

Examples of Divine Justice

How To Live By God's Word

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In the previous sermon, we were exploring the sins of presumption, and syncretism using Christmas as a model, or an illustration of what not to do.

Human nature is perverse. There is in mankind, and therefore in us, the desire to worship God, but human nature wants to be free to follow itself—to follow its own dictates in regard to how it is going to worship God.

Now the result has been a wide variety of religions, and mass confusion as to which is the true religion. This is a world in which true values are lost in an ocean of conflicting opinions as to how to live.

All of us know God is not pleased with this circumstance, but He is allowing it to continue. Not much longer, but we still have to put up with His patience with us a little while longer. But, even while He is allowing it to continue, He is still calling people out of it.

Now He has shown His people have been redeemed from what He calls the traditions of this world (I Peter 1:18), and He calls these traditions futile. But the Christian is now responsible for not allowing the world to squeeze him into its mold.

My purpose was not to convince you that Christmas is evil, but was to begin to get you to think more seriously of what it is we are involved in since this perverseness is imbedded so deeply in human nature. This perverseness I've been referring to in the last number of sermons is self-deception.

It is not something to be frightened about, but we must be aware of its presence there if it is going to be overcome.

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

I want to draw your attention to the word "wanders." I believe with all my heart that most of us do not intend to go astray. We wander into unrighteousness. We wander into sin. But you see the results of whether we deliberately do it, or wander into it, are the same. That is what the verse says. A man who wanders will rest in the congregation of the dead. The assumption in the verse is that the person never gets back on the track. And so while he is wandering, even though he does not deliberately plan to go into that direction, if he does not consciously turn away from it and get back onto the path—back on the track—then it is very likely that he is going to end up in the grave, just as it says.

Now the New Testament has a confirming scripture as well.

Hebrews 2:1-3 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

This is where Paul warns us not to neglect so great salvation. So we have a similar illustration. The person who is neglecting his salvation is not deliberately setting his mind to turn away from God—His way of life. He is simply, through neglect, allowing himself to drift in that direction. He is not planning to go that way. He gets distracted by things in his life—by hobbies, by work, by rearing children, and a great many other things that it could be. It does not matter what it is, but he allows himself to neglect what has been given to him.

The metaphor that is used there in Hebrews 2 is of a boat that has slipped its mooring and it is drifting within the harbor. Just drifting with the current.

Now both of these verses tend to point to a major problem we see arise in the end time church of God. We may call it Laodiceanism, and that is a very nice "tag" to put on it. We can comfortably say the word, but are we aware that a Laodicean is a drifter? A Laodicean is somebody who is hanging on to the best of both possible worlds according to the way that he sees it. He has got one foot in the church, one foot in the world, and he does not realize that he is drifting.

Now this is the kind of person that God says He finds unpalatable. He is going to spit him out of His mouth.

Proverbs 8:36 But he who sins against Me wrongs his own soul. All those who hate Me love death.

That is a sobering conclusion to think on. We do not like to think of ourselves as loving death. But, I want you to think of this in relation to the verse that we just read from Proverbs 21. The person who is wandering and making no conscious effort to get back on the track—no effort to repent—is drifting with the current. Would you say that because this person is not really protecting "the pearl of great price" that he has received—is not taking advantage of the great gift that he has been given in understanding the purpose of God—that he loves death if he is doing nothing to take advantage of what has been given to him?

The Bible again consistently shows that those who do not consciously and purposefully direct their lives toward obedience to God in reality love death rather than life. Christ came to give us life. He gave us a way that we are to follow. He expects that we will make the efforts to do so.

If we neglect it, if we just drift, can we say that we are really following His way? I do not think so. I do not think that we can honestly say that we really love His way. The conclusion then from God's point of view is that those who are just drifting—neglecting—in fact, love death. This is not a conclusion that we should feel comfortable with at all. God intends that we take the

admonition and begin to do something with our life.

What has happened in reality, is that human nature has deceived the person about one's purpose in life. His drifting is the evidence of what it is that the person really loves.

What is so interesting in light of this is that the words most commonly used both in the Old and New Testaments to indicate sin are both defined as "missing the mark." That does not sound to me as though someone has deliberately aimed in the wrong direction. It sounds to me as though they have generally aimed in the right direction but missed it.

The other word that is also translated into the English word "sin" means to slip, or to fall, or to wander from the path. Is that not interesting? Again, you see there is no indication of deliberateness at all. But rather, the indication is that either out of weakness, or out of ignorance, somehow or another, he unconsciously turns aside. Nobody slips and falls on purpose. And, nobody wanders out of the way on purpose either. You might get lost if you wander out of the way.

You see, God understands human nature and that it has a tendency not to want to hold itself steady, because human nature deceives the person into thinking that things are okay the way they are.

I think we can conclude then, in regard to Christmas, that it is a snare. Remember the scripture in Deuteronomy 12: 30-32 where God says to watch out and don't become snared in what the people of the land are doing. Christmas is a snare. It is a vanity; that is, to keep it is futile. It will not produce any good thing.

Mark 7:7 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

In vain! It is a vanity for one to do so and anyone who practices it as a way of life (Revelation 22: 14-15) is going to die. They will not be in that city. So, Christmas is a snare, attractive though it is. It is vanity. It will not produce good things. Those who practice it will die.

Picking up on that, we are going to lead right into the subject that has much to do with both the theme of Christmas, and the way I began to introduce this sermon.

We are going to look at some examples of divine justice.

We are going to be looking in on God as He executes judgments against these very sins that we were talking about. The sin of presumptuousness, and the sin of syncretism. However, we are going to concentrate mostly on the sin of presumption and you are going to see some of the most shocking examples of divine wrath in the entire Bible.

If you think that this is not something serious to God, I think that by the time you get through studying this, you will have rethought your understanding.

We are not dealing with a light matter. We are dealing with sins in which ignorance plays only a very small part. It deals with a sin in which knowledge of what was right is fully available.

The people involved in these sins should have known better than to do what they did. It is the

kind of situation that we, the people of God find ourselves in—those to whom God has given this revelation of what is His way of life—what the gospel is—what God's purpose is.

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

Then comes the instruction as to what is to be done. I want us to pay attention to the word "unintentionally," because by the time this is over, you will know that there is no sacrifice for sins of presumption. There is no sacrifice for sins done deliberately. We will define this, and make it more specific as we go along.

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

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

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

Then follows instructions as what is to be done. In chapter 5:15-18, we have the trespass offering.

Leviticus 5:15,17 If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the LORD, then he shall bring to the Lord as his trespass offering a ram without blemish from the flocks... If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity.

In that case, our blindness does not excuse our guilt. The person is still guilty even though he did not know.

"Unintentionally," thankfully, includes more than one might think at first glance. It means to turn aside, to wander, to err, to make a mistake, to miss the mark. That is, the person misses the real objective in life, which is to obey God, and to be holy as He is holy.

It includes sins done with a degree of consciousness, that is, an awareness of what one is doing. It includes sins done willingly out of weakness, but not sins done deliberately.

For example, the Bible clearly differentiates between manslaughter and murder. Manslaughter is

the taking of a life accidentally. There was no plan to do it. It just occurred. The head flew off a hammer, hit somebody in the head, cracked their skull, and they died. Nobody deliberately planned to do that. There may have been some carelessness involved in it. It was not something in which the person deliberately set out to do.

In the case of murder, it includes a measure of deliberateness, lying in wait, planning to do it, setting one's mind to do it. It includes a situation in which one burned in anger against someone for quite a period of time. He had plenty of time in order to bring himself under control, but he never did it. And then, reaching the boiling point, the person murdered the other one.

Numbers 15:22-24 If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses—all that the Lord has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and onward throughout your generations, then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation...

Then comes the offering that is made.

Numbers 15:26 It shall be forgiven...

Numbers 15:30 But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people.

That means executed—put to death.

Numbers 15:31 Because he has despised the word of the Lord...

Notice these verbs! "Despise." "Reproach." "Cut off." You can see that there is a difference in attitude reflected about the person who sins unintentionally, even though the person was conscious of what he was doing. We will define this a little bit more.

Numbers 15:31 b ...that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.

No forgiveness here. See? He bears his guilt right to the grave.

So, murder, which involves deliberateness to it, is the willful taking of a life. And to sin presumptuously is to do it willfully.

Previously in this series, I gave definitions of the English word, "presumption." In the Old Testament it doesn't quite mean the same thing, as it does in English. In English, it simply

means to assume, to take a matter upon oneself without considering all the factors, and then just going ahead and doing it. But, in the Old Testament it carries with it the idea of acting arrogantly—of rebellion. In fact, it means to do something with audacity—to be headstrong.

There is willfulness implied in the usage of the word that is not contained in the English. It is much more forceful than the English usage of the word. It refers to those who overstep their bounds, or dare to act in a disobedient manner.

In other words, a person who is sinning presumptuously is fully aware of what he is doing, in that he is fully educated, and is not in ignorance either of what he is doing, or the potential cost of what he is doing, and he deliberately sets his mind to do it. It is an act of rebellion, an audacious rebellion of setting one's will despite all he knows to go ahead and do it anyway.

You can see, just by those usages, that the word "unintentional" in Leviticus 4 and Numbers 15 can include within it someone who is conscious of what he is doing, but he does not act audaciously. He does not plan it. He is not rebellious. He is weak.

Now God will forgive that. But, He will not forgive the sin that is presumptuous according to usage of the words in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, the usage of the word begins very similar to the English usage of the word. It means "to think," or "suppose." But, when one looks at the context in which this word is used in the New Testament, it carries with it the idea of dealing proudly, defiantly, and recklessly. It means to look down upon. We see a tremendous amount of pride inferred or implied in the usage of the Greek word in the New Testament.

Remember these usages of the word in both the Old and New Testaments as we begin to look at the examples—the illustrations—that we're going to turn to. And, at the same time, I want you to remember this biblical New Testament principle as it is illustrated in the Old Testament, that is "To whom much is given, much is required."

Now, have we been given much? Is there much required of us? We will see!

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

meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

A numbing, shocking, frightful occurrence! I don't know how many people were watching when this occurred. Maybe Aaron himself was a witness and he saw something akin to lightning kill his two eldest children. And in a moment—in a flash—their lives were gone.

He had seen them when they were babies. He had been with them as they grew through their childhood, and into their teen years. How much had he agonized over them when they got sick? He saw them grow in strength and maturity. Undoubtedly, he felt a measure of pride in their development. I'm sure he was very pleased to see them in the position that they were now in. And then, suddenly (I assume that they were somewhere between 30 and 40 years of age), their lives were gone in a flash! There are none of us who would not be numb by that kind of frightful occurrence, especially coming at the time that it did.

Now we're going to look at this thing in the way that it occurred.

What did they do that was so awful to God that He struck out in the way that He did? They did something that was so reprehensible in God's eyes that He could not stand to allow them to live another second.

He has never intervened in any of your lives in the way that He intervened in the lives of these people. What He did there has left its mark on all time. You ought to understand enough about the nature of God that He is not in the habit of reacting this way. What they did must have been something that He found so distasteful that it motivated Him to act, and take away two men's lives in the blink of an eye.

You would think, humanly, if anybody who had the favor of God, it was Moses and Aaron. Were these not the two that He chose to lead His people out of their bondage from Egypt? Did He not choose Moses to be the leader politically and religiously from all the people? And Aaron, his brother, to be the religious leader under Moses?

You would think that if there was anybody that God was going to show favor to, it would be one or the other of these men, wouldn't it? Maybe He would wink, and turn His head, and look away, because after all, these were the relatives of Moses, right? These were the sons of Aaron!

But, there is no respect of persons with God. No partiality in judgment. God did not turn away. He did not blind His eyes, because there is no favoritism with God. And he took their lives in a flash. No mercy. Just swiftly, and violently wiping them out right on the spot.

There were no temple prostitutes, like we have in paganism. They didn't bring temple prostitutes there in order to service the men of the community. There was no sacrifice of little children before the altar of God that He said He hated, and detested so much. Just something that He called, "strange fire." No trial, just a summary execution. It was that quick.

Let's go back and pick this thing up in its context. In Exodus 40, the Tabernacle was erected and arranged.

Exodus 40:11 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "On the first day

of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.

Exodus 40:34-36 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. When the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys.

Then we find that the Fire was over it at night. So we have the erection of the Tabernacle, and God symbolically taking up residence within it. It was as though it was His house.

Now once the tabernacle was erected, we have beginning in the book of Leviticus the establishment of the sacrifices, and their instructions.

Leviticus 8:1-3 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, the anointing oil, a bull as the sin offering, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather all the congregation together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

We find here the consecration of the priesthood to the service of God at the tabernacle—that is, empowering them to act in God's behalf for the people in making the sacrifices. We find in verse 10, that Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle, and all that was in it, and sanctified them. He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times anointing the altar and all of its utensils, also the laver and its base to sanctify them. He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head, and anointed him to sanctify him.

Remember the anointing oil is a type of the Holy Spirit of God. We find the Holy Spirit, as it were, being given to Aaron for the purpose of carrying out his spiritual responsibilities to act as high priest between God and the people. So, he is empowered and set apart—sanctified—to do this job.

Leviticus 9:1 It came to pass on the eighth day...

This is only 8 days after the tabernacle is erected. Things are happening very rapidly here.

Leviticus 9:1-2a It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. And he said to Aaron, Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering...

We find here in this chapter the sanctification of the priesthood to serve under Aaron in behalf of God before the people.

Leviticus 9:22-24 Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people,

blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted [maybe screamed would be more like it in reaction to what occurred] and fell on their faces.

They fell on their faces out of fear, reverence, respect, awe, and wonder from the knowledge that God was in their midst. That last verse shows that God accepted these people—Aaron and the priests—because everything was done according to His will.

Now in Leviticus 6: 8 you will find, if you have a NKJV (and some other Bibles), a title at the beginning of a paragraph, which says "The Law of the Burnt Offering."

Leviticus 6:11-13 Then he shall take off his garments, put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. ` A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.

In Leviticus 9: 24 God lighted that fire. And that fire, because of being ignited by God, became holy fire, as though the Hand of God touched it. It was never to be allowed to go out. It had to be fed constantly in order to keep it from going out. The fire of God was always with them continuously. It was in the pillar of fire above and below; they were carrying it with them wherever they went.

Are we beginning to see the "strange fire" indication here? It is beginning to come clear.

Leviticus 10:1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire [strange fire]...

In Exodus 30: 7-9, the instructions for the altar of incense are found. You will remember in Leviticus 10: 1, these two young men, Nadab, and Abihu, took their censer, and put fire in it to put incense on it. These men were going to carry out their responsibility of putting incense on the incense altar.

The incense altar was inside the first room of the Tabernacle. It was backed up against the curtain that separated the Holy Place, from the Most Holy Place—separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The curtain was there, and right in the front of it was the altar of incense.

Exodus 30:7-9 Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning;

when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.

You begin to see how explicit the directions are regarding the use of all the furniture, the tools, the utensils of the Tabernacle. So, morning and evening, and special incense.

Now, what did they do? Well, the fire that they offered, or that they should have offered on the incense altar should have come from the burnt offering altar—the brazen altar. They should have taken coals of fire from it, put it in their censer, taken the special incense, gone into the first room, and put the coals from the brazen altar into the incense altar, and then put the incense on top of the coals that came from the brazen altar. They did not do that. They undoubtedly took coals from a common fire, rather than from the fire that was on the brazen altar.

They did not follow the instructions explicitly that were given by God for doing what might seem to be a very simple operation.

Aaron was undoubtedly shocked, and displeased. So he went right to the top among human beings—right to Moses—to get this thing straightened out.

Now here comes the instruction—a major portion of it anyway, for you and me—because Moses gave him God's answer.

Leviticus 10:3 Then Moses said to Aaron, This is what the Lord spoke, saying: By those who come near Me [In the context right here, the high priest, and the priests, specifically] I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.

They didn't do it! They didn't do it because they failed to follow through with the specific instructions that God gave them to do. God expected them to follow His instructions right to the T. They cannot possibly say that they didn't know any better, because all of this happened within eight days from the beginning of the erection of the Tabernacle to when they made this incorrect offering. They should have known better than to do what they did! They were fully instructed; they were not ignorant of what they were doing. They instead (we have to conclude this), presumptuously decided to offer coals from a fire that had not been ignited by God and was, therefore, not considered by God to be holy.

Did they drift? Did they wander? Did they just step aside?

I don't think it was that simple. They knew better. They deliberately and willfully did what they did. God can forgive sin that is done in weakness. He can forgive sin that is done because we forget. He can forgive sin that we do when the pressure is on us, and we don't react in the right way. He took these people's lives immediately because what they did was presumptuous. They did it arrogantly. They did it with audacity. They knew what they were doing when they did

what they did. They added—or we might say that they subtracted. Remember Deuteronomy 12? Remember Revelation 22? "Do not add, do not subtract, from what I have said."

These two men either added or subtracted, however you wish to look at it, from the instructions that should have been fresh in their minds. God especially holds those responsible who are to draw near to Him. In this case, the priesthood is to be holy as He is holy. They tried to get by with what they felt carnally was acceptable.

By an incident such as this, we can begin to understand how God defines holiness. If you look up a definition of "holiness" in a Bible dictionary, or something similar, it is very likely they will begin by telling you it means "to be sanctified," and "to be set apart." It includes moral and ethical qualities. Those who are consecrated to serve God must follow Him explicitly—must follow His instructions explicitly.

There was no ambiguity with the instructions that were given to Nadab and Abihu. Each step, and each instrument in the process, was designed by God to convey certain spiritual concepts. They were instructed in it, and then they blatantly twisted it to their own ends in order to—who knows what they had in mind. So, God reacted very quickly.

It says Aaron remained silent. Do you know why? Because Aaron knew that God's judgment, despite his feelings about his own sons, was correct. So, Moses tossed in a further warning, "Don't you go out of the door of the Tabernacle, lest you die. Don't uncover your head," because that was a symbol of mourning. "Don't mourn for them, because if you do, that would show you to be in disagreement with God's judgments, and maybe the same thing would occur to you."

Now that is a bit of Divine Judgment.

We don't like to think of God in these kinds of terms. We tend to like to think of Him as loving, kind, generous, merciful, forgiving, a cuddly grandfather whose lap we can crawl up on, and snuggle in, and feel warm and comfy. I am not saying that aspect of God is not there, but rather, I am just saying that there is another side of God in which His justice can be absolute, quick, terrifying, and horrifying. Especially when it hits close to home.

"Those who draw near to Me are expected to be Holy," is what He is saying. Holiness is not merely consecration, or dedication to a god, but it is moral and ethical as well. These men sinned! They were consecrated. They were sanctified to be priests. But, because they were unethical and immoral in what they did, they died.

How does this apply to you and me? I Peter 2 says that we have been called to be royal priests. Now, think about that and think about it seriously. We are a spiritual priesthood who are called upon to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God.

Today a person may claim that his God is Creator. But, if he is not obedient to the Creator God's commands, then that person is merely deluding himself. Human nature has deceived him. You see, sincerity is only part of the picture. God wants the sincerity to be there. He doesn't want us to sin either intentionally, or unintentionally. He wants our intent—our motivation—in every act to be one of obedience to Him.

We are to worship Him in spirit and in truth. We see, by putting these things together, that the

closer one is associated with God's work, the more necessary it is to ensure that spiritual blemishes do not mar the relationship with God. If it is, we can't function for God in the way that He intends. And God will not be glorified before all the people. This is why Paul said in I Corinthians 6: 20 "Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit." What he meant was, glorify God with your entire personality.

So, our motto needs to be "Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else" in our relationship to God.

Leviticus 10:9-10 Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.

This gives an indication that maybe this was the reason they did what they did. They may not have been drunk, but they may have been drinking. Remember, it was a period of great celebration. The Tabernacle had been erected, Aaron had been installed as High Priest, and the sons were installed in the priesthood, and the Levites with them. Undoubtedly, there was a lot of celebrating going on. And it seems to indicate simply by the placing of the verses, that Nadab and Abihu had been drinking. They weren't thinking properly when they did what they did. Alcohol has a way of deluding a person into thinking that he is in control when he is not.

Perhaps all the other references in the Bible to being drunk are actually nothing more than veiled references to this occasion right here. Somebody under the influence of alcohol cannot serve God properly.

Does not God describe the world as being drunk with the wine of her fornication? He describes them as people who are in no condition to serve God because they can't think straight spiritually. They think they're in control, when they are not. And, so they can't be holy. They're going to attempt to serve Him in immorality, and without the proper ethics.

We could go on to quite a number of examples. How about Uzza? Everybody knows about Uzza. The story of Uzza involves the moving of the most sacred and revered object to all the Israelites—The Ark of the Covenant. The story is in I Chronicles 13: 3-4. The Ark represented the Throne of God. It had been missing from Israel for about 20 years. Finally, David had consolidated his position as king of Israel, and he decided he wanted to bring the Ark to himself, and to Jerusalem. So, he made plans to do so.

As they were moving the Ark on an oxcart, the oxen stumbled; the Ark appeared to be tumbling off onto the ground, and Uzza, in what may have been nothing more than purely reflex action, put out his hand to steady the Ark. Upon touching it, apparently another lightning bolt came out from God, and Uzza was immediately struck dead.

David's reaction at first was anger, because God spoiled his party. The band was playing. They were marching into Jerusalem. People were dancing. And God spoiled his party. But then, it turned into abject fear, because he, David, knew that something like this would not occur unless something very immoral and unethical had been done.

We know the story that David searched the scriptures, and the second time, he got it right.

The scriptures are very clear. The Ark was not to be transported on a cart. It was not to be pulled by oxen. It was to be carried with long poles thrust through rings that were built into the Ark. Not only was it not to be touched by the Kohathites, who were to be the only ones who were allowed to carry the Ark, it was not even to be looked upon by the Kohathites.

Aaron and the priests were to go into the Tabernacle, cover the Ark, and then the Kohathites were allowed to come into the Tabernacle and carry the Ark with poles made only with acacia wood. In I Chronicles 13, virtually everything that was done in the moving of the Ark was wrong. And, virtually everyone who participated in it, was unholy in the way that they had acted.

These people had good intentions. They didn't mean for this to occur. They were celebrating. This was one of the high points in all of the life of the people at that time to have the most revered and sacred object come back into the land, and to be put back into the place where it was supposed to be.

And God spoiled the party by striking Uzza dead, because he dared to reach out his hand and touch something that he was forbidden to even look at with his eyes.

He was not guiltless. God is never unjust. Uzza was not the only one that was guilty. David was guilty too. All the captains of 10, and captains of 50, and the captains of 100s were guilty. What about all the priests that were involved in this? They were guilty as well. Was Uzza a Kohathite? Nobody knows. The Bible does not say, which seems to indicate that he was not a Kohathite. But, Uzza was the one who was killed as a result of all these people's sins.

When Uzza reached out and touched the Ark, it was no act of heroism, but rather was the final act of arrogance and presumptuousness, because he presumed that his hand was going to be less defiling than the dirt that he feared it was going to fall into.

Can you recall how in Exodus 20: 25 after giving the 10 Commandments, that God concludes that section by saying to all the people, "If you are going to build an altar to Me, I want it to be built out of either dirt, or stones that are uncut." He did not want the altar that was raised to Him, to be defiled by the hand of a man who has sinned. Man's hands are not holy.

You see, the earth that the Ark would have fallen into is obedient to its Creator! It doesn't sin. It follows the laws that God established. Only man sins. Only man goes against the will of God. When Uzza's hand hit that Ark, it was immediately defiled by the touch of a sinning man, even though it was done by a reaction.

Now we have trouble with things of this nature. We don't like to think of God as being like this. So the divine justice at times angers us, or offends us, or at the very least, confuses us.

We look at these things in the light of all the teaching that we have had from the time that we were little tots, whether it was from a protestant church, or the Catholic church, or even from the Church of God. How merciful God is. How much God loves us, and gave His Son for us—the greatest payment that has ever been given for anybody under any kind of circumstance. How generous, kind, and forgiving He is. We don't like to hear about a God who can react like this. Did He seem patient when He reacted in the case of Nadab and Abihu? Or, in the case of Uzza?

The reason we have difficulty is because we do not fully understand the vitally important biblical concepts of holiness, justice, sin, and grace. And I'm not going to tell you I fully understand them, because I do not.

I understand them in part, and I will pass on to you what I do understand. We don't completely understand what holiness is. We don't understand completely what Godly justice is. We don't completely understand the evil of sin. And we don't understand completely what grace is.

The acts of God in the case of Nadab and Abihu, and of Uzza (and I might add here, of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament), they don't seem to us to be clear-cut examples of God's mercy. But before we can understand God's mercy, we have to first understand God's justice.

Divine justice is linked to righteousness. They are inseparable. And, in fact, we find contexts in the Bible where the two words, or sometimes the one word used both ways, are translated "righteousness," and other times, they are translated "justice." They are that closely linked. They cannot be separated.

God's justice is according to righteousness. Righteousness means "rectitude." Righteousness means "right doing." It is right. There is no such thing as evil justice in God, because God is righteous. The justice of God is always an expression of His Holy Character.

Justice in the Bible refers to conformity with a rule or a law, a standard, or a norm. Remember, divine justice has to be attached to the norm with God—divine righteousness. God always plays by the rules. It is impossible for Him to break His own rules. He always plays by the rules. And the norm for God's justice is His own character—what He is. God is always consistent. That is, what God does is always consistent with what God is, or who He is. He is absolute purity. He is holy. There is no shadow of turning in Him. He is utterly incapable of an unholy, unrighteous act. God is absolutely straight. There is no turning in Him.

We call people crooks. Do you know why? Because they are crooked! They don't go the straight way! But, God is absolutely straight! There is no shadow of turning in Him. That's what that verse means. He never deviates from what He is. That's why He can always be relied upon! You can trust Him under any circumstance. He will always act according to what He is, according to what He says that He will do, because it is absolutely impossible for Him to turn away from those things, because He is absolute pure character. You see, every act of God reveals what He is.

In Genesis 18 there is the discussion, or prayer, or whatever you might call it, between Abraham, and God, when Abraham wanted God to spare some of the people in Sodom and Gomorra. And so he says, "Are you going to kill the righteous with the wicked?" "Are you going to slay the innocent with those who are guilty?"

Genesis 18:23-25 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You [Listen to Abraham's argument here] to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the

wicked; far be it from You! [Now look at this question!] Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Abraham knew his friend, God, pretty well. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" In a sense, he was throwing back to God the very understanding that he had of God's holy, righteous character. He knew that in God's justice, there could be no turning from what God is, and that His act toward Sodom and Gomorra would reflect what God is.

Well, there was probably never a more rhetorical question ever asked by a man on this earth. Even though Abraham knew a great deal about God, I don't know whether Abraham had a complete understanding of how far such an act like that was from God's character. There was never a remote possibility that God would kill the innocent with the guilty in the city of Sodom.

God said, OK, I'll spare it for 45, 40, 35, 30...God could say that, because it is not in His mind to kill the innocent with the guilty. Do you know why? Because for God to do that, He would have to cease being holy. That's not possible. He would have to stop being God.

God is the supreme Judge of all the earth. And if He is unjust, there is no hope that justice will ever prevail. Because, we know that human judges can be corrupted, they can take bribes, they can be partial, they can be in ignorance, and they can make mistakes. But God is never corrupt. No one can bribe Him. He refuses to show partiality. There is no respect of persons with Him. He never acts out of ignorance. He never makes mistakes.

Nadab, Abihu, Uzza, Ananias, and Sapphira all got what they deserved. There is no injustice with God! God's justice is never divorced from His righteousness. He never condemns the innocent. He never clears the guilty. He never punishes with undue severity. He never fails to reward righteousness. His justice is perfect justice.

But—now get this—He does not always act with justice! Are you ahead of me? Or are you with me? He sometimes acts with mercy!

Mercy is not justice. But, neither is it injustice, because injustice violates righteousness. Mercy manifests kindness and grace, and does no violence to righteousness. We may see non-justice in God, which is His mercy, but we will never see injustice, because God would have to cease being God in order for that to take place.

I have given this sermon because I feel it is a place that is necessary to begin in order to understand God's grace. First we have to see the way God can, could, and has judged in the past. He has every right to do acts like He did to Nadab and Abihu, to Ananias and Sapphira, to Uzza, to Saul, and others. He would be just in deciding in our lives to do similar things to us, and make us nothing more than just a grease spot on the earth. But, I think that we will never understand, or appreciate mercy—God's grace—until we begin to appreciate the fact that He has not dealt with us as our acts have deserved. God has every right to be as just with us as He was with Nadab and Abihu, and the others.