep My statutes, and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.'

I am sure that the Jews understood this, and that is, in order for a person to receive eternal life by lawkeeping, he would have to keep the law perfectly, sinlessly, because it says there, "If you keep the law, you shall live in it." It is implying *eternally*.

The importance of this to us is that this verse is the very first inkling in the book of Romans of the subject of *grace*. He does not mention it here, but anybody understanding verse 13 (knowing that they have sinned, they have not lived up to the law perfectly), [would say] "How can you be justified by lawkeeping?" See, it plays a part, but everybody knows that they are going to fall short of the glory of God if they understand that verse at all.

**Romans 2:14** For when Gentiles, 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.

Again, these verses are God's declaration that nobody, regardless of who they are, or how basic it might be, is without some knowledge of God's law. It is also God's declaration, when you come to understand it, that there is a *natural law*.

I do not know whether you remember that when the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas were underway, he was asked whether he believed in natural law. You need to

understand a little bit about Clarence Thomas' background. Clarence Thomas was reared very strictly as a Catholic. He attended Catholic schools. He went to Catholic universities. He understands a great deal about biblical law, and when he was asked, "Do you believe in natural law?" he answered, "Yes," and a furor broke out because all the liberals on the left want to hide behind ignorance of the law. When Clarence Thomas said that, they knew he was declaring before them that ignorance is a mighty skinny path to pursue.

God is saying through Paul that though the Gentiles may not have the law revealed to them in written codified form, that merely by observation and experience they had a considerable knowledge of God. For instance, they knew that it is wrong to murder. They knew that one should honor his parents. They knew that one should remain chaste. They knew the importance of honesty, of dealing justly with one another within their communities.

They did not understand about idolatry, and they did not have the details of many things, but they understood the basics of human relationships which are very close to the things that God requires in His Word. They learned it simply by experience. They learned it by observation. They learned it, as we would say today, by reading books. They learned it, because God revealed it to them. He brought it to their mind, and so they were meeting, in many cases, the very things that God requires in His Word.

You know that is true today. There are Gentile nations which exceed the United States of America in morality. Where did they get it from? They learned that it works. *Natural law*. They apply them better than we do. Those kinds of people really despise the American culture that is flooding into their nations through things like television and movies, because it is corrupting and destroying their culture that was built not upon God, not upon His Word, but maybe Buddhism, or Shintoism, or Taoism, or Hinduism.

They thumb their noses at Americans who have "the Word," who have "the Book," and yet we are shipping these things all over the world. They are more moral than we are in things that count. We murder more people in New York City, in Los Angeles, and in places like that than whole nations like Japan do in a year's time.

Paul gives us proof of this, which is the Gentiles' reaction to sin in their consciences to the conduct that God calls sin. They do not call it sin. But you see, when they do sin, and somebody like Paul would recognize it as a sin, their conscience tells them they just did something wrong. They make accusations of one another, whether it be in court, or whether it just be on the street, or whatever, of sinful conduct. They do not know it is sin, not the way a Jew or an Israelite would know it is sin. They do not know it is sin, but they know it is wrong. Their conscience is telling them that it is wrong.

He means then that when the Gentiles do well in accordance with conduct God calls righteousness in their relationships with fellow man, that even though they do not know God's revealed law, nonetheless they feel good about themselves, and when they do evil in similar situations, they feel guilty. And so Paul says this is proof that they have knowledge of God's law.

Let us go back to verse 12, and we are going to jump right to verse 16.

**Romans 2:12** For as many as have sinned without law [apart from the law, the Gentiles] will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law [the Jews] will be judged by the law.

**Romans 2:16** In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

We are back to the end times again. So mankind has no basis for an honest complaint, and feeling like an unjustly treated victim.

**Romans 3:23** For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.

Nobody is totally ignorant. Not one single person other than Jesus Christ has ever lived up to the level that they *know*. Do you understand what I mean there? We know a level that is higher than most of the people on earth know, but we are not living up to it either! And so the judgment has to be that nobody is living up to the level they do know. Whatever that level is, everybody is falling short of what they know.

We are going to go back to the book of Proverbs and pick up what I feel is a shocking verse.

**Proverbs 8:34-36** "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."

Wisdom in this chapter is personified as a woman. Really what we are looking at here is Jesus Christ described as "wisdom." But we do not want to get the figures too much mixed up. We will just deal with wisdom as it is here. Wisdom is essentially the right application of God's law, of God's way, to our lives. We might say wisdom is the right application of the knowledge of God. The basic message of God's Word is that doing right produces life, both as to quality and to length. Now this is a generality, but it is nonetheless true. When we fail to do right, i.e., wisdom—doing what is wise in making right application—we are showing by our conduct that in reality we love death rather than life. Chew on that for a while.

Perhaps we do not follow through doing what is right because "right" is fuzzy to us, and because we do not have a clear understanding of what is right. Perhaps we do not follow through because wisdom is formidable, just as surely as the tall strong people of Canaan with their fortified cities were formidable to the Israelites. What was wisdom in that case?

What was wisdom when Joshua and Caleb came back with the report, along with the other ten, and the other ten told all these stories about these giants that were in the land and how great their fortified cities were? Who had wisdom? Joshua and Caleb, or the other ten? You know the answer to that. Joshua and Caleb had the wisdom because they said, by faith, "Our God will fight for us, and these formidable people will just be bowled over like so many ten pins!" (I am paraphrasing, of course.)

But what did their fellow Israelites do? They did not choose wisdom, which would have been to follow their faith. They instead chose to not go into the land, and what happened to them? Every single one of them died. They loved death rather than life. They loved death rather than wisdom. This

is the principle that is here, because they drew back in fear and did not go into the land, throwing aside faith in God. Instead they ended up dead a couple of days later.

There may be other reasons, but in the end Solomon says that those who cast aside wisdom love death rather than life. That is sometimes a very shocking reality to come to grips with. Do you know what this comes down to? Bad choices make us our own executioner. "The soul that sins, it shall die." Who chooses to sin? We do. We love death rather than life. And when we do that, God's judgment is executed in our death. Did He force us into that? Of course not. We made the decision. He gave us the choice, and He gave us the knowledge. He commanded. We sinned. We die. The judgment comes.

We are going to look at another shocking sequence, and I know that it is one that you are somewhat familiar with. Turn to Leviticus 4, and we can see an example of the way that God can judge. I want to go through this whole sequence so that you will see that He was exceedingly fair, supremely fair, in what He did.

**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 . . .'

**Leviticus 4:13** 'Now if the whole congregation of Israel sin unintentionally . . .'

**Leviticus 4:22** 'When a ruler has sinned, and done something unintentionally. . .'

**Leviticus 4:27** 'If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD . . .'

**Leviticus 5:15** "If person commits a trespass, and sin unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the LORD, then he shall bring to the Lord for his trespass . . ."

This word unintentionally has more included here than might meet the eye at first glance. It can also include *turning aside, wandering, to err, to make a mistake, to miss the mark*. The person misses the real objective in life, which is to obey God and be holy as God is holy, but the person who sins like this is not presumptuous. Understand that. *He is not presumptuous*.

This kind of sin includes sins done with a degree, though, of consciousness and awareness of what one is doing. He is doing something that is being done willingly, with knowledge, but out of weakness. This does not include sins that are done deliberately, premeditatively, and presumptuously.

Just as an example, the Bible clearly differentiates between manslaughter and murder. With manslaughter, a person dies, but it was unintentional. The ax head flew off the handle and hit the person in the head and he died. An automobile careens out of control for some reason, and somebody accidentally dies. But murder has a measure of premeditation, of lying in wait, of planning to do it.

In the Old Testament, to act presumptuously means to act arrogantly, rebelliously, with audacity, to be headstrong in sinful conduct. It refers to those who overstep their bounds, or dare to act in a disobedient manner. In the New Testament it means to think, or suppose, to deal proudly, defiantly, to go on recklessly, to look down upon.

That series of verses in Leviticus just forms a little bit of a foundation.

Go now to Exodus 40. We are dealing with a sin very interesting here.

**Exodus 40:1-2** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting."

**Exodus 40:17** And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up.

Here they are, just entering into the second year. They have thirty-nine more years to go in the wilderness.

**Exodus 40:33-34** And he [Moses] raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

**Exodus 40:38** For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

The implication of all this is that God was right there in their midst in the camp. The book of Leviticus follows right on the heels of what happened right here. In Leviticus, chapter 1 through chapter 7 verse 37 give the sacrifices and offerings that had to be made.

**Leviticus 7:37** This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, of the trespass offering, the consecrations, and the sacrifice of the peace offering.

In Leviticus 8 we have the consecration of Aaron and the priesthood. Do you see what is going on? Everything is being put in order so that the Israelites could worship God in the wilderness according to His directions. The details that God gives are very specific and very expressive.

In Leviticus 9, the priesthood makes its first offering. As they were making the first offering,

**Leviticus 9:24** 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.

They were scared! And they fell on their faces in fright and reverence to what they just witnessed. I want to impress this upon you. Nothing was hidden by God from these people.

**Leviticus 6:12-13** And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.

That fire probably shot out right from the tabernacle door, and it lit the fire on the brazen altar. That fire from that point on became *holy* fire, because a fire from the holy God lit it. They had express instructions: "*It shall never go out.*" And as long as it burned it was holy fire.

**Exodus 30:7-9** Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.

This is a little vignette about the incense altar which was inside the first room of the tabernacle. It stood right in front of the veil that separated the first room from the second room. Every day, morning and evening, the high priest had to go in and put incense on that fire.

**Leviticus 16:12-13** Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die.

There are two things there. The incense represents the prayers of the saints. The incense went up and it filtered through the veil, and went into the holiest of all places that is right before the throne of God. But that fire on the incense altar inside the first room could only have in it coals that were taken from the brazen altar that God lit with the holy fire that came out of the tabernacle door, and lit it on the very first offering that they made.

Go now to Leviticus 10. I want you to see that this falls right after verse 24 when the fire came out. Chronologically it could not help but have happened shortly after.

**Leviticus 10:1-3** Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, and 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, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; . . .

Brethren, please pay attention to these words: " *I must be regarded as holy* by those who come near Me." That includes us. These men did not sanctify God by being obedient to His command. They offered "profane fire."

**Leviticus 10:3-7** . . . and before all the people I will be glorified." So Aaron held his peace. Then 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 or 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.

First of all, I want you to think to whom this happened. Whom did it happen to? It happened to Aaron's sons. Now you would think that God would give some leeway. After all, he was Aaron. He was the high priest. He was the brother of Moses, the man who talked with God face to face, and you would think there would be some leeway in the judgment. No, there was not any leeway in the judgment. God held them responsible for what they did. They did not do things the way He said, and

this happened almost immediately after what He had just instructed them in with very great detail, with very great care, and they did it wrong.

They did not sanctify Him before the people. They did it wrong, and God reacted swiftly and violently, wiping them out on the spot. There were no temple prostitutes there like in the pagan religions. There were no human sacrifices that they did. Just *profane fire*. Well, God's reaction allowed no time for a trial. There was a summary execution right on the spot. A supernatural judgment, and the Old Testament God who did that was Jesus Christ. The God of the New Testament summarily executed these people because they did not follow the directions that they were so clearly given.

Aaron undoubtedly was very greatly displeased and shocked, and the brothers too. Eleazar and Ithamar were undoubtedly shocked as well. Humanly, they went right to Moses to get this matter straightened out. Well, Moses gave them God's answer. Do you know what God's answer was in plain language? "Don't you dare mourn." That is what He meant. "Don't take your hat off and throw dust on your head." Moses told them, "Don't you show any agreement with what Nadab and Abihu have done." The implication is very strong from what Moses said. They got what they deserved.

There are at least five possibilities why they were guilty. 1) The coal was not taken from the brazen altar. 2) They made the offering at the wrong time of day. 3) No one except the high priest was permitted to carry out this responsibility. 4) They were intoxicated, as verses 8 and 9 give somewhat of an implication. 5) It could have been any combination of the first four. There might have been several things involved there.

Like Adam and Eve, they added to or subtracted from what God said, and they died. They tried to get by with what they carnally felt was acceptable. They loved what they did better than God's instruction, and therefore they loved death. And so God killed them as a witness to you and me. "I will be sanctified," He says, "by those who come before Me." And that means us.

There is another thing here that we will not go into, and that is that holiness begins to be defined for you and for me. Holiness takes on a moral tone to it in terms of obedience. Morality is obedience to the Word of God, to the law of God. They did not follow through. They were immoral in what they did. Those who serve God and are going to sanctify Him are those who are moral in their service of God. They follow God's instructions.

Now look at this. There was no ambiguity of instruction. Each step and each instrument in the process was designed to teach certain spiritual concepts. They had been completely instructed, and were blatantly twisting the teaching of God, and it says that Aaron remained silent because he knew the judgment was correct.

You can tie this incident to I Peter 2, where Peter says that we are a royal priesthood. Paul says in Romans 12:1-2 that we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, and God will be glorified, sanctified, by those, His children, who are moral in the carrying out of their responsibilities.

In Acts 5 you can read the account of Ananias and Sapphira. The same God who cut down Nadab and Abihu was the same God who cut down Ananias and Sapphira. They knew better. They lied about what they did with the money. They paid with their lives. They loved death rather than life, and so they chose to do the wrong things.

These examples of divine justice may even anger or offend our sense of fairness, and at the very least sometimes they are difficult to understand in the face of all the teachings that we receive from this world about how merciful and patient God is. But the reason that we have difficulty is we do not understand four vitally important biblical concepts. Those four are: 1) holiness, 2) justice, 3) sin, and 4) grace.

We do not fully understand what holiness is. We do not appreciate it. We do not fully understand what justice is. We do not fully understand sin's sinfulness, nor do we fully understand or appreciate grace. I cannot exclude myself from this evaluation. Every single one of us has been warped by this world's injustice.

Before we can understand divine mercy we have to understand more about divine justice, because divine justice is linked to divine righteousness, and that is that God's justice is always according to righteousness. There is no such thing as evil justice in God. The justice of God is always an expression of *His* holy character.

Justice in the Bible refers to conformity to a rule or a norm. Please understand this. *God plays by the rules*—His rules. The norm of justice biblically is God's own holy character that is expressed to man through His instruction in His Word. What God does is always consistent with who and what He is. His righteousness is the standard, the norm, and it is absolutely pure. There is no shadow of turning in Him. He is utterly incapable of an unholy, unrighteous act.

We call people "crooked." They are crooks. They are crooked. That is all it is. God is absolutely straight. It is our judgment that is crooked. God is straight. Our judgment is perverted. We do not look at things through His standard. We have a powerful tendency to look at things through our own standard, and this is why people think that God is unfair in His judgments. We do not know enough, but God's own righteousness screams out, as it were, through His Word or from heaven: "You stand condemned," He tells these people, "because you have plenty of knowledge of Me, and My judgment will always be exceedingly fair to what you have been given. You're not even living up to what you *do* know."

**Genesis 18:23-25** And Abraham came near, and said, "Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Never did a man ask a more rhetorical question. Perhaps it is possible that Abraham, like us, had only an imperfect knowledge at that time of how far such an act was from God's judgment. There was never even the remote possibility that God would kill the innocent along with the guilty, because everybody is guilty. For God to do that, He would have to cease from being God. He would have to cease from being holy. God is supreme Judge of all the earth. If He is unjust, there is no hope that justice will ever prevail in the history of mankind.

We know human judges can be corrupt, take bribes, be partial, but God is never corrupt. No one can bribe Him. He refuses to show partiality. He is no respecter of persons. He never acts out of ignorance. He never makes mistakes. Nadab, Abihu, Uzza, Ananias, and Sapphira all got what they deserved. They loved death rather than wisdom, and they got it, and so will all those who perish in the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.



There is no injustice with God. God's justice is never divorced from His righteousness. He never condemns the innocent. He never clears the guilty. He never punishes with undue severity. He never fails to reward the righteous. His justice is perfect justice. But God does not always act with justice. Sometimes He acts with mercy. But mercy is not justice, but neither is it injustice because injustice violates righteousness. Mercy manifests kindness and grace, and it does no violence to righteousness.

I think that this is going to have to be about the right time to stop. I feel as though I am just chopping things off, but this allows me room to give another sermon down the road after the holy days sometime. So I think this is really a good place to stop, and hopefully I can leave you with wanting some more.