

The Gracious Judge

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Date: 05 November 2017

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[0 : 00] not quite the right answer. So there's actually, it's something riding on this. If you don't do well in the pop quiz, we actually have a little bit of homework. So let's start with an easy one. What book are we studying? Good. I knew if I made consequences, I'd get responses.

Usually that doesn't happen. Okay, that's right. What does the book of Exodus tell? What's the story that it tells? The Exodus. Wow, that's an easier answer than I had. So the Exodus is as an event.

Who exits? Yeah, the Jews, Israel. Where do they exit from? Good.

Why does Israel want to exit Egypt? Because they're in slavery, they want to exit out of bondage.

Good. Who helps them to exit? Moses and ultimately God. Yeah. Where do they exit to?

To the desert, to the mountain of Mount Sinai. That's where they are, the part that we're in right now. Why does God bring them to Sinai? What happens there? Yeah? Okay. So God gives them his law. What happens before he gives them his law? Why does he give them this? Why does he give Israel these commandments?

To let them know that they need him because they keep sinning? Because he adopts them and he gives them a new identity. They are going to be his people. They're going to be a nation of priests, a royal priesthood, because they're going to show the whole world what God is like.

[1 : 39] So he gives them these laws to say, hey, you're going to show the world what I'm like. This is how you do it. You need to live this out. So he gives them laws to show them how to live so that they can be in relationship with him and they can live as God created humanity to live. So up to this point in the narrative, if you've been joining with us, how has Israel done at following those commands? Horribly. Yeah, horribly. They haven't done very good.

Okay. Well, now I don't know what to do because I kind of need you to still do the homework and you've done very good on the pop quiz. So I'm in a bit of a moral conundrum, but we'll make it a group project. That way you don't have to do it individually. So this is what I want you to do. And by the way, if you're an introvert, I'm an introvert. I hate this type of activity. So I'm really sorry. If you really need to, you can go and excuse yourself and get a cup of coffee or something like that. But what I'd like you to do is I'm going to form groups of three, four, five, whatever kind of happens. And I'm going to have this side of the church discuss one question and this side discuss another one. So there's exactly eight chairs in the middle row. So four on each side and you guys split apart. So once I say go, you're going to form groups. And this side, I want you to react to the word judge. I want you to think of one or two word answers. What do you think of when you think of a judge? What are they like? What's their role? What do you want to see from a judge? Okay. You guys understanding that? Okay. And this side,

I want you guys to react to the word gracious. What do you think of when you think of the word gracious? Not long sentences, not theological dictionary definitions, just one or two word responses when you think of the word gracious. Okay. You guys understand? You guys know which way you're going? Part the red sea here? Okay. I'm only going to give you two minutes because these are just quick responses. Okay. All right. And go. If you're sitting by yourself, go and find a group to talk with.

One more minute. One minute.

All right. Wrap up your thoughts. We're going to come back together in 10 seconds.

[5 : 07] All right. Okay. So I want to hear some of the highlights. I can't remember which side.

I gave you guys judge, right? This side? Okay. So what are some of the things that you guys thought of when you thought of a judge, of the role of a judge and their character and things like that? Authority over right and wrong.

What does that mean? What does it mean to be just? Okay. Oh, that's a good one.

Way all sides out. Sorry. Excuse me. I'm just writing the sermon right now as you guys answer. Any other thoughts? Sorry? Compassionate. Yeah. Protective? A protector. Okay. Yeah, I got it. [6 : 29] Protective. All right. Listener. In what sense? What do you mean? Okay.

Yeah. All right. Good thoughts. Also, this idea of law, like following, I guess it came up here in knowing what's right and wrong. I'm good. You guys good? Anything else you're burning that you want to say?

Okay. How about you guys over here? The word gracious. Oh. It requires a standard.

Loving. Loving? Sorry, what? Forgiving. Yeah. Good. Undeserved love.

Kindness. Kindness. Sorry, what? Courteous?

[7 : 34] Unmerited. Unmerited. Giving. Patience and... Pardon? From the heart.

From the heart. All right. Anything else? Based on giving.

Okay. Yeah. So, grace is based on giving. It's not based on receiving. All right.

Yeah. Yeah. Giving more than you deserve. Yeah.

So, when we talk about judge, one of the themes was giving what you deserve. Right and wrong and gracious is giving more than you deserve. Well, in our text today, we'll read in a minute, we see both a concept of God as judge and God as gracious.

[8 : 40] I should have said God as judge and God as gracious. And so, we want to look at what it means that God has these two parts to his nature and how they fit together.

Because we normally see this idea of justice, of giving people what they deserve, and this idea of grace, of not giving people what they deserve. They are incompatible in a way.

And so, we want to look at what that means for us, that God has these two parts of his nature and how he even does, how we can live in light of that. So, let's open up this time with prayer and then we'll dig into the text, which is Exodus chapter 34.

Father, we have been singing of your greatness and of your glory. And when we read through Exodus and we see you reveal yourself to your people, we see your greatness.

And it's humbling to come before you. It's humbling for me to read your word and to try and understand it from my own life and to teach it to others.

[9 : 49] And so, we pray that your spirit guides us as we look at your word, as we seek to understand who you are and who we are in light of that. As you give us our identity, just like you gave Israel their identity as your people.

So, I pray that you empower me to speak. You empower us to not just listen, not just hear, but to be changed by your word because of how it reveals who you are.

I pray this in your name. Amen. So, I invite you to turn to the book of Exodus. And we're going to read through most of chapter 34 right now and we'll get the last part a little bit later on.

And we'll read through and I'll periodically stop and make some comments. So, Exodus chapter 34.

Does anyone have one of the ESV Bibles and can tell everyone the page number? So, page 74.

All right. So, page 74 if you have one of the church Bibles here. Let's begin in verse 1. The Lord said to Moses, Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones.

[11 : 10] And I'll write on them the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So, remember Moses had brought down the Ten Commandments and he broke them before even showing them to Israel because Israel had already broken the first two commandments and had made an idol to worship instead of worshiping God.

Be ready in the morning and come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on the top of the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain. Not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.

This is a theme that's been going through Exodus that Moses goes and talks to God but no one else can come because of God's holiness. They have to stay away from him. So, Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning as the Lord commanded him.

And he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

We see all these things that we talked about when we were talking about grace. Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of their fathers to

the third and fourth generation.

[12:33] Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped, O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, he said, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin and take us as your inheritance.

Then the Lord said, I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people, I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.

Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. So these are the people that lived in what we call the land of Canaan, the promised land that God was taking Israel to.

Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you're going, or they will be a snare among you. There's this idea in the beginning of the Bible that those who are unclean can take and lead those who are clean and make them unclean.

The same way that diseases work where uncleanness is stronger than cleanliness. And so it will drive the Israelites away from God if they partner up with these people who do not follow the Lord.

[13:46] So don't make a treaty among them or with them or there will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, and cut down their Asherah poles. So these would be in the places of worship of the Canaanites.

And the Canaanites often, they were involved in infertility cults of religion where they would worship in ways to try and encourage their gods or to convince their gods to give them prosperity, to give them rain when they needed rain for the plants to grow, to give them sun when they needed sun for the plants to grow.

And so they would worship in this way. The Lord continues, Do not worship any other god for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices.

And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same. Again, throughout the scriptures we see this correlation between the idea of idolatry and of adultery, of worship and of relationship.

And that's especially true with the Canaanite religions which blurred that line and they would act out things to encourage their gods in their worship.

[15:10] Verse 17, Do not make cast idols. We've already seen one of the Ten Commandments relisted and this is the other of the first two commandments, not to make idols.

And yet the language here is different. Commentators say that the Hebrew word used here in talking about cast idols, do not make cast idols, is specifically referring to the way that Israel made the golden calf that they worshipped.

So without mentioning it directly, God is pointing out, By the way, I've given these laws to you before and you have not followed them by speaking in the very specific way that they made the idol. And then he goes on to list some of the feasts and things that we would have read about just before. Celebrate the feast of unleavened bread. So this was the feast that went along with Passover.

For seven days, eat bread made without yeast as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib. For in that month, you came out of Egypt. So remembering the God bringing Israel out of Egypt.

[16:13] And because the emphasis here is not so much on the Passover lamb, which talks about their redemption, it's on the quickly going, the unleavened bread. Remember, they had to make their bread unleavened so they could make it quickly, so they could leave quickly.

And it's pointing to the mission that Israel had. The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock.

Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb. But if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons. So again, these are all laws that have been, that are repeated, that God has already given to Israel.

This one in particular is referring to the final plague of judgment that God unleashed on Egypt, where he took the firstborn of every womb.

And Israel was not, was still subject to that judgment that God placed on them. But he allowed them a way through, and that way through was the Passover sacrifice, where they said, where they sacrificed a lamb, and then that angel of death would pass over them.

[17 : 20] But now God is reminding them of that. He said, still, every firstborn of every womb belongs to me. It's, it's to be taken to me. And so with animals, you sacrifice that firstborn, but I don't want you to first, to sacrifice your, your children.

So redeem them with an appropriate sacrifice, so that you are reminded of this work that I've done on your behalf. You're reminded also of the judgment that is to fall on you because of your sin. No one is to appear to me empty handed.

We're in verse 21 now. Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest. Even during the plowing season and the harvest, you must rest. Again, this is the commandment about the Sabbath.

And, and the Sabbath is, is given to Israel, not only as a time for them to, to rest because their bodies need it, but also as a reminder. And this is particularly true when you're talking about the plowing season and the harvest season, a reminder of God's provision and that God provides for them.

Their, their hope is not in their ability to work their fields. Their hope is in the Lord. Verse 22, celebrate the feast of weeks with the first fruits of the wheat harvest and the feast of ingathering at the turn of the year.

[18 : 30] So the first feast was the feast of unleavened bread, which reminded them of their flight from Egypt. And the next two feasts are the, uh, what we would think of as the Thanksgiving feast, the feast when they brought in everything, thanking God for the, uh, the provision that he had and, and the feast of, uh, of planting the, um, the feast of weeks where there was the beginning, very beginning of the harvest.

So one at the beginning of the harvest, one at the end of the harvest, the beginning of the harvest saying, Lord, these are yours because we know that more will come. You are providing, you will provide for us. And the feast of Thanksgiving being, thank you, Lord, you have provided for us. Verse 23, three times a year, all your men are to appear before the sovereign Lord, the God of Israel. Those are those three feasts we just talked about. I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord, your God.

Do not offer the blood of the sacrifice to me along with anything, containing, containing yeast. Remember yeast, there's two kind of concepts here. One is again, this reminding of the feast of unleavened bread and of Israel's mission to leave Egypt and why God was moving them quickly out.

But also, um, in the scriptures, the East is this, uh, has this concept of, of defilement. Um, and just like if you're, if you're a baker, you know that when you add yeast to, to a bread, you, uh, bread dough, you no longer can separate where the yeast is from where the, the rest of the bread dough is.

[20 : 05] It mixes in. And it's the same, uh, way with sin and evil in us that, that when we take it in and it becomes a part of us and it's very difficult to separate the, um, uh, the, the, the, the evil, the contamination from who we're called to be, it becomes a part of us.

And in the new Testament, that same image is actually used in the positive in the, in the fact, um, that, that Christ's work in us, um, causes us to become part of God and that, uh, you can't separate us from God once he is, uh, hidden in among us.

Sorry. Every time I look up to talk to you, I lose my place. Can anyone tell me what verse we're on? 26. We were halfway through 25.

Good enough. Um, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover feast remain until morning. Again, this idea of moving quickly out, bring the best of the first fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord, your God.

Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. What a strange commandment that is. Um, I, I did a lot of research on that, but what is this commandment?

[21 : 15] Then why is it repeated? Uh, this is the second time and it gets repeated again one more time. And, and, uh, commentators have different ideas, but one of the driving ones is that this was a, a practice, uh, used by everyone around Israel.

And again, it's, it was seen as a magical practice, a way to encourage, um, the, encourage productivity and encourage, um, fertility. So if you cook a, a goat in its mom's milk, it's somehow, uh, causing your, um, uh, your flocks to be more productive.

And, and the prohibition against that is a reminder that your hope of, uh, of, of your crops isn't in your magical practices. It isn't in anything, uh, except your, your hope is in the Lord providing for you.

Verse 27. Then the Lord said to Moses, write down these words for in accordance with these words, I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. Moses was there with the Lord for 40, 40 days and 40 nights without eating bread or drinking water.

And he wrote on the tablets, the words of the covenant, the 10 commandments. Let's stop there for a minute. And I need to drink of water because I am not feeling great.

[22 : 32] So if you haven't been reading this passage all week, it seems very strange.

It seems like it was written to a different culture in a different time. And it, and it was, and these commandments are given to, um, to Israel to, uh, demonstrate or help them to, to demonstrate a difference between how they lived and how the neighbors around them lived.

And it was very clear to them where God was doing that and, and how God was shaping them to be different, to, to set their hope differently than those around them. And if he was writing to us, uh, the commandments would, a lot of those commandments would look very different, uh, because the people around us set their hope in very different ways than the people around Israel set their hope. But one of the great things about the scriptures, it's, it's, it's a, the, the Bible is a human book in the sense that it was written. Um, the, the, the actual writing was undertaken by, by humans as God directed them.

And it was written for them in a specific time, in a specific place. And so, uh, in that sense, there's not a lot that we see from this text that, that applies to us.

[23 : 49] But, but the Bible isn't just a human book. It's a divine book. It's a divine book in the fact that God's words were recorded, that, um, that God, uh, led people like Moses to write and to, and he directed them in a certain way, in a way that affects all people.

So there's ways where we struggle to understand how things, how these affect us. How what's, what's the correlation of the commandment not to, to boil a young goat in its mother's milk for us today.

And yet there's other places where it's very clear that we can see that things haven't changed. And the clearest one in this, uh, passage is this idea of God being a judge and yet God being gracious. So God being a judge at his core is the application of his holiness and his glory. And that's what leads to all of these commandments. I think we've talked about it before, but holiness means to be separate.

We think of holiness usually just in terms of moral terms, but that's actually something that, uh, is downstream of the concept. The real concept of holiness is to be set apart, to be completely other.

[24 : 52] And the idea is that there's a great gulf between God as creator and everything else as his creation. The difference between us and our pets is far less than the difference between us and God in terms of our, our composition in terms of our, our glory in terms, uh, of our power and our authority.

And God's unique in the fact that he is the source of everything. And this idea of holiness is then connected to ideas of righteousness and of purity. Like we talked about, um, when we were thinking about being a judge, because God is the source.

He's the original. He's the standard. So we often think of God as being pure and righteous, as if they are qualities that God has. And that's okay. That's not wrong to, to think about, but it would actually be better to flip those around.

Purity and righteousness are God in the sense that he's the definition of them, uh, in, in this way, he's completely unique. Do you understand the difference of what I'm trying to say?

It's not that God is pure and holy. It's that pure and holiness describe, they flow from God.

Something is pure because it is like God. Not God is pure because he is like something else.

[26 : 04] Okay. And so for God to be holy and separate, set apart and completely separate, that, that means that from him emanate, uh, purity and holiness. And in that way, he's completely different than anything else.

This idea of, of glory. We might've talked about this before too. Glory means weight. It refers to how much matter someone has, how much something matters. And the most common biblical, uh, imagery associated with this idea of, of purity and of glory are the imagery of light and fire.

And we've seen this repeated throughout Exodus, right? When, when Israel comes to the mountain of Sinai, the entire Sinai is, uh, the entire mountain is filled with smoke and fire and, and there's lightning and all of these things that give off this imagery of purity and holiness and glory.

A good way for us maybe to think about this is to think of the sun. The sun is unique in our solar system. At least it's the only, uh, planetary body of its kind in our solar system.

And it's the source of all light and energy and, and really the source of all life in our solar system. It's in the center of our solar system.

[27 : 15] So that thinking about it in that way, in that the sun is, is holy. It's unique in, in amongst the planetary bodies that surround it. And the sun is also the largest, uh, the largest planetary body in our solar system.

So it's in that sense, it has glory. It has weight. It has gravitational pull and it affects, it asserts its influence over every atom in our solar system.

We're all circling around our sun. And the sun is actually a, a pretty good image to, to be thinking of when we're talking about glory and holiness, uh, because it's both necessary.

I mean, that word necessary hardly even does justice to the impact of the sun on our solar system.

We cannot exist, um, without it. And yet it's also dangerous, isn't it?

I mean, especially as the winter starts to come and the wind is, is blowing, everybody would love a nice day at a sunny beach. We'd sign up for that. Nobody is signing up for, uh, tours of the sun's surface because it's dangerous.

[28 : 24] It's destructive. If you get too close to the sun, it's glory and it's holiness will overtake you. And it's the same way with God. And we've already seen that in the book of Exodus. Think all the way back to when Moses interacted with God at the, at the burning bush.

God said to him, take off your sandals because this is holy ground. And, and don't come any closer. There's this idea that God is drawing Moses in.

And yet at the same time, he's telling him that he has to not come any closer. He has to stay a certain distance away. And Exodus is filled with this tension between people being drawn to God and then being warned to stay away.

We saw that in this passage already as well. When Moses was called to go up to the mountain, but everyone else had to stay away. And God brings the people to Sinai and he declares to them that they'll be his people.

They'll be his inheritance. He will be their God and they will be his people. And yet they have to set up barriers so they can't climb up to the mountain to actually be with God and be close to him.

[29 : 24] Because if they came up, they would be destroyed by his glory and his holiness, just like we would if we traveled too close to the sun. So God is drawing the people to himself, but because they are not pure, they can only come so far.

And it isn't that coming to God is bad. It's that it's too good. It's too good for us. And that's where this idea of judgment comes in. Light always overpowers darkness.

The light can't decide, oh, I'm not going to go into this part of darkness. Holiness always overpowers unholiness. They can't coexist. Can't have a room with sufficient lighting that is part light and part dark.

You can't have a God that is holy and yet has unholiness around him. They can't coexist. So for God to be righteous, it means that he destroys unrighteousness.

Okay, so what I really want you to be seeing is that God doesn't judge just because it's some kind of hobby. You know, when you're an eternal being, you got to do something with your free time. It's that God's judgment is a necessity because it flows from him being just and holy.

[30 : 38] It flows from his very nature. And we want to see this from human judges too, don't we? We want our judges to be looking at those who do transgress the law. Then we want our judge to look at someone who murders.

And we say, we don't want them to say, look, I know you murdered the guy. The jury knows you murdered that guy. You know, you murdered the guy. Everybody, even your lawyer knows that you murdered that guy.

But my coffee was great this morning. I'm in a good mood. You can go away. You know, we don't want to see that. We want to see justice means, yes, that the, those who aren't guilty are free, but it also means that those who are guilty are punished.

For, for the, for the judge to act in that way with no legal reason, it would remove the judge from the position of justice and righteousness and actually make him guilty. So if God forgives for no reason, it would remove him from being pure and holy and would make him guilty.

The, just like that judge would be a criminal. So here in our passage, we see that God is a righteous judge. And it's very clearly in verse seven, I'd encourage you to look at that verse again.

[31 : 50] Would you like me to move my mic? Is there an issue? Verse seven says, uh, actually let's read, no, read verse seven.

Um, halfway through, he says, yet after this exhortation about how God is, is gracious and loving, yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.

He punishes the children and their children for the sins of their fathers to the third and the fourth generation. So what are the implications for the people of God to be in relationship with a righteous judge?

What does it mean to be as some, someone who is unholy in relationship with someone, who is holy? Well, Moses in this position, his immediate reaction is to be driven to worship.

God's holiness and justice always drives us to worship. We see this anytime that someone sees God. And the idea here is that God's holiness is awesome in kind of the actual sense of the word, not in the texting sense of the word, the actual sense of the word that it causes awe.

[32 : 54] And in the same way, you can't help but look out, uh, the window when the wind whips up a blizzard. You just want to look at it and, and watch that. Or we were driving, uh, to the church today and the sun was hitting the, the snow on the mountaintops.

Like it's very hard to concentrate on the road when you have that kind of, uh, beauty because there's just this sense of awe. Or, um, uh, on Halloween night, I was walking home with my two boys after trick or treating and someone was shooting fireworks off behind us.

And my boys walked all the way up the hill. We live by quite a steep hill. They're walking in their costumes backwards, uh, almost falling down because they couldn't tear their eyes away from these fireworks.

It was causing a sense of awe in them that made them look at the, at the, at the fireworks. And God is infinitely more than that. He causes a sense of awe that draws us in to worship him.

And that's what happens to Moses. Moses, the second reaction almost at the same time is to ask for forgiveness because God's holiness drives us to repentance. Uh, Moses is painfully aware of the people's sin.

[34 : 02] He's just come down from the mountain and had to, uh, and witness the, the golden calf. And so he has to go back up. And yet if we look, uh, at his repentance in verse nine, he says, he talks about our iniquity and our sin.

So Moses had nothing to do with this, the creation of the golden calf and the worshipping, the golden calf. And yet when he goes to repent to God, he doesn't, he doesn't blame shift.

He doesn't look, Hey, these people are terrible. Please forgive them. He, he says, please forgive our iniquity and our sin. And finally, God's holiness and justice drives us to obedience.

The third thing that happens is that God reminds Israel of the festivals and the laws that he gave them to demonstrate purity. We talked about those as we walked through, but the idea here is that there's all of these reminders of God's holiness in the law that he gave Israel.

His, there's all these reminders that God is unique, that the fact that everything comes from him, all these reminders that the, the hope of Israel is in God, not in other things, not in magical practices, not in something else, but they can give up things to follow God because their hope is in him.

[35 : 18] Each of the commandments, each of the festivals, each of the laws is designed to reinforce Israel's connection with God and to remind them of their dependence on him. And yet in that, there are also hints that they will not keep these commandments, hints like that change of word when he talks about making idols to talk about exactly what they have just done, that they won't be able to keep these commandments.

And that leads to the second theme of the passage that God is gracious. And if you've been paying attention, you know that this idea of God being gracious flies in the face of God's judgment.

God judges because he is holy. His holiness means that he can't allow evil. He can't allow sin. So how can he be gracious? Gracious. And it's clear when you read verses six and seven together. The Lord, the Lord is compassionate and gracious. Compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. How's that possible? How can you forgive wickedness, rebellion and sin, and yet not leave the guilty unpunished? How can this be?

[36 : 31] Well, first let's unpack what it means that God forgives. God's gracious forgiveness is always tied to relationship. It's not that God just forgives someone and sends them off.

No, his forgiveness is always related to restoring a relationship with them. For God to forgive means that he, means for him to draw near again to those who have sinned. For God to forgive means that he, he will draw near again to those who sin.

Now, this is even in Moses plea to God. And in verse nine, he doesn't just ask God to forgive Israel. He asked that God will go among them, that he'll be in their midst, that God will maintain that relationship with Israel despite their sin.

And it's not just Moses's word central to this passage is the Lord restoring his covenant with Israel. It has its own heading in my version of, of the, of the Bible, my printing that he restores.

God restores this covenant to be with Israel despite their sin. And that's done symbolically through the, the recreation of the stones of the 10 commandments.

[37 : 40] God says, very, I mean, it's a, a very cool image. Here is the law. You broke it. Let's rebuild it. Here is this covenant I made with you.

You broke it, but I want to make it again. It's very clear in these pictures, even with these stones that God is overcoming this, this breaking of the covenant.

And yet he's going to restore it. And he's going to continue to be with Israel. And God promises to work in and through Israel and lead them to a new land. But again, how can this be?

How can we really see a holy, pure, just judge? And the same God being one who forgives sin.

How can these two work together? And the passage records a bad way out of the paradox, a bad way of how to deal with God being just and God being gracious.

[38 : 38] The passage records the response of Aaron and the elders to this evidence of God's glory. Beginning in verse 29. And when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

So God, Moses' face is glowing. When Aaron and all of the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant and they were afraid to come. Come near him. But Moses called to them.

So Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him and he spoke to them. Afterward, all is all the Israelites came near and he gave them all the commandments, commands the Lord had given on Mount Sinai.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But when he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out, he told the Israelites what he had been commanded.

They saw his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back on over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord. So Moses' face shone after his encounters with God.

[39 : 38] This is a very literal picture again of what was supposed to happen for Israel. They were supposed to see God and be changed by him. Moses' face was changed by God. And then they were supposed to go out to others and be, and draw others to God through that change.

And that's exactly what happens in this picture of Moses. And yet that isn't what happens. But Moses is changed, but even Israel rejects it.

And Aaron and Israel couldn't hold that paradox of God. They couldn't see God's glory, even as it was reflected off of Moses, like this third hand glory. They couldn't hold that paradox.

So they asked Moses to put a veil over his face to cover up God's glory. So they weren't constantly faced with this picture of God's glory and his holiness. They asked Moses to cover over the effect of God in his life, to cover over the impact that God had made on him.

So their way of dealing with this paradox was just to put a veil over it, to cover it up. So it wasn't so stark. It wasn't so clear that they were living among, they were asking a holy and just God to live among them.

[40 : 47] They weren't told exactly what the thought process is here, but from other places in Exodus, I think we can assume that what Israel is doing is they can't handle even Moses' secondhand glory.

Back in Exodus 20, at the conclusion of the Ten Commandments, when they're first given, we read this. All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpets and the mountain smoking.

And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. So they couldn't bear seeing this evidence of God's glory. Then they said to Moses, Moses, speak to us yourself.

We will listen. But do not let God speak to us. And Moses said to the people, do not be afraid. God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you and keep you from sinning.

What's happening here? God is demonstrating his glory to the people. And they say, no, we can't handle that. Moses, you go in between us and God because we don't want to, we can't see him.

[41 : 44] We can't look at him. We can't handle that amount of glory. You do it yourself. And then you come to speak to us and we'll do whatever God says. But we can't have relationship with him.

And Moses says to the people, God showed you his glory so that you would have a motivation to obey. God's glory drives us to repentance and to obedience. And so, but Israel just wants, they want to cut that out.

They won't want to see God face to face. They'll do what he says, but they can't handle that personal relationship with him. We see in that passage, both the, an example of the people's tendency to hide from God's glory, but also the warning about what happens when we do.

That we don't follow God. We don't obey his word because we've cut him to a certain degree. We've cut him out of the picture. We've cut his glory out of the picture. But both his glory and his grace should drive us, should draw us into relationship with him.

That was Moses' first reaction, right? He, his reaction to God's glory was worship. God's glory and his grace draw us to him. But when we veil them, when we veil either his glory or we veil his grace, we limit the power that they have to draw us into relationship with him and we distance ourselves from God.

[43 : 01] I think we veil God when we fail to see the implications of his holiness, when we don't look at his holiness. I think that's something that's very common in our culture today. We ignore how holiness and through that judgment are central to who God is.

We don't like to think of God as a judge and so we don't think of him as holy. But God ceases to be God when he's not holy. Remember that God's holiness means that he is the center like the sun in our universe.

God is center in the universe. So to not obey is to deny that some, to not obey God is to deny something that's central to who he has created us to be.

To not obey God is to deny something that's central to our human identity as we are created in his image. So when we veil this, we see that these, we see these laws and these rules that God has given us as unnecessary restrictions or as mere suggestions and we build our life apart from how God has commanded us to live.

But to do that is to distance ourselves from God. We need to see his glory and his holiness on full blast if we are going to follow him. Kind of on the opposite end of the spectrum is that we veil God when we deny his grace.

[44 : 26] And we can do this really well in the church sometimes. We can get a sense for God's holiness but then we veil his grace. We may understand what God is calling us to but then we also see how far we fall short of that.

We only see our sin and we don't get a sense of God's grace. And what happens when we do that is we hide from God. I don't know if you have a sin maybe that you keep falling into the same sin, the same pattern of sin and every time you do you feel this need to hide from God.

God calls us he says when in 1 John he says when we're walking to walk in the light to follow God is to confess our sin. It's not to not sin to walk in the light is to confess our sin and yet when we continue to fall into sin sometimes we veil God's grace and we say no I need to hide from God for now because I understand he's glorious I understand he's holiness I understand that he's a judge and I understand that I fall short of that so I need to hide from him because we don't see his grace which is calling us to come to him that when we sin we run to him harder because we recognize how much we need him.

But we don't because we say oh if I go to God now after disobeying him I'll feel like a hypocrite. His word is saying well that's what we are without him and so go to him and he restores us. When we hide from God in our sin it shows that we don't actually believe it shows that we believe that we not God but that we are the ones who determine whether we should receive grace and that misbelief is causing us to hide from God.

[46 : 13] A third way kind of a combination of these is we veil God when we make the Christian life just about being good. I think this is in a way what Israel was doing. They were separating the commands from the God holy God who commanded them.

In all of this we have to remember that Israel's commissioning was not to be good or pure or righteous. That's not what God was calling them to. That's not what God is calling us to. Now that's a necessary effect of following the law but Israel was called to follow the law because it brought them near to God and then they could draw others to God also.

Their commissioning was not just to be holy. Their commissioning was to be near to God to be holy as he was holy so that they would look like him and draw others to him. It's very easy to look at those and say they're the same thing.

So I was thinking of this image about having a cough. You know when you have a cough and you're coughing really bad what's the goal? To stop coughing?

Is that the goal? Well here's a problem. There's a really easy way to stop coughing. Suffocate yourself. And then you'll stop coughing. Right?

[47 : 30] Stop coughing is not the goal. The goal is to get healthy and when you get healthy you'll stop coughing. Stopping coughing is a natural effect of the true goal.

When we make the correlation in case you're having trouble drawing the connection here the correlation is that as we draw into relationship with God we will be changed into his image. We don't change into his image and then go after him because it doesn't work. It never will. And we will pursue ways to act holy and to be holy that are actually in countermeasure that are actually against what will help us to draw near to God.

So we need to get the order right. We need to get the true goal right. We veil God when we make the Christian life just about being good instead of making it about being in relationship with him. So what's the point? Well when the people had Moses cover his face I think they had the wrong goal in mind. And that's a mistake we read we make too. But if we read this law and we divorce it from relationship with God it won't do us any good.

[48 : 40] But that leads us back to our question then. How can we have relationship with God at all? How can he forgive us and yet remain holy?

Well there's a good way through that paradox. And we can we can see it in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and I apologize I should have put it on the screen for you but I didn't.

2 Corinthians chapter 3 the apostle Paul walks us through this paradox of God being both just and gracious and he does so through referencing this event in the life of Moses.

Let's begin in verse 7. Now if the ministry that brought death which was engraved in the letters in stone came with glory so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of his glory fading as it was so this is talking exactly about the passage we were just in will not the ministry of the spirit be even more glorious?

If the ministry that condemns men is glorious how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.

[49 : 58] And if what was fading away came with glory how much greater is the glory of that which lasts? Therefore since we have this hope that we can be drawn near to God we are very bold.

We are not like Moses who put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read.

It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read a veil covers their hearts but whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away.

Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

What's Paul saying? He's saying that the law that God gave Israel wasn't bad. It revealed who God was and what he called Israel to. But just like that veil over Moses' face Israel couldn't see the law

properly.

[51 : 02] They couldn't see that it was describing who God was so they veiled it. And they couldn't see the true glory and they couldn't see the true graciousness of God. They limited both.

But the overwhelming glory of God was too much for them and so they limited it. But when they did they also limited the grace of God. Because when you cover up God you limit both his glory and his grace.

And it impacted their worship and it impacted their mission. But God's promise and commissioning to Israel was that he would be with them. And that veil over their hearts that's pictured by the veil over Moses' face limited their viewing of God with them.

And in some ways this is understandable because of their sin the people couldn't draw near to God. And there's even a picture of this in the temple and I'm not sure exactly where you are in the readings that you do before or earlier on in the service but the Exodus talks about this description of the temple and in the temple there's this place in the center that's the holy of holies where the wholeness of God's presence dwelt and that was covered up by a huge curtain.

And it was like that for hundreds of years first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. And it was this thick curtain and no one was allowed through but when Christ was crucified that curtain that veil tore from the top.

[52 : 20] and now this room that had the full effect of God's glory was accessible because of the work of Christ.

Because the people were purified by Christ. And you see how Paul ends this passage? And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory and we're being transformed into his likeness. When we veil God we take away that relationship with him because we can't and then we can't follow him and we can't be like him and we can't accomplish the mission that he has for us. But because he broke down that wall because he tore that curtain because he removed the veil because he solved that paradox in himself of being just and of being gracious because he took that that paradox upon himself in Christ.

Now we can look at him with unveiled face. We don't have to limit his glory. We don't have to limit his graciousness. That relationship was restored and the effect is that we're being transformed into his likeness.

Our cough is being healed. When Israel separated God out then they couldn't even follow the rules. But when we have that relationship with stored we begin to reflect him again.

[53 : 33] In a few minutes we're going to be celebrating communion and communion is supposed to be a meal that reminds us of Christ's sacrifice. It helps us to look backwards at what Jesus has done and in one sense it looks back on the cross as the work of reconciliation of bringing us back to God but it also has one eye on the future.

When Christ instituted it he said to do this until the kingdom of heaven was restored when God's glory was brought back fully when humanity was brought back fully into relationship with God and that's something in the scriptures that is pictured in an event called the wedding supper of the lamb and this is a meal that we celebrate until that great banquet of recognizing and realizing God's full and complete dwelling with us.

I should actually put that the other way around us being back up with him and this is a meal that celebrates God's justice. We see the cup representative of Christ's blood that amplifies exemplifies God's justice that payment has to be made for sin.

We can't ignore it. We can't jump over it. There's a great cost to sin so we have to take sin seriously but this is also a meal that celebrates God's grace that he took that cost upon himself to restore us to restore relationship with us that we've been saved from the penalty of sin and we're being saved from the power of sin and one day we'll be saved from even the presence of sin.

So when we partake in a few minutes remember that God is just and he is holy and yet he is gracious. Don't don't fail his justice or his holiness and don't fail his graciousness and because he is just and holy and gracious we can look at him with unveiled face and we can be changed by him but only if we see that clearly.

[55 : 28] Let's pray.