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

Israel's Failure, Part 2
Scripture: Romans 10:1-3
Code: 45-76

How thankful we are for a wonderful day to share together and rejoice in the things of the Lord as His people, to come together to study His Word! And tonight we're going to go back to Romans chapter 10 in our continuing study in Romans. And I'm just so very excited about the things that the Lord has impressed upon my heart to share with you tonight, and I'm not going to be in a hurry. If I don't finish tonight, I'll be back next week, and I trust you will as well. So we won't go by the things that are of great importance to us.

But last week we started to look at this great tenth chapter. And a phrase that we came to at the beginning of verse 3 has really stuck in my mind. It says that "they," and referring to Israel, "being ignorant of God's righteousness." That is such a haunting thought that the Jewish people who had received God's revelation, God's self-disclosure on the pages of the Old Testament were ignorant of His righteousness is almost inconceivable. But that's exactly what the apostle Paul said. They were ignorant of God's righteousness. And as we introduced that thought the last time two weeks ago, I've been unable to divorce myself from pursuing that thought even further and I want to share a little bit more tonight along the line of being ignorant of God's righteousness. That's such a very, very important theme.

And I want to begin, if I might, by having you turn in your Bible to Jeremiah chapter 9. Jeremiah chapter 9, and I want to share with you the first few verses of the chapter and then some toward the end. And as chapter 9 begins, we see Jeremiah in his classical weeping state. And he says in verse 1, "O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." In other words, he doesn't have sufficient supply of tears to give expression to his sorrow. And in verse 2 he says, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men that I might leave my people and go from them for they're all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men and they bend their tongues like their bow for lies, but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth, for they proceed from evil to evil and they know not Me, saith the Lord."

And the weeping of Jeremiah was because his people didn't know God. They were ignorant of God. Go down to verse 23, same chapter. "Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,

neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth, or boasteth, boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

If a man is to boast, let him boast in that which is most boastful, if you can say that, most worthy. And that is that he knows Me, that I am a God who is righteous. They know not Me, said Jeremiah, they know not Me. Hard to imagine with all of the revelation that they had had that they still didn't know God. They were ignorant of God's righteousness.

Now the words of Jeremiah chapter 9 are much like those of Romans 9 and Romans 10. They're the same kinds of words. Do you remember in Romans chapter 9 how the apostle Paul said, "I say the truth, I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart," and he could wish himself accursed from Christ for the sake of his brethren, his kinsmen who are Israelites? In other words, he had the same feelings that Jeremiah had. He had the same sorrow of heart because he looked at a people who didn't know God. And he says the same thing in chapter 10 verse 1 and 2, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved for I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge."

So Paul really stands in line with Jeremiah as a weeping prophet, as a weeping messenger. And he is not unlike the Lord Himself, who wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, "You didn't know the day of your visitation." When God came you didn't know Him. You didn't recognize that I was He. And the source of Jeremiah's anguish and the source of Paul's anguish and the source of the anguish of our Lord was ignorance, ignorance. When they knew God, Romans 1 says, they glorified Him not as God. They refused to know the God who had been revealed to them.

I believe Isaiah faced the same thing. Listen to what he says in Isaiah 1 verses 2 through 4: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken. I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know. My people do not think. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the holy one of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." And I would draw your attention to what he says: "They do not know, My people doth not think."

In chapter 5 of Isaiah verse 13, he says, "Therefore My people are gone into captivity," and he's referring to the Babylonian captivity. "They are gone into captivity because they have no knowledge." They have no knowledge. That's the essence of it.

Hosea faced the same thing. He said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." God speaks about this willful ignorance on Israel's part in the plaintive words of Psalm 95 and verse 10. This is what it says, "Forty years was I grieved with this generation and said, it is a people that do err in their heart and they have not known My ways." They don't know Me. And the echo of Israel's ignorance bounces down through the corridors of history to the time of Christ, to the time of Paul. They still didn't know Him, they still didn't know Him, tragedy of all tragedies.

Jesus on the cross in Luke's gospel, chapter 23 verse 34, prays a prayer and He says, "Father, forgive them for (they what?) they know not what they do." They don't know what they do and they don't know who they're doing it to. They are ignorant. They are willfully ignorant. They do not know. They do not think.

Peter, preaching in the book of Acts chapter 3 verse 14 says to them, "You denied the holy one and the just and you desired a murderer to be granted unto you." In other words, you changed your Messiah for Barabbas. "You killed the prince of life whom God has raised from the dead of which we are witnesses, and His name through faith and His name has made this man strong," that is the man they had just healed, "whom you see and know, yea the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." Then he says in verse 17 of Acts 3, "And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers." Ignorant, ignorant, didn't know. The apostle Paul recounts his testimony of the time before he was saved, he says, "I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." And you must understand that there has been through the history of Israel a pervasive ignorance. And you see it today. All you have to do is walk the streets of Palestine. They do not now know God anymore than they knew Him then in the time of the Savior and the apostles and the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah, in the time of Hosea and the time the psalmist wrote of their ignorant unbelief.

This, I believe, to be the supreme national tragedy in the history of the world, because it is a squandering of such immeasurable privilege and opportunity, to have been the recipients of the Word of God. And we are reminded of that in chapter 9, aren't we, of Romans in verse 4, "The Israelites to whom pertains the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service," that is the ritual or the worship or the ceremonies, "and the promises whose are the fathers

and of whom is concerning the flesh Christ came." In other words, they had all of that, they had all the self-disclosure of God. They were the ones who received the oracles of God, it says in Romans chapter 3. And they didn't know God. And consequently, in spite of all of the privilege, in spite of all of the opportunity, the Jew finds himself on the same level as the Gentile, of whom it is said in Ephesians 4:18, "He is alienated from God, his mind is darkened, he doesn't know God." And the Jew is in the same boat.

Now this tragic fact of Israel's ignorance is the theme of chapter 10. It's the theme of the chapter. Proudly they claimed to know God. Truthfully they didn't know Him at all. They were utterly ignorant, as demonstrated by the fact that they hurried to kill God in human flesh.

Now remember what we've been learning. In the book of Romans Paul is endeavoring to present the gospel of justification by grace through faith. In other words, he's presenting how to be right with God, how to have a relationship with God, an eternal relationship, a sin-cleansing relationship, a grace-dispensing relationship, a peace-giving relationship, a hope-giving relationship. And he's presented that a man becomes right with God through faith. God's grace reaches out and the man responds by faith. The Jews, however, have rejected this. They have rejected Christ. They have rejected the gospel. They have, for the most part, rejected the preaching of the apostles. And Paul knows that if he is to make any points with his teaching, he's going to have to deal with this unbelief of Israel. He's got to explain it somehow, because unknowing and unwitting people are going to say, "Well how can we believe this is true if the Jews, who are God's people, don't believe it's true?" So he must discuss the unbelief of Israel as a defense of the validity of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. He's got to explain the unbelief of Israel. And so this is not some incidental text, this is the heart of his argument, this is the apologetic. If the gospel is really true then you better tell us why the people of God have rejected it. The ones who have always received God's law, the ones who have written down God's law, who have preserved God's law, who are the people of the covenant and the people of promise, if they reject it then you better tell us how that can happen if it's really God's message. And that's exactly what he does.

And in chapter 9 he points out the fact that Israel's unbelief fit into the sovereign plan of God, that they were unbelieving because that was the sovereign plan of God. That that didn't surprise God but rather God had planned for that. It was in the plan. And he points out all through chapter 9 that God is absolutely sovereign and that God never intended that all of Israel would be redeemed. He was selective. And the illustrations used are the illustration of Jacob being chosen over Esau and Pharaoh's heart being hardened to show that God is in fact sovereign. So Israel's rejection doesn't violate God's plan. Israel's rejection doesn't overturn God's plan. Israel's rejection doesn't obviate the truth of the gospel. In fact, God had that planned into it all along.

But that's only the first half. The first reason to explain Israel's unbelief is God's sovereignty. The second one is Israel's willful ignorance. And the two always go together. They always go together. They're always in perfect harmony, concurrence and balance, that where you have God rejecting a person, being it an Esau or a Pharaoh or whoever else they might represent you will also have in that person willful ignorance and unbelief. One does not exist without the other. God doesn't just damn people apart from their own choices. They act in concurrence. And so as you come to the end of chapter 9 he begins to turn to the other side and present the balance. And he says in verse 32, the problem with Israel was they sought salvation not by faith but by works. So it wasn't just the sovereignty of God that explains their unbelief, it was also their own unbelief, their own willful choice in seeking something by works rather than by faith.

You say, "Well what about Esau?" That was true in his case. God rejected Esau. But if you study the story of Esau you will find out that Esau was a secular man. Esau was a man who looked down on holy sacred privilege. Esau was a man who willfully ignored spiritual opportunity. He treated the blessings of God with disdain and thus he was rejected.

You say, "What about Pharaoh?" Listen carefully. If you study the plagues in Egypt you will find the first five times through the first five plagues Pharaoh hardened his heart, Pharaoh hardened his heart, Pharaoh hardened his heart, Pharaoh hardened his heart, Pharaoh hardened his heart. And not until the sixth plague do you find that it says, "And God hardened Pharaoh's heart." Yes there was a sovereign act of God, but not independent of the choice of Pharaoh.

So God's sovereignty always acts concurrently with man's willful choice. The two must go hand in hand. And so Paul shows, first of all, that Israel's unbelief fits the sovereign plan of God, doesn't change it, isn't a surprise to God, isn't a shock, doesn't overturn the plan, fits into it. But God is not independently responsible for what happened to Israel; they made a choice themselves. And that's where we move into chapter 10. And if the theme of chapter 9 is the sovereignty of God, the theme of chapter 10 is the volition or choice of man. And chapter 10 goes on to unfold the factors of Israel's unbelief; that Israel is set apart because of ignorance. That's the basic theme here, because of ignorance. And remember last time I told you five things that we need to note. They were ignorant of the person of God, they were ignorant of the provision of Christ, they were ignorant of the place of faith, they were ignorant of the parameters of salvation and they were ignorant of the predictions of Scripture. And that takes us right through the tenth chapter.

So it isn't just the sovereignty of God independent of the choice of Israel. They were ignorant. And they were ignorant of all these things. And I want to hurry to say they were willfully ignorant. They chose to be ignorant. They weren't ignorant because they didn't have the information, they were ignorant because they chose to ignore the information; they chose to turn their back on it. When they knew God, they refused to worship Him as God. When they knew God's truth, they refused to acknowledge it as God's truth and they went about to establish, it says in verse 3, their own righteousness.

So the first thing that they were ignorant of was the person of God. They were ignorant of the person of God. And that's where we are in the first three verses. They were ignorant of the person of God. And again I say it's absolutely inconceivable but it's true. They were ignorant of the person of God. They who had received all of God's revelation chose to reject the message.

Remember we noted for you in chapter 2 verses 17 to 20 where it said that they rested in the law and they made a boast of God and they made a boast that they knew God's will and they made a boast that they approved the things that were excellent. And they boasted that they were really instructed in the law. And they boasted that they were guides of the blind and lights to those in darkness and instructors of the foolish and teachers of babes and so forth and so on. Then he says, but you only have a form of knowledge and you have a form of truth. That is, it's outward. The truth is you don't know anything. And because of you God and His word and His name is being blasphemed. So they didn't know. And the first thing of which they were ignorant is the righteousness of God.

Now when you stop to think about this, people, this is the most basic characteristic of God's nature. And I want to talk about that and I want you to listen carefully because I think it's so very important that we understand these things. They were ignorant of that which was most basic about God. Now let me tell you what righteousness means, are you ready for this? Very profound definition, hang on: It means God's right. That's right, always right, always does what's right, thinks what's right, says what's right. God is right. If you want another word for righteousness it's just take out the middle: Rightness, the rightness of God. He's never wrong. He's never erring, never sinning, always right, the rightness of God. They were ignorant of His moral perfection. Another way to say it is His holiness. His holiness and His righteousness are inextricably linked. And I guess we could say that His rightness or His righteousness is His manifest holiness. Holiness is that which is true of His essence. It manifests itself in His rightness.

You say, "Well they missed then the basic." That's right, they missed the basic. They missed the fact that God was absolutely holy. They thought God was less holy than He was and they were more holy

than they were. They didn't understand how absolutely morally perfect God was. They didn't know how utterly free from wrong, how utterly unable to touch sin. I'm just enthralled with that thought because I fear that so many people today don't understand that either and they are equally ignorant of God's righteousness. Most people think God is just...just a nice guy, just somebody up there who wants everybody to feel good. I mean, we sort of make God into that. And that's the God of the liberals, isn't it? Just loves everybody. They don't know how really right He is, they misjudge His moral perfection. They misjudge His utter and absolute holy purity. They imagine that God is more tolerant of evil than He is. And that we're better than we are. So we pull God down a little, shove us up a little and we're pretty close. And a few religious activities and we're right on the line. That's a fatal error. We imagine God to be like us. God is absolutely right, absolutely right.

The whole Old Testament theme is holiness. The whole purpose of revealing in the Old Testament is to reveal the holiness, the rightness of God, the utter moral perfection and purity of God who knows no flaw in His nature. In fact, the Hebrew word "holy" is used over 600 times in the Old Testament to indicate moral perfection, to indicate moral perfection. And the sum of it comes in 1 Samuel 2:2 in that wonderful benediction of Hannah. She says there is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one beside You. There is no rock like our God, by Him deeds are weighed. In other words, everything is measured by His infinitely holy standard. There is no one holy like the Lord.

As I said earlier, His holiness has two elements. One is His utter separateness, His utter otherness. That is that He's other than we are. The second is His manifest righteousness. He is holy in that He is totally separated from us. He is holy in that He is manifestly right and morally perfect. That's why Exodus 15:11 says, "Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness?"

The truth here is so basic. If a person doesn't understand God's rightness, that is the supreme ignorance. If we imagine that God is less than He is, we have made a fatal mistake because we find to be God less than perfect, therefore He tolerates sin and imperfection, therefore we're going to be okay if we just improve a few things. Fatal mistake. Fatal mistake.

And all through the Old Testament God continues to affirm, continues to affirm how righteous He is. In fact, when you get into... Just for a minute turn to Leviticus 18 and 19, and we're... As I said, we're not going to hurry. We'll just cover what we can cover. But in Leviticus 18 the Lord starts laying down some standards. He starts laying down some... Actually you could call Leviticus 18 to 20 the law of holiness. This is God dispensing standards and laws and rules for social morality. This is one of the great law-giving sections of the Old Testament. You know, there are basically four sections of the Old Testament that give God's moral perfection, that establish laws that come from His absolute holiness.

The first one is in Exodus 20 and that's the Ten Commandments. And those are the basic moral standards. The second one comes also at the end of Exodus 20 and goes all the way to Exodus 23, to the end of the chapter, and that's been called the book of the covenant. And that basically is applied law, the applied standards, and it's a series of special case studies where God applies His standard to given situations.

And then in Deuteronomy chapters 12 to 25 there is what has been called the law of Deuteronomy, and that's the expansion and the explanation of the Ten Commandments in detail. So the... God reveals His moral perfection in the Ten Commandments, that's the basic standards. And then in the book of the covenant, that's the application of law to life, and then in Deuteronomy 12 to 25 in the law that expands and explains and builds on the Ten Commandments, and then this is the fourth of those major law sections, from Leviticus 18 to 20, called the law of holiness where God lays down the principles for society and for morality within society. And all of these are His perfect expressions of His absolute purity. And He always sets Himself as the standard and this is what's so remarkable in Leviticus. I want you to see if you can follow this.

The end of verse 2: He's giving rules all the way through, you see them there. Look down, for example, in verse 12 and following, "Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not." All of this is that. It's a whole lot of laws coming from His perfect person. But notice the motivator, at the end of verse 2, "I am the Lord your God," the end of verse 4, "I am the Lord your God," end of verse 5, "I am the Lord," end of verse 6, "I am the Lord." In other words, this is the reason why obedience is necessary. The end of verse 21, "I am the Lord," the end of verse 30, "I am the Lord your God." Now look at 19 verse 3, "I am the Lord your God," verse 4, "I am the Lord your God," verse 10, "I am the Lord your God," verse 16, "I am the Lord," verse 18, "I am the Lord," verse 25, "I am the Lord your God." And it goes on like that, verse 31, "I am the Lord your God," verse 32, "I am the Lord your God." At the end of...in the middle of verse 36, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt," the end of verse 37, "I am the Lord."

He keeps saying "I'm the Lord, I'm the Lord, I'm the Lord and I want you to obey these things because I demand perfection." And it's summed up in 19:2. Look at the second verse of 19. Here's the key to the whole thing, "Speak unto the congregation of the children of Israel and say unto them, You shall be holy for I the Lord your God (What?) am holy." Now the reason I call for moral purity and perfection from you is because that's who I am. You be holy because I'm holy. That, beloved, is the most revealing statement in the Old Testament as to the nature of God and His demand on men. And that's why the Lord picked it up in Matthew 5:48 and said, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And that's why Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 1:16, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

In other words, a holy God demands a holy standard. The Old Testament then is geared to presenting to us a God who is absolutely holy, absolutely without flaw, absolutely perfect and righteous. And all the rest of His attributes, now get this, all the rest of His attributes are simply functioning in concert with His perfection. In other words, He loves and His love is perfect love. He is wise and His wisdom is perfect wisdom. He is powerful and His power is perfect power and His knowledge is perfect knowledge and His justice is perfect justice and His anger is perfect anger and His vengeance is perfect vengeance and His grace is perfect grace and His mercy is perfect mer... See, it all flows in concert with His moral perfection.

All you have to do is look at the Old Testament to know the rightness of God, the righteousness of God. And that's why you just grab your head when you read, "They being ignorant of God's righteousness." It would have to be willful. It would have to be. He revealed His perfection in the Old Testament. He set the standard of perfection and He called men to that perfection. That's the heart of the holiness of God. That's the heart of the rightness of God. And I'll tell you something: Nobody anytime is ever going to occupy a permanent place in His eternal presence who isn't holy, because Habakkuk reminds us, "He's too pure to look on evil."

Now let me just expand on this for a moment. I want to just sort of give you some categories in which we see the perfection, the rightness, the holiness of God. We can't look at all the laws, all the ingredient laws that God has put into His moral system which reveals His absolute holiness, but just a few of them. We saw one this morning. Let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 6, and we're going to spend our time in the Old Testament tonight. Deuteronomy 6, it will sort of piggy-back on our message this morning, and here we find that God reveals His perfection in the matter of worship, in the matter of worship. "Hear, O Israel," Deuteronomy 6:4, "The Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, with all thy might." And Jesus said... Remember Matthew 22:40, verse 37, first of all, this is the great...verse 38 rather, Jesus said in verse 38, "This is the first and great commandment." And then in verse 40 He said, "All the law and the prophets hang on this commandment," and the one about loving your neighbor as yourself. So Jesus affirmed the centrality of this. God is saying I demand to be perfectly loved. I am the perfectly pure God and I demand whole-hearted, single-minded, pure, and perfect adoration. I tolerate no other objects of worship and I tolerate no half-hearted worship. His sovereign lordship was not to be in any way usurped by anyone else. No other idea, no other person, no other institution, no other loyalty was to come between men and God. He demanded perfect worship, perfect worship.

Look at Numbers 25, "And Israel abode in Shittim and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab." Balaam contributed to this, by the way. "And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods," that is the gods of Moab, "and the people did eat and bowed down to their gods and Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor." “Baal” means “lord.” “Peor” was a local mountain, Mount Peor. They worshiped the god of the mountain. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and the Lord said unto Moses, take all the heads of the people and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, slay ye everyone of his men that were joined unto Baal-peor." Well, that's pretty serious. But God is too holy to tolerate an unholy alliance. He demands to be worshiped in accord with His utter perfection.

Verse 6 says, "Behold one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle at the congregation." I guess they were weeping. "And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, took a javelin in his hand and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the women through her abdomen." When he found one of these who had contributed to this, he just ran a spear through she and the man. "And the plague was staid from the children of Israel, but before the plague was over twenty-four thousand were dead."

You see, when it comes to worship, God demands pure unmitigated worship. "Be ye holy (For what?) for I the Lord am holy." And God established that standard of absolute holiness. How could they not know how righteous He was? I mean, they knew there were incidents like Numbers 25. They knew that God didn't tolerate disobedience. They knew that. They knew that God punished those who didn't worship Him with a pure and total heart.

And then God revealed His holiness through laws relating not only to worship but to the family. That's another area we could talk about, to the family. I mean, initially in Genesis chapter 2 God said that one man would marry one woman for life, right? Genesis 2:23 and 24, God made man and woman, brought them together and said they should leave their parents, cleave to one another and they too should become what? One flesh. And then God, of course, caused that one flesh union to bring forth children and God established laws for children, rules for children. And the book of Proverbs, just is a whole book about family, isn't it? It says, "Children, listen to the instruction of your father, listen to the instruction of your father and your mother, young men, here's how to live." It instructs the children in the proper responses. And that's only part of the instruction. Many other places in the Old Testament are given to instruct the family. Back to the same passage in Deuteronomy 6 it says, "And these words which I command thee this day," in verse 6, "shall be in thine heart, thou shall teach them

diligently unto thy children, shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way and when thou liest down and when thou risest up."

In other words, the truth that I give you, the law that I give you is to be something that is taught within the family. In Leviticus 19, which we just read, "Speak unto the congregation of the children of Israel, say unto them, You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall fear every man his mother and his father." You had better respect your parents. That's one of God's standards. He demands that. In chapter 20 verse 9 of Leviticus, "Everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him."

And you can see that God put some pretty strong standards into family because He's holy. And you can look at society in general. So many of the laws that God gave to reveal His absolute righteousness and His absolute perfection and His absolute purity were laws given to society. And we could talk about so many of them. How you cared for your animals and how you dealt with people in business and how you handled your money and how you treated strangers and how you treated orphans and how you treated the poor and the needy. All of those things are dealt with. And God put out laws and rules for how to deal with poor people, how to deal with needy people, oppressed people, widows, orphans, children, neighbors, enemies, friends, leaders, servants, kings, so that society could function. God gave mandated standards for that. And they were expressions of His utter and absolute, majestic perfection. They were without flaw. They were absolutely right, absolutely true and demanded of everyone.

In Deuteronomy 15:7 it says, "If there's among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of the gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart nor shut thine hand from the poor brother, but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart saying, the seventh year, the year of release is at hand, and thine eye be evil against thy poor brethren, thou givest him nothing and he cry unto the Lord against thee and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him because for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto, for the poor shall never cease out of the land. Therefore I command thee saying, thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor and to thy needy in thy land."

That's just one of many social laws that come from a perfect God. And then another thing, another category that fascinates me and is so very pertinent today is the category... I just call it life, life. God had some things to say about taking a life, too. There are some very clear commands in the Bible

against murder, right? But do you know what the Bible says to do about murderers? Look at Genesis chapter 9 and I'll show you. In Genesis chapter 9 and verse 5, it says, "And surely your blood of your lives will I require, at the hand of every beast will I require it and at the hand of a man. At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man." And then verse 6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed." In other words, capital punishment; you murder someone, you pay with your life. Why? As a crime a deterrent? No. It may do that, it may not, that isn't an issue. Why? To get murderers off the street? No. That's a nice thought, that's helpful, but that's not the reason. Why? "For in the image of God made He man."

Walt Kaiser puts it this way, "When you murder someone you kill God in effigy." You murder God in effigy, because that man is made in the image of God. And the murderer is to suffer that which he has inflicted, for murder is not only the extreme act of hatred, it is a crime against the majesty of the divine image. You say, "Well maybe that was only for then?" No, as long as men bear the image of God, this punishment is in vogue. It should be the same today. The Old Testament has laws for manslaughter. They're not this severe. God gave laws for accidental death. They're not this severe. God gave very clear direction about what happens when someone dies in war. It's not the same. But murder is to be paid for with a life.

And critics of the Bible always say, "Well if God is so perfect and He's given this perfect law, how come He didn't kill Cain? When Cain killed Abel why wasn't Cain executed?" And many of the critics have sort of used that as a ploy to discredit the righteousness of God. They say, "Well God can't really be that concerned or He would have snuffed out Cain."

Well let me see if I can explain it. Cain should have died, no question about that, for killing Abel. But he didn't die. And why he didn't die may be explained to us in Deuteronomy chapter 21, turn to it. Deuteronomy chapter 21, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother and that when they have chastened him will not hearken unto them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him and bring him out to the elders of his city and to the gate of his place and they shall say unto the elders of his city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones that he die. So shalt thou put evil away from among you and all Israel shall hear and fear."

You know what I believe this says? That a family in its own behalf can never act as executioner. I believe that the family is so sacred to God and that God has such zeal to maintain the continuity of family and that God wants to build in protections to preserve the family so that in a passage like this where a stubborn child deserves to die, that family cannot act as executioner. That must be done by

the local government. And since in the time of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, there was no local government, there was only family, and no one in the family had the right to kill another family member, Cain was spared. But he was not spared the punishment of God, but only because families are not given the prerogative to execute their own members. That belongs to duly constituted government. And that becomes reinforced when the Scripture says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," and it's not talking about vengeance, it's talking about right kind of laws, that when someone does something they're properly compensated. But that's a task for the government, not personal vengeance. And Jesus made that clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

There's another issue and that's the issue of abortion. And that's a very important issue because the Old Testament deals with that issue as well. That's another way to take a life. Now is God consistent in that way? Do we see the manifestation of God's absolute moral perfection as God speaks to the issue of abortion? I believe we do. And the question they always ask: is a fetus human? Can we really call that murder? Is that fetus human? You hear women say, "I have a right to do anything I want with my body." Is that your body or is that somebody else's body? That's the question. And I believe that question is answered in the Old Testament in several passages. Look first of all at Job chapter 10, Job chapter 10 and verse 8, and this is just an insight into this issue. "Remember..." Start back at verse 8 and then we'll go to verse 9, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about. Yet thou dost destroy me?" Job is asking questions. You made me, God. And then he says, "Remember I beseech Thee, Thou hast made me as the clay and wilt Thou bring me into dust again?" The Lord was really putting Job...allowing Satan to put Job through some terrifying trials. "Wilt Thou bring me into dust again? Hast Thou not poured me out as milk and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favor and Thy care hath preserved my spirit."

He's just talking about the fact that he was created by God. He doesn't see himself in this act of creation as other than who he is. He's describing me, me, me. It's very personal. In Psalm 139 a more familiar one, verse 13, the psalmist in this case is David. He says to the Lord, "Thou hast possessed my inward parts, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb, I will praise Thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, marvelous are Thy works and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hidden from Thee. When I was made in secret and intricately wrought in the lower parts of the earth," a reference, no doubt, to the abdomen, "Thine eyes did see my substance yet being unformed and in Thy book all my members were written which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them."

In other words, God, You planned me and You shaped me in that place. This is distinct identity. The Scripture says of John the Baptist that he was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb,

in Luke chapter 1. Now those scriptures tell me that that's not some attachment, that's not some foreign object in the body that should be removed at will. That's somebody that God is creating. But there's even a more definitive passage in Exodus 21 and I would just draw your attention to it. Exodus 21, and this is most interesting. We don't want to spend a lot of time but I do want to at least touch this great and important text. "If men fight," Exodus 21:22, men are getting in a fight, and often when men fight wives try to break it up. "And they fight and hurt a woman with a child," it's a pregnant woman, "so that her fruit depart from her and yet no mischief follows, he shall be surely punished according as the woman's husband will lay upon him." He shall pay as the judges determine. "And if any mischief follows, then thou shalt give life for life."

Now here's a woman with a child. It identifies the unborn young as a child, got that? Not a fetus, a child, somebody. And in the struggle and the fight her child goes out. Some people say that's a miscarriage. No. There's a different Hebrew word for miscarriage. It's not that word. Every time this term here is used in the Old Testament, every time, it is used of the coming out of a child at birth. Once out of all those times the child is stillborn. All the other times it's just the birth of a child. The point is this, if that woman in that struggle is so affected that she gives birth, if the child lives, there should be some compensation for her pain and her wound and her hurt. If that life dies, you die. You have aborted the life and it is a life for a what? A life. I think we could simplify the whole abortion issue if we just executed all the aborters. That would be according to the Word of God, a life for a life. God is very consistent. God is absolutely holy. And the righteousness of God is seen in His laws about worship. The righteousness of God is seen in His laws about...about marriage and family, His laws about society, His laws about life.

You take just the aspect of marriage alone apart from family. And some people say, "Oh well, God's not so holy, He allows polygamy," right? You've heard the critics say that. "Why look at Lamech. Lamech was a polygamist." Right, and God drowned the whole world, including Lamech. You say, "What about Esau? Esau had three wives." Yes, and Esau was a profane person. "But Jacob married two sisters." Yeah, and a life of grief. And nowhere does God approve of polygamy. You go back to Genesis 2, one man, one woman come together to make one flesh for life. And in the period after the patriarchs there are only 13 recorded instances of polygamy in the Old Testament, only 13. Now listen to this, 12 of the 13 polygamists were absolute rulers who were answerable to no laws in their own thinking. Nine of them were kings, absolute monarchs. Three out of the remaining four were judges in Israel who were, in a sense, above the law. Only one of them was a non-absolute ruler of one nature or another. It was practiced by those who felt themselves non-subject to courts.

And then the critics say, "Well what about Deuteronomy 21?" Well, let's look at it. "Is God really that holy? Here He advocates polygamy?" they say. Deuteronomy 21:15, "If a man have two wives, one beloved and the other hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if

the first born son be hers that was hated, that it shall be when he maketh her... his sons to inherit that which he hath that he may not make the son of the beloved first born before the son of the hated, which is indeed the first born." Now that does sound bad. I mean, if you married two wives, you love one hate the other. If the one you hate has the first born son, you can't give the inheritance to the son of the one you love. You've got to give it to the son of the one you hate. But what the English doesn't do for us here is to help us understand that the way the text should be read is that if a man has had two wives in succession and he loved one and hated the other, not two wives at the same time. The assumption is that one has died, a hated one, who has left a son. And now he's married to his second love and she has a son and he wants to give it to him but he can't. It's the law of primogenitor.

Look at Proverbs 5:15 and this is just very clear. Some people who read this the first time might not understand it. Now let me tell you something, when the Bible talks about sex and when it talks about sex acts it always does so in very gentle, poetic, and veiled terminology. It is not explicit. It is not pandering to lust. It speaks in very veiled ways. And this is speaking of sexual relations in a very veiled way. "Drink water out of your own cistern, running waters out of your own well. Let your fountains be dispersed abroad and the rivers of waters in the streets let them be only thine own and not for strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?"

In other words, God says you've got your woman and that's all you need. That's the standard. So there's no advocation of polygamy at all in Scripture. And when you talk about God's provision of physical love or sexual love, that too is a manifestation of God's holiness, of God's perfection, for He brings two together for life in a beautiful and fulfilling and blessed relationship. It's a relationship here, it says let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth, and let her breasts satisfy. I mean, it's all a wonderful, fulfilling thing between a man and a woman. I love what it's called in the eighth chapter of Song of Solomon, the whole physical relationship is called there the flame of the Lord. I mean, that's marvelous. And some people come up and say, "Well how can God be a holy God where He allows sex?" It's because the world has made such a rotten and wretched mess out of it. In God's design it is the flame of the Lord. In other words, it is that burning that God has given us. That's why Hebrews 13:4 says that marriage is honorable and all and the bed is undefiled. And God regulates sex, believe me. One man, one woman, marriage, that's where it is the flame of the Lord. Read Song of Solomon and see the beauty of physical love. All through that book, it's marvelous. And you don't say, "Well, God couldn't be very holy, look at all the sex He produced." No, no, no, look at the beauty of the relationship He produced and the perversion that men have caused it to become.

But God regulates it. In Leviticus chapter 18 God says, "No bestiality." I mean, that's inconceivable to me anyway. But do you know, in the Nile Delta there was a cult which practiced co- habitation between women and goats. This is in the time of the Old Testament. The gods of Canaan, Ugarit, cohabitated with animals. You know what a mermaid reflects? Paganism, which advocated man cohabitating with a fish. And you've seen the half horse, half man; all a part of the bestiality that has occupied the minds of cultic religions. Leviticus 18:23 to 30 forbids it. And then there's homosexuality. In Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20 verse 13 and Deuteronomy 23 verse 17 calls it an abomination which God hates, it is a perversion. And Deuteronomy 22:23 to 29 says that fornication is a perversion. And Leviticus 18 says that adultery is a perversion. I mean, Scripture is very clear on the perfection of God, isn't it, even in that area. God gave clear directions about those things. He forbid incest, any perversion of the proper order. He's a perfectly holy God. He tolerates nothing but His absolute holy standard.

Well, there are so many other things we could talk about in God's perfection. You could talk about wealth. God regulates that. God has given us very clear instruction about what we're to do with the things that we have received and how we're to care for them in accord with His absolute holiness. We could talk about truth. You want to know something? The most important commodity in human society is truth. Do you know that? As soon as everybody begins to lie, then nobody knows what's going on. As soon as people will willfully lie, all relationships are suspect. As soon as people begin to lie, courts can't find out the truth. I mean, truth is essential. That's why Proverbs 12:22 says the Lord detests lying lips. Everything comes apart when people don't tell the truth. The Bible condemns false witnesses, perjurers. Oh, the Bible allows for the fact that you don't have to say everything and the critics have said, "Well God isn't so holy, Rahab lied. Rahab lied and hid the spies and God commends Rahab and puts her in the Messianic line. God can't be that holy, He allows lying." And the answer to that is Rahab lied because Rahab lied, not because God wanted her to. And God would have saved those spies and God would have spared Rahab and God would have made sure it all worked out if she hadn't lied. That's the folly of lying. No, no lie is prompted by God, none at all.

There was a time when some things were concealed in 1 Samuel 16 from Saul. They were concealed for God's purpose. But the intention was not to deceive, it just wasn't said, that's all. It just wasn't said. There was no lie. There was no deceit. And if Saul had asked the right question in 1 Samuel 16 verses 1 to 3 then he would have had to get the right answer. But as long as he didn't ask, there was no lie. Slandering, stealing, coveting, every other thing you study in the Bible consistently manifests God's absolute perfection, His absolute rightness, His unwavering holiness and purity and moral perfection. All through the Old Testament, all through the New Testament, God revealed Himself as righteous. And yet they missed it. They didn't see it. And there are people today the same way. They want to look around and find all these little things that are inconsistent with God and all they do is

show how ignorant they are of Scripture. That's all. Because every one of them can be explained rather readily as we've tried to do tonight. That's half of what I want to say to you. Come back next week. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You that You are a holy God, that You have revealed Yourself perfectly and as the perfect one without flaw. Your standards are unwavering and pure. Lord, sometimes we think we see an inconsistency. Maybe we think You allowed something that was not consistent with Your holiness. Or maybe we think You did something that was inconsistent with Your holiness or You said something. But if we look more closely in Your Word we see it isn't so. It isn't so. Father, may we see how holy You are, how unwavering You are, how absolutely perfect You are. How You establish that which is right and never ever deviate. And may we in seeing how right You are by contrast see how wrong we are, how far away we are, how prone to sin and perversion, how we fail to worship You in the holy way You desire. How even in our families we fail to live up to the standards You've established there so often. In society we fail to reach out the way we should. In our marriages we fail. In the way we treat the dignity of life, in the area of sexual relationships, of wealth, in the area of telling the truth, how we fall short of Your holiness. But You have said, "Be ye holy for I the Lord your God am holy." We confess we can't and so we need a Savior. We thank You that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our unholiness and desires to live within us to make us holy, that we may enter Your presence and be accepted.

While your heads are bowed in a closing moment, I pray in my heart that you know the Savior, the one who can forgive, who alone can forgive and will forgive, that you'll open your heart to Him if you don't. We can't live up to God's holy standard, there's no way. But Christ can forgive that in us and give us a new, divine enabling to live to His glory.

Father, work in all our hearts. Help us not to be ignorant of how righteous You really are. Bring to the prayer room those You desire to come and we offer our praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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