Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Principles of God's Judgment, Part 2
Scripture: Romans 2:4-5
Code: 45-18

Let's look in our Bibles to Romans chapter 2. I forgot my watch tonight. Don't leave yet, there's a clock right here on the podium. But I always feel a little bit ill at ease when I forget my watch. My dad used to tell a story about a fellow who found it difficult to follow a watch, so he used to suck on a mint. When the mint was gone, he knew his time was up, and one day he got a button. We'll try to keep aware of what's going on. Most importantly of all, though, is not the time but the message, and I believe God has a very special message for us as we examine again the beginning portion of the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

This is really a look at the first 16 verses in total, for those verses give us the principles by which God will judge men – principles of judgment. You could subtitle our lesson tonight Abusing the Goodness of God – Abusing the Goodness of God. Now, the Bible tells us that God will judge all men and that He will judge all men through Jesus Christ. That is the divine plan. It says He has appointed a day, in Acts 17:31, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained, Acts 17:31. Someday God will judge all men through Jesus Christ. Christ is the agent of judgment.

One of the most important passages teaching this is the 5th chapter of John where it says in verse 22: "The Father judgeth no man but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." And verse 27 adds: "And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man." In John 12:48, it says, "He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." And there are many other passages that tell us that someday men will be judged by God through the agency of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's a very well-known fact in the Bible. In fact, even the pagans know that they will be judged. At the end of verse 32, or rather at the end of chapter 1 in verse 32, it says that they know the judgment of God. Men are aware not only through the Scripture but through their conscience and through what they can see around them that God judges evil.

Now, the question that we find answered in chapter 2 is: What is the standard for such judgment or on what basis does God judge? What is the criterion for judgment? Or the criteria, plural? I believe Paul tells us in the first 16 verses of this chapter that there six different elements by which God judges, or six different facets that come into play in divine judgment. Now, before we continue our look at these six, you have to remember one thing: that the particular focus of Romans 2:1-16 is on the moral person. Particularly, this would be identified in Paul's time with the self-righteous, religious Jew. When we saw chapter 1 verses 18 to 32, as a condemnation of God's wrath being brought

against ungodliness, we pretty well were looking at God condemning the pagan, heathen, immoral world, and the moral, religious person would sort of join in with that condemnation and say, “That’s right, they ought to be condemned.” But the moral person, the religious person – particularly, the self-righteous Jew or the self-righteous contemporary church member – might say, “I agree, they ought to be condemned” and then himself feel exempt from such condemnation. So moving into chapter 2, Paul also draws into the purview of judgment the moral, self-righteous person.

Now, in 1:18-32, we saw that God’s wrath was already at work on the immoral, sinful, pagan idolaters and purveyors of vice. The wrath of God was already at work as the consequence of their sin worked its way out in their lives. But now as we look at chapter 2, we see that the wrath of God, as it were, is being piled up or awaiting the day when it breaks, even on those who are moral and apparently righteous but not inwardly righteous. The moral majority, if I can borrow the term, is always eager to condemn the debased and the debauched people in society but not so eager to look at their own life and see if they in fact are any better off. People who are religious or people who believe in God or people who go to church or people who get involved in anything like that usually feel that because they keep certain religious standards and they go through certain sacraments or whatever that it exempts them from the judgment of God, and that in fact is not the case. There are people who think, “God wouldn’t do that to us, we’re the good folks, you know, we’re the guys in the white hats. We believe in God.” But the moral people, the self-righteous people whose morality is only a façade and who are falsely secure, who are outwardly attached to the right religion but do not have truth in their hearts, they need to know also that they’re in line for God’s wrath as much as the pagans and more.

So Paul sets forth the true bases of judgment, and they apply to everybody, and most particularly, he focuses them in on the moral person, that is the outwardly moral, the outwardly religious person who wouldn’t want to find himself in chapter 1 with the reprobates of pagan vice. Now, as he unfolds these principles, there are six elements in divine judgment that he lists. God judges on the basis of six features. First, He judges according to knowledge. Secondly, according to truth. Thirdly, according to real guilt. Fourthly, according to deeds or works. Fifthly, according to impartiality, and sixthly, according to motive, and we’re working our way through those very important elements of God’s judgment.

Now, first of all, God judges on the basis of knowledge. Back to verse 1 and let’s just review that point. “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself for thou that judgest doest the same things.” Now, this simply tells us that God judges on the basis of man’s knowledge, and what he is saying in that verse is this: If you know enough to judge somebody else, then you show that you know enough to be held responsible for what you do. So if you can sit in the seat of judgment and you can condemn the heathen for what they do, then you’re going to wind up in those very terms condemning yourself when you do the same thing.

Maybe you don't do it as flagrantly, maybe you don't do it as outwardly, maybe you don't do it as proudly, maybe you don't flaunt it like they do, but when you do it in your heart or you think it in your heart or you do it in secret or you do it as privately as you can and the people in the religious atmosphere don't know about it, you nonetheless betray your sinfulness and you will find yourself judged on the basis of your knowledge. In other words, if you can condemn others because you know the law of God, then you're self-condemned by that knowledge as well. So God will judge moral people on the basis of their knowledge.

Secondly, we've already learned that He judges on the basis of truth. Verse 2: "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth." In other words, it fits the facts against them who commit such things. God's judgment perfectly fits the facts. As it said at the end of verse 27 in chapter 1, they received a recompense of their error which was fitting or was appropriate. God always rightly fits the judgment to the facts. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, "Just and right is He." God's holy nature will not allow Him to do anything that isn't right, and as I told you in our last study, the hope of the hypocrite, the hope of the religious phony, is that God will not judge on the truth but He will judge on the superficial profession, and that is so silly to assume that you're going to get away with a masquerade before God. God will not judge that way but He'll judge on the facts.

So verse 3 adds, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things and doest the same that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" You want to judge everybody else and that proves you know the law and so you'll be judged on that knowledge, and if God judges truly according to the fact, do you think you're going to get away any more than they are? Not a chance. God will judge accurately and He will judge truly and He will judge according to fact.

And I think this is right where you find the people in Matthew 7 who come and they say, "Lord, Lord, we've done this in Your name, we've done that in Your name, we've done this other thing in Your name," and they lay out the façade of religious externals. They lay out all of the surface religious activity, and He says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." And I think Paul has that same thought in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 when it says, "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes." And he's looking at a future event but it's the same idea. Men think they're secure and everything is okay, and then like a thunderbolt comes the judgment of God. There will be no escape. God has the books and in those books the perfect record of the true thoughts, the true words, the true deeds of every human being, and that becomes the source of data by which God renders the ultimate verdict in divine judgment. So God will judge men on the basis of knowledge and on the basis of truth.

Now, thirdly, and this is what we want to talk about tonight. And, my, this is a tremendously interesting particular point. He judges men on the basis of guilt, true guilt, verses 4 and 5. Now, here in these two verses, God affirms that the moral man, the religious man – namely, in Paul's day, the Jew – is guilty of sin and can in no way escape judgment, and two verses show how really profound man's guilt is.

Look at verses 4 and 5. “Or despiseth thou the riches of His” – that is, God’s – “goodness and forbearance and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hard and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Now, we’ll stop there, and I just want to take those two verses, and that’s really more than you could even handle in one time, so profound is it.

Verse 4 says God has been good to you, all of you, across the face of the world. God has been good to you, and His goodness and His forbearance and His long suffering had as its goal to lead you to – what? – repentance. And when it did not lead you to repentance, conversely, because of your hard and unconverted heart, you were just storing up wrath that would ultimately break loose at the final judgment. That’s the essence of what these verses are saying. God has been leading men to repentance, but men have been going to judgment instead, and men are piling up a pile of guilt, a storehouse of guilt, that is going to come back on them in judgment.

Now, there is guilt all right and guilt for all sins but guilt for the worst sin and that is the most heinous crime of all against God and that is to reject what God has done, and man is guilty of that. Man is guilty of rejecting God’s goodness, of abusing God’s mercy, of ignoring God’s grace, of spurning God’s love, of mocking His kindness.

Matthew Henry, that commentator of old who has so many helpful thoughts in his commentary on the Scripture said, “There is in every willful sin a contempt of the goodness of God.” And that’s right. Whenever you sin or whenever I sin, we show contempt for God’s goodness.

Let me read you just two verses, and you need not turn to them, but in Hosea – Hosea, of course, records for us God’s love for wayward Israel, and in the 11th chapter and the first verse, God says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him,” and that sort of sets the tone for the thoughts in the chapter, and verse 4: “I drew them with cords of a man with bands of love and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws and I laid food before them.” In other words, I didn’t have a bit in their mouth, I fed them and I led them gently and I drew them with love. And verse 7 says, “And My people are bent to backsliding away from Me.” I mean here was God with love and tenderness and graciousness and kindness and mercy, reaching out to draw Israel and they were just sliding away from Him.

Now, let’s go back to verses 4 and 5 and look at the several parts that make up these thoughts. The word “despisest” in the Authorized is a very strong word. It means basically to grossly underestimate the value of something, to grossly underestimate the significance of something. It is a failure to assess true worth. It is making light of the riches of the goodness of God, and this is the blackest of sins, by the way. The worst sin is not rights violated, the worst sin is mercy despised.

Let's look at what happened. They failed to really evaluate, they failed to see the true worth of the riches of God's goodness. They didn't know how valuable it was, and men still don't know. I mean everybody alive in the world today has experienced the goodness of God. I'll say that again. Everybody alive in the world today has personally experienced the goodness of God and experiences it every breath they take – in many, many ways, not the least of which is that the Lord makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust and the Lord gives them food to eat and the Lord gives them a fire to keep them warm and the Lord gives them water to refresh their thirst and the Lord gives them food to fill their hungry stomach and the Lord gives them a blue sky and a warm sun and the Lord gives them green grass and beautiful mountains and whatever it is, and the Lord gives them people to love. In every way, God has demonstrated His goodness.

And by the way, the word "goodness" is a very important word, chrstots. The idea is really kindness. It's translated kindness in Galatians 5 in the list of elements of the fruit of the Spirit. It speaks of God's benefits, His kindnesses to men, and then the word "forbearance" – anoch – is the word for truce. It's the word for the cessation of a hostility. It's the word for the withholding of judgment. So God pours out blessing and He holds back judgment. He is forbearing; that is, He says, "Okay, a truce, no hostility, I'll just be kind to you and I'll withhold My judgment." And the word "long-suffering" – makrothumia – means patience. It is a word that signifies one who has the power to avenge but doesn't use it. It's a great characteristic of God, He's so patient. Over and over again in the Scripture, we read about the patience of God, the patience of God. God is not willing that any should perish. God is long suffering because of that toward us because He's not willing that we should perish.

And so you have goodness, which refers to the benefits which God gives. You have forbearance, which refers to the judgment He does not give, and you have long suffering, which refers to the duration of both, and so for long periods of time He is kind, and for long periods of time He withholds His judgment. The Hebrew term would say He is slow to anger and plenteous in what? Mercy. And this is the riches. It isn't just goodness and forbearance and long suffering, it's goodness and forbearance and long suffering at its epitome, it is the riches of those things. Not just the shallow but the fullest. The old theologians used to call this common grace. It comes also under the theological term of providence. In other words, God is just good and He pours out His goodness and He withholds His judgment and He does it for a long time.

Psalm 52:1 says, "The goodness of God endureth continually." Psalm 119:68 says, "Thou art good and doest good." Psalm 33:5 says, "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Psalm 145:9 says, "His tender mercies are over all His works." And Psalm 107:8 says, "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness."

Now, you know what is appalling about this is that most people don't really see God as being good. Most people wonder how God can be so bad to let certain things happen, right? "How can God allow that?" or "How can God allow this?" Let me tell you the answer. The goodness of God is nowhere

more clearly seen than that when man commits a sin, he doesn't fall over dead on the spot. You see, God had every reason at the fall to wipe out the human race – every reason – and He has the same reason every single time you or I ever commit one sin, and it is only His goodness and His forbearance and His long suffering that lets us take another breath. It's mercy rejoicing against judgment, as the Scripture says.

And God was especially good to Israel. He is, after all, the God of patience. He was good to the pagans – wasn't He? – in Noah's time. He waited 120 years for them to repent. He was so patient with the nations. The time of their ignorance, He overlooked. He was so patient with Israel and with Judah, He waited for centuries and centuries – seven, eight hundred years – before He took them into the Babylonian captivity. And God is wonderfully patient with us today. You look around the world today and people are sinning at a rapid rate. The divine law of our blessed God is trampled underfoot and God Himself is openly despised, His name is blasphemed, and it is amazing that He doesn't strike dead the people that do that. When you hear someone blaspheme the name of God and then take another breath, that is the goodness of God.

Why doesn't He cut them down? And why doesn't He cut me down and you down when we sin as He did Ananias and Sapphira? Why doesn't He cause the earth to open up and swallow us like Dathan and Abiram? And what about apostate Christendom? What about all the liberals and the apostates? What about their toleration for every form of evil? How can He let that go that on? Why does not the righteous wrath of heaven consume them?

The only answer is because, as Romans 9 says, "God has dealt with the vessels fitted unto destruction with much long suffering." Listen, get this in your mind because we're going to answer this question. If you have ever thought for one moment that God is unjust, you simply reveal how easy it is to learn to abuse the goodness of God, and I'll show you why. The goodness of God, back to verse 4, is designed to lead men to repentance. It is designed to cause them to turn from sin to Him. It is designed to cause men who are filled with evil to long for God and God's goodness. It is designed to make them thankful that He didn't slay them and turn to Him in gratitude. If you really realize what you deserve every day you live, every breath you take, you'll thank God that He didn't strike you down. You see, God's goodness and God's patience calls us to repentance, to thankful grateful hearts, and yet we so often fail to do that.

Now, what does repentance mean? It simply means to turn from sin toward God, to turn away from what we're doing to Him, and to do that because we see our sin and we see what we deserve and we know we should die, and when He doesn't take our life but He lets us live, we should turn in utter gratitude to Him. But men don't do that. They despise God's goodness, and before you start putting the blame somewhere else, we can be guilty of the same thing that is characteristic of an unregenerate but religious person. One commentator has said that almost everyone has, quote, "a vague and undefined hope of impunity and a kind of feeling that this can't happen to me." We just

have this feeling that everything's okay, and the Jews believed they were exempt from the judgment of God, and many people – most people – believe that.

Listen, most people in our world don't believe God's going to judge them, they don't believe that for a minute. And they just load up on God's goodness and God's providence and they take in all the pleasure of life and all the love and the wonder of love and of children and parents and friends and a partner in life and the beauty and the fun and the pleasure and all of the delicacies of life that God gives, and they just take it all in, the beauty, the warmth, the emotions, and it's all mercy that they don't die every breath they take.

But they never think about that, and that is why it is such an incredible sin to be unthankful, you see. That's why in chapter 1 when it condemns the heathen, it condemns him for failing to glorify God and neither were they what? Thankful. Heine, the philosopher, was once quoted as saying, when confronted with his sin, "God will forgive. After all, it's His trade." I'm afraid many of us fall into that. We go right into a sin because we're so used to mercy that we figure we'll get it again. So the Jews, like the rest, assumed mercy and went on sinning. They assumed God's grace and went on sinning. They assumed God's kindness and goodness and patience and long suffering and went right on sinning, and they just stomped all over God's goodness.

But goodness despised leads to the end of goodness and ultimate judgment – verse 5 – and it talks about a hard and impenitent heart piling up wrath to be revealed on the day of wrath, that special day when righteous judgment from God is revealed. The kind of people who are like this are people who don't see God's nature as loving and good and kind. They just see their own nature as deserving. "Well, I'm not so bad." I mean they don't say, "O God, thank You, Thank You for another day of life. Thank You for a partner that I love. Thank You for what You've done. Thank You for not taking my life and slaying me in my sin." They just take it all for granted and they get the idea that they're just getting what they deserve, they're not half bad anyway.

And there is a sick cult that has arisen in contemporary evangelical Christianity that is built around self, and people talk about self-image and self-esteem and self-worth and self-value, and it is nothing but humanistic worldliness. You have no worth or value as a self, as a corrupt sinner, and the whole idea of that concept has taken evangelicalism and twisted it from a God-centered perspective to a man-centered perspective, and salvation in Christianity is all seen from the viewpoint of what can it do for me? And sin is always seen as to how it affects man, not how it affects God. We are selfists, indulging ourselves in God's mercy, and this is a horrifying error. The only reason you even breathe one breath or I even breathe one more breath is because God is merciful, and if I forget that and tread on that mercy, such ingratitude is so severe.

Now, I want to speak to this issue because it opens up one of the great truths of Scripture, and I want to give you a little Scripture lesson that will help you fill out your theology at this point. Now, think with

me now, very important. People see God as unjust. You know, if somebody – if something comes into your life, your husband dies, your wife dies, your kids are injured, somebody you know gets a disease, your thought is, “Well, God, that’s not fair.” Right? “How can You do that, God?” And you have to work your way through those kind of thoughts. But you know what that is, that’s your rotten old sin principle operating. “I mean how can you do that, God?” “I mean how can I be without a job?” or “How can I have all these kind of problems?” or “Why me? It’s not fair.” And so you tend to question God’s love and you tend to question God’s actions, and it’s an incredible turnaround because God is so merciful and so kind and yet men despise that very kindness, and when something goes eschew in their life, they begin to accuse God of being unfair or unjust. How incredible.

William Gurnall wrote in 1660, this statement: “When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said the greatest miracle in the world is God’s patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince has an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them in provision but lays close siege to the place and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God that could wink all His enemies into destruction bears with them and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may He command us to bless them that curse us who Himself does good to the evil and unthankful. But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus. God’s mill goes slow but grinds small. The more admirable His patience and bounty now is the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire.”

Now, let me ask a question and then answer it. How can people question God’s goodness? How can they do it? Answer: By seeing – watch this – by seeing history from the wrong perspective. Let me show you. We’re in the New Testament. We’re experiencing God’s goodness. We’re experiencing God’s grace, God’s mercy, and then we go back to the Old Testament, right? And we start reading the Old Testament and we read about all these amazing things that God does. He turns Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt because she looked backwards. You say, “The poor lady. I mean the whole place is burning up. I mean it’s so hard to resist the peek. I mean it isn’t a mortal sin, she just went – zap, out of existence. I mean it seems so arbitrary, I mean so – why that?” And we say, “What kind of a God does this cruel and whimsical kind of punishment?”

Then He tells His special man, Abraham, to go up and burn up his son in a sacrifice, and then He sends a bunch of snakes in to bite all the Israelites, and then He caused the ground to open and swallow those men, and then He sends forth fire from His prophet Elijah and it burned up a hundred people, and they’re just pagan people going about their business and whoosh, they’re gone. And then some people were mocking Elisha, a bunch of little kids, calling him names, and a bear came out and ripped up 40 of them. You say, “What kind of a God is this? What kind of capricious arbitrary – why all those little kids? I mean little kids are bound to sort of make fun of people now and then.” And yet you

have other people like David whose lives are a mess and Solomon whose got more wives than you could count and he just goes along through life, and Lot's wife goes – I mean what kind of a God is this?

And then the Bible says He hardens Pharaoh's heart and then kills his firstborn for having a hard heart. And what about when He called for the extermination of every Canaanite, kill every man, every woman? Doesn't make sense. And He even said, "Happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against a rock." Take babies and hit them on a rock? What kind of a God is this?

You see, it made some people so distressed that they just have to say, "Well, it's not the same God. I mean it can't be the same God. It's impossible." Lord Platt, writing in the London Times said, "Perhaps now that it is written in a language all can understand, the Old Testament will be seen for what it is, an obscene chronicle of man's cruelty to man or worse perhaps, his cruelty to woman and of man's selfishness and cupidity backed up by his appeal to his God, a horror story if ever there was one. It is to be hoped that it will at last be proscribed as totally inappropriate to the ethical instruction of school children," end quote. We can't handle that book. It's too gross.

Look with me at 2 Samuel chapter 6, and I'll give you a couple of other illustrations. The Ark of the Covenant is being brought back to the children of Israel, and what a great day this is. After all, it's been in the country of the Philistines for many months, and now they're going to get the Ark of the Covenant back, and oh, what a great time it is. They're bringing back that which represents the presence of God in their midst. And, you know, whenever the Ark of the Covenant was moved the Kohathites had to move it, and they were a part of the Levitical order. But the Kohathites were trained from their youth to transport the Ark. They knew how to do it. They were trained to do it. God had told them never is anyone ever to touch it. There were big rings on the side. They had poles to run through those rings. They would carry it with the poles, never touch the Ark. They were trained all their life to do that.

And so verse 3 says when they went to move it, "They set the Ark of God on a new cart." God did not want His Ark on a cart, even a new cart. This was flippant. This was human. This was disobedient to the instruction. And so they're popping along on the cart and everybody's happy and they're playing instruments, in verse 5, and harps and psalteries and timbrels and cornets. And they came to Nachon's threshing floor, which is just a geographical point in the little trip, and the thing must have hit a little mud hole or a chuck hole and the cart went into a jolt and the Ark started to move. And Uzzah, he was a Kohathite, he was in charge of this, he just put his hand out to steady the Ark, I mean he didn't want it to be defiled by hitting the ground, but what he didn't know was that the ground wasn't defiled, the human race was. Nothing wrong with the ground. Dirt never fell, man did.

So when he touched the Ark, he – dead on the spot. You say, "Well, he's a poor fella, I mean he doesn't go out and commit adultery, he doesn't have 800 wives, he just goes – and he's out of

existence, just that fast." But it was a careless and arrogant sin, which came about because he was not obedient to the Word of God.

Look at Leviticus chapter 10. Aaron had two sons. Oh, he was so proud of those two boys, Nadab and Abihu. Any father would be, and you know what? They were going to be priests. What a great thing. They were going to be priests, and guess what day this was, Leviticus 10, get this, this was their ordination. I remember the day I was ordained, I'll never forget it. I was in my father's church. I know it was a wonderful day for my father. I know from my mother who, by the way, is here tonight, and it's kind of special to have her, because she had prayed that the Lord would give her a minister, preacher, and it was a great day when I was ordained. I know it was a wonderful day for them especially.

Well, this was that kind of day for Aaron. His two boys were ordained to the priesthood, first day, and they went in there and they took the censer that the priest used and they put fire in and they put incense in and they offered strange fire before the Lord which He commanded them not. They messed around. They were so excited about being a priest that they just took some liberty, and they went in there and did some kind of a thing that was not what they were supposed to do, and there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them and they died before the Lord. Can you imagine Aaron? I mean God, these are just young boys, I mean they were so excited about what they were doing and this was their ordination and they're dead, You burned them up. No warning – I mean couldn't You say to them, "Now, boys, we know you're new at the ministry, but you're going to have to get rid of that kind of flippancy and do it right," but whoosh and they're gone, and there are so many people in Israel who are evil and they're alive.

Have you ever asked yourself about the flood? How could God drown the whole world? Does that seem like cruel and unusual punishment to you? And then if you study the Old Testament further, you will find that there are nearly 35 sins for which God prescribed the death penalty, such as hitting your parents – that's right – or even cursing them, you know, mumbling under your breath a curse to your parents. Death penalty. Murder, kidnapping, sodomy, fooling around with magic, violating the Sabbath, blasphemy, desecration, child sacrifice, contact with spirits, unlawful divorce, false prophecy, raping an engaged woman, and it goes on to about 30 or 35, and they required capital punishment, and so people – and just sum all that up that I've said to you in about the last ten minutes – people say God is just too severe. I mean things kind of go along and every once in a while – whack – somebody just dies. It seems like it's so arbitrary and so whimsical and so capricious. He kills one and let's someone else live, and He doesn't always enforce the death penalty in some cases but He does enforce it in others."

Two little boys – two young boys, I should say, get all excited and do some kind of foolish thing, we really don't know what they did, but some kind of foolish thing in there and they die, and David goes on with women all over the place and commits fornication and adultery and he lives. Now listen, if you

look – watch this – at the Old Testament with the New Testament in view, you're going to get confused because we live in an aura of the goodness and mercy and grace of God, and if you go back from that perspective, you're going to get all confused in the Old Testament. The problem is we feel that God is unjust because we are comparing His justice with His mercy, not His mercy with His law. Let me show you what I mean. We have to go back to creation. You cannot look at the Old Testament from the New Testament, you have to look at the Old Testament from the creation.

Now, God said this, "In the day you eat of the fruit of the tree you shall surely" – what? – "die." When God created, He said, you sin, you die. The New Testament reiterates the wages of sin is what? Death. The soul that sinneth, said Ezekiel, it shall die. You eat, you die. In creation, all sin was a capital offense. Any sin, God had a right to kill. Now, think of it this way: God made man freely. Created man of His own choice freely. He made man to glorify Him. He made man to radiate His image. He made man to manifest His person. But man rebelled. R. C. Sproul says he committed cosmic treason. Now, if God freely made man and God freely gave man his life and God freely gave man the conditions to continue that life, and man chose to violate that, then God had every right in the world to take that life back, right? After all, He gave it freely.

Whenever we sin, we are striking a blow at God's sovereign character. We are misrepresenting His image and His intention for us. We are insulting God and does not He who freely gave life have the right to freely take it back if He gave the conditions and we violated them? Is that unfair? No – no, He gave the conditions, that would be just. He has every right to take back the life He gave when that life violates His conditions. Okay? Adam and Eve ate. Let me ask you a question: Did they die? No – no, they didn't die. Did they get justice? No. What did they get? Mercy. And at the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God's mercy was activated, and you know what else was activated? The plan of the cross. Because as soon as God was merciful to sinners, somebody had to take His justice, right? And the cross became a fixed reality.

So originally, every sin – now stay with me – every sin required death. Is it unjust by God's law to take the life of the rebel to whom God has been so good? No. But God didn't exercise His justice; He was merciful to Adam and Eve. Now listen to me. By the time you come to the Mosaic law, you only have 30 to 35 capital offenses. That is not cruel and unusual punishment, that is an amazing reduction in the severity of God's judgment, isn't it? Because originally, it was any sin and now it's just 30 to 35 of them, and who knows how many thousands there are. God is so merciful but by the time He gets to the Mosaic era, He's reduced it to 30 to 35. And you know something else? Even in the case of those 30 to 35, there were times when God did not enact His justice. There were times when the people of Israel did all of those things and God spared their lives. He was merciful.

Wherever there was adultery in a marriage, there was supposed to be death, but because they were so adulterous all the time, God permitted them to divorce as a gracious, merciful alternative. And they were to die for idolatry, but how many times did God forgive that idolatry? And how many times was

He merciful? They were to die when they were committing fornication, but how many times did God show His patience? They were to die when they murdered, but how many times did God seem to overlook it? He was so patient, so patient.

Now, you see, beloved, that is the point. If you compare the Old Testament with the original created standard, the Old Testament is full of mercy. Now listen to me. But we are so used to mercy, we are so used to grace, we are so accustomed to getting away with our sin, we are so used to not being punished, we are so accustomed to grace that we abuse it, and whenever God does do what is just, we think He's unjust. That's how confused we are, and that's how we despise the goodness of God. When God knocks down in death Ananias and Sapphira, we say, "Well, how can God be so cruel?" when the fact is, how could anybody else in that congregation stay alive? They were all sinners. You see, we so tread on God's mercy, and we're so used to abusing God's grace, that we are offended if God isn't merciful, and that's the truth. He chooses times not to be merciful.

You say, "Well, I still don't understand why He does it." Listen, I'll tell you why. Because it's so bad now and we tread so much on His mercy and abuse His grace so badly now that if He didn't give us those frequent examples of His justice, imagine how much more we would tread on His mercy without any fear of repercussion. The reason that God from time to time takes a life and comes down in severe judgment is because periodically throughout the flow of redemptive history, He has to illustrate what should happen to bring us back to our senses because we are so accustomed to His mercy. If we didn't have examples of the consequence of sin, we would go on blissfully trading without a thought on His mercy.

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 10, and I think I can illustrate this truth to you. First Corinthians 10:8 talks about the people who committed fornication, and when they committed fornication, God took the life of 23,000 of them. Why? Why did God kill 23,000 idolatrous, fornicating people? Why? Verse 11: "All these things happened unto them for" – what? – "examples and are written for our admonition who are living at the end of the age so that when we think we stand, we had better take heed lest we" – what? – "fall." So why are there throughout the Old Testament and even into the New, why are there those illustrations of God's instantaneous wrath? They're examples and God does those to show us what should happen to all of us and to build in our hearts attitudes of thanksgiving.

Every day I live I should say, "Thank You, God, thank You for being so merciful and overlooking the sin today that should have caused my death and eternal judgment." I'll tell you, we would never tolerate the insubordination that God tolerates. We tread on His mercy even with these examples. Can you imagine if there weren't these examples what would happen?

Look at Luke 13. I think this is so graphic, Luke 13 verse 1. Powerful passage. "There were present at that season some that told Him" – now, some people come to Jesus and they tell Him something. They tell Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Now, some

Galileans came down apparently to the temple and they were Jews and they came into the temple to offer their sacrifices, and there they were doing their religious activity, and Pilate moved into the temple and slaughtered them so that the blood pouring out of their bodies was actually mingled with the blood of the their sacrifices. Right in the time they were worshiping their God, he slaughtered them right on the altar.

And the people are crowding around Jesus, and they're not asking about Pilate's cruelty, they're asking about God's justice, and they're saying, "What about that? I mean what about those Galileans and Pilate, that pagan, that desecrated person comes in and slaughters them in the midst of their sacrifice. I mean how can God allow that?" And I think what they're saying is, "Were they super wicked? Were they super sinners? Were they more vile than everybody else? I mean why did they suffer that way? Where was God? I mean was God off saying, 'Oh, I forgot about those Galileans in there and Pilate got them before I could think about it'? Or was God saying, 'You're more wicked than everybody else and you're going to get it right here with your phony religious activity going on'?"

And Jesus answering, said unto them, "Are you supposing, are you thinking that these Galileans were sinners worse than all the other Galileans because they suffered such things? I mean do you think that the reason this happened to them is because they deserved it more than anybody else? Nay, I tell you, and unless you repent, you'll likewise perish." See what He said? He said, "They aren't any worse than you, and unless you repent, you're going to get the same thing." They were examples. They got justice as an illustration of what all the rest of them were going to get if they didn't repent. They weren't worse than anybody else. They were chosen examples that God elected to use as illustrations.

Or they said, "What about those 18 people upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them?" Can you imagine that? I mean that would be in the headlines. Eighteen folks are just walking down the road and some big tower is there, and it just starts to go, and it falls on 18 people – 18 people with wives and husbands and kids – and their life is gone. I mean it just fell on them and it killed them and I mean they weren't sinning, they were just walking down the street. I mean they weren't doing anything evil and they died. Are you thinking that they were sinners above everybody else? Do you think they were worse than everybody else? No, no. Unless you repent, you're going to perish just like they did.

Do you see the point that He's making? They're not worse than anybody else, they're just illustrations of what you all ought to be getting. That's all. You understand? You see, we are so used to mercy, so used to grace, that we think justice is unjust. History affirms God's goodness. To some, He has given the role of example to warn of sin's just consequence and to make all men grateful and repentant that it hasn't happened to them.

But let me say in closing, back to verse 5, Romans 2, if you refuse God's goodness, if you refuse to be led to repentance by His goodness, if you will not come to thank Him and to come to Christ, then your hard and unconverted heart is just piling up wrath, and you may be surviving now but in the day of wrath when the fullness of wrath is revealed in the righteous judgment of God at the great white throne, it's going to break loose on you. The ones who are not repenting are piling up a storehouse of sin and judgment, laid up little by little. Oh, what an illusion. Because God is merciful, people think it's all going fine, you see, and instead of being driven to repentance over God being so kind to them as sinners, they think that because things are going well that they're really okay and they're fine and everything is wonderful. What an illusion. And so they tread on His mercy only to wind up some day with His full fury.

The phrase "a hard and impenitent heart" I think is interesting. The word "hard" there is sklrots. We get sclerosis from it, hardening of the arteries, arteriosclerosis, or sclerosis of the liver as well. Hardening of the arteries may take you to the grave, but hardening of the heart will take you to hell, and then he calls it an impenitent, a non-repentant, unconverted, unchanged heart. Ezekiel talked about the fact that the people had a stony heart, Ezekiel 36:26. In Ezekiel 3 verse 7, he talks about Israel's being hardhearted. Jesus talked about hard hearts, Matthew 19:8, Mark 3:5, Mark 6:52, Mark 8:17, John 12:40.

The writer of Hebrews calls, in chapter 3 and in chapter 4 three times, harden not your hearts – harden not your hearts. Don't become cold and indifferent because all you're doing is storing up unto thyself. In other words, that you're responsible, you're doing it to yourself. You're storing up divine fury that will break loose on the day of wrath, which is further defined as that day when righteous judgment is fully revealed, and I believe that has to be the great white throne. In Revelation 20 it tells us that the Lord calls together all the wicked dead from everywhere and to the throne and they are judged out of the books in which is the record of their deeds and they are cast forever into the Lake of Fire with the devil and his angels.

So men, face the truth. You can tread on mercy now and you will receive fury in the future. Or you can see mercy for what it is and be grateful and come in a repentant heart to God and turn to Christ. If the goodness of God toward you is not leading you to repentance, then drop-by-drop, every sin you commit is filling up a reservoir of God's patience, and it is held together by God's mercy. But someday, the dam gets too full and the wall breaks, and you will be drowned in an eternal flood of your own sins. But you have an alternative. There in the midst of that is an island of safety and that island is Calvary, and as we sung earlier, "There, the Savior is waiting if you come to Him." Bow with me in prayer.

Father, thank You again tonight for teaching us through Your Word. Thank You for not giving us what we deserve. Thank You for Your goodness, forbearance, long suffering, for Your mercy. Thank You for the examples You gave to show us that if we don't repent, the same will happen to us. May we

turn to You with thankful hearts, come to Christ, and not drop-by-drop fill the reservoir with our sin that someday shall break to drown us. God, if there's anyone here in this place – and we know there must be – who is despising Your goodness, may they do it no longer but may they come. And any of us, even as Christians, who have fallen prey to that most evil thing of taking for granted Your wondrous mercy, forgive us as well. We know that there's no need to face that judgment, for Jesus took all Your justice and all Your wrath on the behalf of those who believe. May we enter into that by faith. Father, we pray that as we close our fellowship tonight, You'll draw into Your own kingdom those You would have to come, for Your glory. In Christ's name, amen.

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