

Many Excuses

Self-Justifying and True Justification

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As we begin this service, I have for you seven questions I want you to answer to yourself, as you believe them:

1. Do you believe that pharmaceuticals restore one to good health?
2. Do you believe that vaccinations bring immunity?
3. Do you believe that the cure for cancer is just around the corner?
4. Do you believe that when a child is sick he needs immediate antibiotics?
5. Do you believe that when a child has a fever he needs Tylenol?
6. Do you believe that hospitals are clean and safe?
7. Do you believe that America has the best healthcare system in the world?

Everybody knows that all governments have a practice of what is commonly called putting a "spin" on announcements its spokesmen make to the public. Governments do this in order to incline the public to think in a certain pre-designed way. The media does virtually the same thing the marketing industry does in their efforts to sell products.

An important question is: "Do you trust any of them to tell you the truth?" A "yes" answer to any of the seven questions is evidence of the success of the corporate producers' use of "spin" to get people to believe what they say is true. "Spin" used to be called the harsher term "propaganda" in the days before somebody came up with the euphemistic term "spin." In almost every case the comments of the corporate world, or the government world, or whatever, contain evasive half-truths that are in reality nothing more than a prearranged justification provided to hide the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

In early March an article appeared on the Internet written by Dennis Prager that contained an excellent analysis of who gets the blame for very much of the violence reported in the media news broadcasts and appearing in our newspapers and magazines. He blamed the slant in which news is reported on media's propensity to be strongly leftward leaning.

There is not a shadow of doubt in my mind that the perspective of media is generally liberal, especially in political and social issues. The liberal leaning becomes very apparent when the reporters analyze the "whys" of such and such an event that occurred, or in other words, on whom the media places blame for this or that which happened. I will give some examples:

In the press, who got the blame for the very destructive planned and staged riots by the Muslims in many parts of the world? It was not the rioters. It was the Danes, of course. Virtually every article proclaimed this as though there was no other factor. A while before that, when the

Muslims rioted in France, destroying much personal property, who got the blame? The newspapers justified the rioting by blaming the French administration because, as they said, "The French do not know how to assimilate immigrants." When France's Interior Minister called the rioters "rabble," it was said in the news it was that which created the tension; thus, the justification that calling someone "rabble" causes them to act like rabble.

For many years now the media has blamed Israel for the terror committed by the Palestinians by asking, "What are the Palestinians supposed to do? The Israelis have so much by comparison. Why, they even have Apache helicopters. The Palestinians do not have any of them, so they have to use whatever weapons they have—human-suicide-bomber terrorists." Thus, it is justified.

The Los Angeles riots that occurred following the violent apprehension of Rodney King were not blamed on his drunken debauchery, the car chase to elude police, or King's violent resistance when finally apprehended; rather it was blamed on police racism.

Who was blamed that some South Korean storeowners in South Central Los Angeles were murdered during the riots? Why, the LA police, of course. This is not to say that the police did everything right, but if King had just submitted when first contacted by the police, *none* of the others, including the costly riots in which large portions of Los Angeles burned, would ever had occurred. In other words, there was another sin. Rodney King's sin set him off.

Very often, there is a shifting of blame from the actual perpetrators to the victims, thus justifying the criminal acts, thereby giving unspoken approval of the exceedingly wrong concept that two wrongs make a right. But brethren, those justifications do not make that concept right. Almost all the time the media and the entertainment community come down on the side of the one that they perceive as the weak, or the underdog, with some form of screwed-up reasoning, that if the wealthy man had not been rich, he would not have been robbed.

Very many people in this nation have a lopsided view of evil that does not emanate from any kind of Christian value, but from psychology and secular humanism. These people generally assume that human nature is essentially good, and therefore criminal acts do not result from bad choices and the bad values of the criminal. Rather the criminal acts are *forced* on the criminal by social and economic circumstances in that person's life. In media eyes, the perpetrator actually becomes a sympathetic victim who is defending himself from the oppression of the culture around him.

With this twisted reasoning it becomes increasingly difficult to blame the criminal for any bad act he commits because those who think this way are *forced* to make "being rich, good, and strong" the evil. They reason that "the good, the rich, or the strong" had to do evil to become that way, and thus he is getting exactly what he deserves. Twisted reasoning.

Therefore, since Israel is stronger than the Palestinians, the Palestinians' terror is largely excused. White America is stronger and richer than black and brown America, and so black and brown violence is excused. The West is stronger and richer than the Muslim world, and so Muslim violence is dealt with accordingly. It was for this very reason that American newspapers refused to publish the Danish cartoons. At the same time, American newspapers along with American entertainers have no hesitancy at all to mock Christian teaching. Their concept of good

and evil is almost totally eschewed. The justification—"the two wrongs make a right" principle—is taken to an extreme.

We are going to turn to Romans 12:14. Listen carefully to what Paul says.

Romans 12:14 Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.

Romans 12:17-21 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Suppose Rodney King had overcome evil with good. The riots never would have happened. Suppose the Muslims had done the same thing if evil were done to them. The riots would have never happened. Automobiles would not be burning all over Paris. You can see it is God's way to stop war and fights right in their track before they get beyond the two people originally involved.

The whole body of the book of Romans gives no indication as to why Paul would issue these three commands regarding Christian conduct in such a short space of time. It seems fairly obvious that some conflict was going on in the Roman congregation, and it motivated him to do so. However, the sense of his instruction is very clear, that is that a Christian is not supposed to "play God" by taking revenge on some evil done against him, or some perceived evil done against him.

The instruction is clear from Paul. God is Judge, and the Christian has to have the faith that God will determine what the approach will be against the one who injured another in some way, whether it was verbally, economically, or bodily. Nevertheless, the question remains for us: "What justification will a Christian give himself to *excuse* going to war against his brother in the faith?" If it should occur, what is the justification going to be?

I submit to you that these commands, just like the ones regarding husband and wife relationships we went through in those three sermons I gave previously, are going to take a great deal of discipline. The urge to get even is very strong, especially when one believes he is innocent and is being unduly taken advantage of.

Some similar things were going on in the Corinthian church, and so Paul addressed it in I Corinthians 6. Listen to how clear his instruction is here.

I Corinthians 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another [meaning somebody in the church], go to law before the unjust and not before the saints?

He is not saying that it is wrong for one brother to take another before a group or somebody within the church to have it resolved that way.

I Corinthians 6:2-7 Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know you not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? [Pretty strong words here about what these people were doing.] If then you have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer [or allow] yourselves to be defrauded?

These people were using the world's courts in order to vindicate themselves before a brother. We need to understand that God is not requiring anything of us that Jesus has not already faced and left us an example.

I Peter 2:23 Who, when he [Jesus] was reviled, reviled not again [He did not defend Himself in a wrong way before them]; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously.

It is highly unlikely that in a situation when brothers have a contention between themselves, or even if the contention is out in the world, that our judgment is going to be righteous; but God's judgment will be absolutely righteous. If we take the wrong way of resolving the problem, we thus then allow ourselves to be drawn into a sin, and without knowing it ignorantly support the very wrong principle of "two wrongs making a right." So there is instruction.

If we are wrong, we then commit a wrong by taking revenge, and the two of them together will not produce a right solution to the difficulty. Instead, Paul says to trust God, be patient, and God will come up with the right answer. Can we discipline ourselves to do that? It is required of our Father. Then what happens? The war ceases. But, it is not easy to submit to that.

We do not want to allow ourselves to get drawn into things like that. But, this kind of thing happened before. We are going to go to the book of Psalms and we are going to see something David recorded for us. In his position as a warrior and as king, he had an awful lot of enemies. We are going to go to Psalm 37 and we will read through nineteen of these verses, because David gives a multitude of examples. So here comes his advice:

Psalm 37:1-19 Fret not yourself because of evildoers, neither be you envious against the workers of iniquity. [Now what if they work their work against you?] For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. [Notice how faith in God comes through from

what he teaches.] 3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed. [You will be taken care of.] Delight yourself also in the LORD; and he shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. [Think about Jesus and what He did. Every way He turned it seems He was facing enemies who were out to get Him.] And he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not yourself because of him who prospers in his way because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, [There is a hard one. The old blood gets boiling when somebody attacks us, and that is understandable.] and forsake wrath: fret not yourself in any wise to do evil. [Do not try to get even.] For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. [Now if it were just possible, if we take the same approach that most would do following human nature, that we would then be evildoers too. We give up our righteous position with God to get even, for a little revenge.] For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yes, you shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes upon him with his teeth. The LORD shall laugh at him: for he sees that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy [those who are weak and defenseless], and to slay such as be of upright conversation [or conduct]. Their sword shall enter into their own heart [God is going to turn it right back on them], and their bows shall be broken. A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholds the righteous. The LORD knows the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine, they shall be satisfied.

What I want us to understand at this point in the sermon is to watch out, to be careful, to be aware of justifications in the self, because it is a justification that opens the doorway to the path of revenge. Our revenge may not be to actually harm somebody physically or bodily, but to harm their reputation through passing on gossip, or whatever, but a little revenge is nonetheless sought in that manner. When something like this happens we miss the opportunity to exercise faith in God and continuing the development in us of the image of Jesus Christ.

Christ never took the way of revenge. When we take the way of revenge we thus hand Satan yet another opportunity to continue to find more ways to keep a controversy developing into all out warfare where other sins will surely arise and be committed. There are times, brethren, when we have to just bite the bullet and sacrifice our pride. Justifications abound in relation to

God, and to the church too.

Back in the early 70s when Evelyn and I were pastoring the Norwalk, California congregation, during a sermon one of my fellow pastors in the area told of a conversation he had with a perspective member in which the subject of observing Christmas arose. At one point, this perspective member asked the pastor what difference did it make whether one celebrated Christmas since his intent was to give Christ honor and recognition. The pastor replied, "It does not make one bit of difference, ...unless there is a God."

The pastor then asked the perspective member whether he believed Jesus' statement in Matthew 4: 4, that man is to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"? Of course, the man said, "Yes, I do believe that." Well, the minister then asked the man to open up his Bible and turn to Deuteronomy 12: 29, where it says:

Deuteronomy 12:29-32 When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you, whither you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land, Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing so ever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

And so, the minister asked the man, "Do you believe that?" I do not know what the man said, because before he could answer, the minister said, "I want you to turn to Revelation 22. I want you to see what it says in the New Testament if you think that was just Old Testament stuff. I want you to see what it says in the New Testament." So in Revelation 22—almost the last words in the book—it says:

Revelation 22:18-19 For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

I do not know whether the man ever came into the church, but for the purpose of this sermon, I am interested in the justification he used. He was essentially saying, at least to this point in his ignorance, that since he thought his intent was sincere, he felt free to worship God as he thought fit.

There is nothing unusual about this because it is one of the founding freedoms of the United

States of America—the American way of life—that every man is free to worship God as he feels fit in his own heart. But what this man did not realize was that he was in effect creating his own religion, and commanding the Sovereign Creator God to accept him and his offering of worship on his own terms, not God's. That is idolatry, which incidentally is exactly what Cain did, and that got him into serious trouble with God.

Cain's reaction is interesting because he got angry with the innocent party—Abel, his brother—because Abel's good offering was accepted. That is incredible! The righteous man became the victim because he was righteous. That sounds very much like what the media is doing today. There is nothing new under the sun.

Let us go back to the Two Trees in Genesis 3: 6.

Genesis 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

I want you to see in this original sin that before she ever took, she built a case—three justifications from what her senses were telling her. Justifications helped convince her that those things would be all right.

It is interesting that Jesus became victim of the same type of sin.

John 7:19-21 Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law? Why go you about to kill me? The people answered and said, You have a demon: who goes about to kill you? Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and you all marvel.

John 7:25-30 Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? But lo, he speaks boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ comes, no man knows whence he is. Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, You both know me, and you know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom you know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he has sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him because his hour was not yet come.

The sequence here is unmistakable. They justified their anger by making false claims against Him, when *they* were the guilty ones. What is incredible here is the deceitfully quick and powerful defense mechanism the mind reacts with in order to not have to admit guilt, to which it attempts to turn guilt on someone or something else.

They knew who He was. They knew that everything He was doing was good, yet when they

became convicted by His words they justified by saying that He had the demon. That then strengthened them to begin to attack Him—the One they knew was doing good things. It was just like Cain and Abel. The righteous one became the victim when they became convicted. Do you see what the justification does? It clears the guilty person of some measure of his guilt. It really does not, but it feels good to him so that he feels free to sin in attacking the other person.

I am sure that almost everybody within the hearing of my voice has at one time or another watched one of the several varieties of the "Law and Order" television programs. One does not have to listen all that carefully, but virtually every program contains a point where the criminal gives a justification for the crime he committed. The apparent benefit to the justifier is that this was to make him believe that he was right and reasonable in what he did. It absolves him from blame, and it actually puts the onus on the victim; and thus to the justifier, if the victim had not been the way *he* was, this never would have happened.

Such an approach is very common in the world of religion. The justifications that arise for not having to keep the law are legion, and are usually based on very narrow one or two scripture responses that on the surface may appear to say exactly what the justifier believes but which lack authority once other scriptures are brought into the picture.

A clear example of a whole series of justifications for not keeping the law involves the fact that Christ was sinless; therefore, He must have kept the law because the Bible defines "sin" as the transgression of God's law. That is a very clear fact, is it not? It is even clear to the people in the world. It is so clear that they will believe He is our Savior, and that it is through His blood we are justified from sin. But, what about *them* following His example and striving to be sinless just like He was?

There is more to add to this case built in Jesus' behalf than merely His example. (I say "merely." It was pretty terrific!) There was in His preaching a large number of things. We are going to look at some very familiar scriptures.

Matthew 5:17-19 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill [to magnify]. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

That is clear. He said, "Keep the commandments."

Matthew 19:17 And he said unto him, Why call you me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments.

That is clear, is it not? Just to make sure he understood which commandments Jesus was talking

about, Jesus repeated five of the ten.

We are going to look now at John 8:11. In the beginning of John 8, the woman who was caught in the midst of an adulterous act was brought before Jesus for His judgment. This is of course when He wrote on the ground, and all of her accusers left, and there was nobody left but the woman and Jesus.

John 8:10-11 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those your accusers? Has no man condemned you? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn you: God, and sin no more.

That is clear, too. "Do not break the commandments!"

There is a great deal more evidence I could give you. That is just a sampling. But despite all the evidence of Christ's own example, plus His preaching, some will justify with statements like this: "He only did this because He was a Jew, speaking to Jews," or "We do not have to keep them because now we are saved by grace, not works of the law." Or, "The law was only a shadow, but now we have the reality." Or, "Law keeping fills one with pride and makes one believe that God owes him something." (Boy! That is a rich one.) Or, "Jesus kept the law for us."

These are the justifications one gets from the average church going member. When one is dealing with theologians, the justifications become longer and more convoluted. They contain bigger words because that is more impressive. When one sorts through the extra length and the bigger words, what remains is a rather simple justification, but it is just like the ordinary church going member gives.

I want you to turn to another very familiar scripture in Romans 8. This simple statement is the unspoken foundation of all of these self-justifications. Paul writes:

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Human nature is at war against God, and that nature is generating resistance to God's law, and then justifying its resistance because it has its communication source in Satan, his demons, and the cultures that those corrupt beings have created through men. Ask yourself: "How well are you doing in the justifying business in relation to things that you know you should be doing more of or better than in your relationship with God?" We all justify. We all do. It is a knee-jerk reaction that human nature has built right into it.

I want you to notice in an earlier place in the book of Romans a justifying that is coming from the world, but in this case from the intellectual elites of the world.

Romans 1:17-22

For therein [in the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is

written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold [who suppress] the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [is clear to them]; for God has showed it unto them. [If God has shown it to them, are they able to make an honest excuse? We shall see.] For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. [An honest justification cannot be made concerning this issue.] Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations [in their reasoning], and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

Romans 1:25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creation more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The truth of the fact that God *IS* should be one of the most obvious and easily understood of all truths. This is why God says they are without excuse in this matter. Is there anything of which our five senses make us aware that is not created? Anything? The answer to that is a resounding "No!"

Perhaps the most obvious of all things created is Earth, and life itself. We see, hear, smell, taste, and feel the Earth in a major portion of all of its powerful glory. Our very bodies virtually scream of Someone of powerful intellect, wisdom, and love that made every part of it down to the tiniest particle, and then breathed into it life so that it can live and reproduce. Even though we cannot see the Creator, we do see the creation, it should be clearly sufficient evidence of His existence and of His beautiful mind, and it should fill men with faith and hope.

What they *do* know though is suppressed in order to keep knowledge of Him away from the minds of others. That *IS* enmity expressed, just like Romans 8:7 says. And so, instead, they devise the theory of evolution to justify themselves before the public to account for the existence of all these things without the benefit of a life-giving Creator they would have to submit to. But do you know what, brethren? They cannot even account for the building blocks of ~~what~~*does* exist, like, "Where did all of these laws come from that operate everything in the universe? Where is their source? Where did all the materials—the minerals of which everything consists—come from?"

They have a law which they tout every once in a while—the law of biogenesis—which states that life can only come from already pre-existing life. So where did life come from? Why is there such order? The imprint of a Designer is all over the place. Self-justification required a precursor in order for the justifier to believe that he is right and reasonable. Do you know what it is? It is the already existing deceit in the human heart. The justifier has to be able to lie to himself rather convincingly in order to ignore the obvious.

Now as a term, "justification" has to do with the principle of alignment—vindication, absolving, excusing, validating, or proving right—making one blameless or guiltless. Not every one of these synonyms fits in every context, but I think you can see the principle that is involved in

justification.

According to Joseph Shipley's book, *The Origins of English Words*, justification is derived from the combining of two different roots. The first root indicates, "that which is set down," meaning a law or standard. The second root indicates, "that which is sacred," which reinforces the first root, but does not necessarily indicate divine law, because "sacred" indicates something dedicated with more than normal devotion or attention. It does not have to be toward God. You probably have heard people say, "Boy! That idea is sacred to him." It has nothing to do with religion, but "that person is devoted to that concept."

Therefore, the second root does add the justification's seriousness above that which is merely traditional or generally accepted. Thus, for our use here, we want to understand it in relation to being in alignment with the highest of moral standards—*divine* law, meaning the Ten Commandments and any other of God's laws as expressed in His Word.

One of the most common uses of justification in our time is in regard to the text in a document typed on a computer. The edges of the text are said to be in alignment with the edge of one's paper. They are either "left" justified, or "fully" justified with both edges. Documents containing columns of numbers are "right" justified. We are most familiar with that one. You can see that there is an alignment principle at work.

The second common application is in relation to salvation. It is the act of God that enables us to be acceptable into His very presence, and is made possible by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. It is *His* substitutionary death taking *our* place before the executioner, and thus bearing our sin. The wages of sin is death, and *every sin of every person* who has ever lived has to be accounted for, and paid for.

Our works and our promises of obedience are not acceptable to God. He does not trust us. It even says that about Jesus, that He put His trust in no man. Regardless of our sincerity, God knows full well that we are going to break our word. God knows our heart. He knows the pattern of our conduct. Our past life is so marred by sin that without Christ's blood we must remain unacceptable, and die.

With our acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, combined with our faith, there is hope, because we would never, under any other circumstance, be in alignment with God's standard of righteousness and thus be acceptable to Him. God's acceptance of our justification by means of Christ's blood is a major aspect of grace, and that is what opens the door to salvation. It is alignment through what Christ did, and what Christ is, and not because of anything we do, or will do.

In the book of Amos, chapter 7 is one of the more famous illustrations of justification. Amos had a vision from God.

Amos 7:7-8 Thus he showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what do you see? And I said, A plumb line. Then said the LORD, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.

This is a vivid illustration, especially for anybody familiar with building construction. A plumb line is used to check whether a part of a construction project is straight up and down; that is, perpendicular to the center of the earth so that it is not leaning in any direction. In other words, the wall, in this case, is true to the design of the building.

In this case, God, like the construction worker, is holding the plumb line and He is observing what is being built. The wall itself represents Israel. The plumb line represents God's standard of righteousness, and God's standard of righteousness is His Word, His truth, and most specifically the Ten Commandments, which are the overall guide to good conduct. Psalm 119:172 tells us in one brief verse "all of God's commandments *are* righteousness."

God is showing Amos that He has tested Israel against His Word, His truth. He has found them lacking, and that all hope of Israel reviving is lost.

What was wrong with all of the justifications in the illustration that I gave at the beginning of the sermon? Every one of them had a common flaw, and that is that not one of them was in alignment with truth. Not one of them! Every one of them was a defensive reaction made to save face or to look good on the basis of what *seemed* right at the time. Those justifications were convenient, but not right, because they were based in deceptions. That deceitful heart was working, churning out a defensive mechanism by which the person could feel good for a little bit of time.

Now this raises a question we need to face. "Is it ever right for us to give a justification?" The answer is absolutely, "Yes. It is." Jesus gave many justifications for who He was, and what He was, and what He was doing, but every single one of His justifications was true. It was right on! None of His justifications ever gave Him permission to attack those who were attacking Him in any way. So there is our example.

Yes, it is all right to justify, but I will tell you that we are up against a very stern standard. Do you know what it is? The Ninth Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness." We can bear false witness in two ways: by what comes out of our mouth, or the way we conduct our life generally, our conduct. As an illustration, in every case in a court of law a person is required to give an oath, or his word of affirmation that his testimony is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and it used to be, "so help you God." I do not know whether they still say that. Now is there any way of avoiding this sin? It is hard. The desire to excuse ourselves is powerful, and it is quick, and so it is not easy.

Let us go to the book of Job. Do you realize that much of the book of Job is about justification? It is.

Job 11:1-2 Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered? And should a man full of talk be justified [or vindicated, or held to be righteous]?

Zophar hit on a very important point. In one place Jesus said, "By your words you will be justified, or condemned," because where do the words come from? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Our tongues are like quicksilver, especially when they are generating

a defense of what is closest to it—us, me, myself, and I. We justify in order to vindicate our words or our conduct before others to show ourselves innocent, or to be right.

Job 25:1 Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said,

Job 25:4 How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?

Job's three friends persisted in accusing Job, and Job then turned around and defended himself with a multitude of justifications of his own for the circumstance they found him in. Bildad's argument here is that God is so holy, righteous, and penetrating in judgment that there is no room for a man to be justified before Him. What he was saying was, "You are guilty, Job. Why do you not admit it?"

Now Bildad's argument would, in most cases, have been right, but in this particular case, he was wrong. Job was not guilty! You see that in the very beginning when God sets the stage for what happened in the rest of the book. This does not mean that Job was sinless, but he was not guilty of any major sin, and especially of the quantity and quality of sin, he was being accused of. He *was* guilty in attitude and misunderstanding, but not the things that Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz were accusing him of. But, Job was a man full of words, and this is where one of his problems lay. Now look at Job 42 when he repented. Notice what he repented of.

Job 42:1-3 Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that you can do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from you. Who is he that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me which I knew not.

Job repented of his justifications. That is one way of putting it. He repented of the things he said even though he was by far and away more right in what he said than what his friends did. Nevertheless, his justifications got him into trouble.

What we just saw there in the book of Job is one of the major lessons of life. We cannot put anything over on God. He knows exactly.

James 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

I find it particularly interesting that this piece of sage advice begins a new paragraph right after James finished writing about avoiding the temptation to sin. That is right in the middle of the chapter that every man is drawn away by his own lust, his own desire, and not very long before he began another paragraph, speaking about the use of the tongue. That begins in chapter 3.

James counsels us to be quick to listen. What are we to listen to? In terms of this sermon, we are to listen to God's instruction regarding self-justification and avoiding the temptation to sin through it. Why? It is very easy to fall into a sin while talking, in order to defend ourselves. We

are to listen to our own thoughts as well, along with God's instruction. What is our mind telling us to do or to say? Is it the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Or are we getting ready to spin a tale with half-truths in order to look good?

We are going to go back to the book of wisdom—to the book of Proverbs

Proverbs 10:14 Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

In the modern language, wise men keep their traps shut. The foolish spew everything out. That makes two extremes, but that pretty well interprets what the book of Proverbs is saying here.

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words there wants [is no lack] not sin: but he that refrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 29:20 See you a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.

Boy! Where does that put the hasty-worded man? There is more hope for a fool, and people just love to talk all the time.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 Be not rash with your mouth, and let not you heart be hasty to utter anything before God: [everything is uttered before God] for God is in heaven, and you upon earth: therefore let your words be few.

Ecclesiastes 5:6-7 Allow not your mouth to cause your flesh to sin; neither say you before the angel [or the messenger] that it was an error ["Oh, I did not mean to do it."]: wherefore should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also different vanities; but fear you God.

The overall instruction in God's Word is that we must be very quick to listen and very slow to speak. In modern lingo, we should make sure that our brain is in gear before we engage the tongue, because just as quickly as fingers can be snapped, a sin may be committed. And so, he is saying that it is foolish to just blurt out things without consideration of the end result.

I want to tie this with one more principle. You all know where it is.

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?

To me, I came up with something in the last sermon I never knew before, that this verse is

really slightly mistranslated. It is no terrible thing, but what Paul is calling upon in that verse is, that first we are to examine ourselves in relation to our loyalty to the person Jesus Christ, our Savior; and secondarily, we are to examine ourselves in relation to how well we are faithful to the doctrines of the church—the body of faith.

God wants us to know that there is a living Being who is our Savior, and He owns us. He is our Master, and it is to Him personally that we are to consider our loyalty. He is not just a blob of nothingness. He is a Being of infinite kindness. Overcoming, the subject of this sermon requires the strong efforts of brutal honesty in evaluating the self, combined with a steely resolve and the courage to discipline ourselves to follow through and face the music, or our deceitful hearts so quickly and artfully will draw us into a sin. It is far wiser to be corrected and to face the stinging hurt of truth than to dodge the bullet through a lie and delay the coming of a much more severe penalty.