

The Wages of Sin is Death (Gen 2:16-17)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on September 30, 2007

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There are a lot of firsts just in these two verses 16-17:

- First time God speaks audibly where a human hears
- First command, if not the first covenant with man. Although not all the formal language of a covenant is here, Hosea 6:7 may allude to this in comparing Israel to Adam:¹ “Like Adam they transgressed the covenant” (ESV, NAS, etc.)
- The first prohibition is in the style of the Hebrew law given in the Ten Commandments (Hebrew *lo* + imperfect = “thou shalt *never* ...” stronger than merely “not” in English)
- The first law is simple: if you eat from that one tree, you’ll die; and the implication is if you don’t eat of that tree, you’ll live. Obey -> Live; Disobey -> Die.
- First words from God to man reveal His great goodness, grace and kindness (“from any tree of the garden you may eat freely”). This is not harsh, the original language emphasizes the abundant provision God has given man – the world is yours, but there is just one tree on the planet that’s off-limits. Along with this provision, there is one prohibition.
- First words from God also reveal His righteous standard, character, holiness and justice and how serious one sin is to God
- First mention of “evil” in chapter 2 to mankind (10x in chapter 1 we have heard that all God made is good – for first time we hear of “good and evil” a scriptural theme which will continue from these first 2 chapters of the Bible all the way until the last 2 Bible chapters)
- First mention of death in the Bible is found in these verses

What does v. 17 mean “you will surely die”?

To “die” has the basic idea of separation. It can mean spiritual separation, physical separation (body and soul/spirit), and eternal separation from God, and they occur in that order. Adam and every human being since his fall is spiritually dead, and destined for both physical and eternal death unless God’s grace intervenes. And Adam and every human being instantly deserves both physical and eternal death the moment he sins, unless God’s grace intervenes and allows us to live a little longer (which He did undeservedly for both Adam and Eve in chapter 3 and Cain in chapter 4 when He would have been just to execute them on the spot)

There was instant death or separation spiritually when Adam and Eve sinned – rather than the close communion and fellowship they earlier enjoyed, we will see them now hiding from God, covering their sin and cowering in their shame. There was not only separation from God that very day, but sin caused separation between man and wife – the fellowship and union of marriage was impacted by sin in chapter 3 where they turn against each other and blame shift

The very day that Adam and Eve sinned, they died spiritually and morally, their sins separated them from God as Isaiah 59:2 says, they were dead in their sins as Ephesians 2:1 says. That very same day they also came under the judicial death sentence of both physical and eternal death and deserved both that day as well. The same is true of every human being that has ever lived since.

Man has inherited guilt and sinful nature and is spiritually dead without God's regenerating grace. It's not that unbelievers *will* come under death or condemnation or wrath in the future, it's that they already are in that state

John 3:18 "he is condemned already"

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"

John 3:16 of course contrasts "perish" with "everlasting life" – to perish, or to die, is clearly not limited to the physical

A number of passages make clear there's more than one type of death in the Bible – Revelation 20:14 says "the second death" is when [physical] "death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire" which is the final event in the history of this universe before God makes a new heavens and a new earth

All who are still in spiritual death (separation from God) when they experience physical death, all will experience eternal separation in the lake of fire, a place of continual conscious torment

Romans 6:23 (NASB95)

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice that "death" is contrasted with eternal life here, just like "perishing" is contrasted with everlasting life in John 3:16. So the death here is more than just spiritual or physical death, the penalty also includes eternal death – the wages or payment due for Adam's sin and our sin is everlasting separation from God.

One of the prime lessons we see unfolded in Genesis is that the wages of sin is death as Romans 6:23 says. And one chapter earlier, Paul develops His argument this way:

Romans 5:12-14 (NASB95)

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

14 Nevertheless **death reigned from Adam until Moses ...**

The passage goes on to describe how both condemnation and judgment are for all, which of course Paul has thoroughly argued in chapters 1-3 about the requirements of God's justice and wrath.

I want to look at that phrase "*death reigned from Adam until Moses*" and see how this develops in Genesis as well as in the lives of the original readers of Genesis in biblical history.

One way that death reigns is that even though God graciously allows some to live longer than others, and He allows all of us to live longer than we deserve, still the scripture says "it is appointed to man once to die and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Both death and eternal judgment are the destiny or doom of us all.

But I want to look at how “death reigned from Adam to Moses” in particular by God’s judgment like in Genesis 6, the flood. I want to look with you not at occasions where people died of old age or natural causes, I want to look at some examples where death reigned by *supernatural* causes. There are times from Adam to Moses where God in His justice intervened and God Himself carried out a divine execution by a unilateral supernatural judgment on human beings.

In Luke 17, Jesus Himself surveys some of the significant judgments of this nature that were revealed and carried out by God Himself in executing individuals, or consuming entire cities in His wrath, and even destroying the entire world. The reality of past judgments makes the future judgment of our Lord all the more imminent and urgent because we could be taken out at any time or Jesus could return at any time.

Luke 17:26-36 (NASB95)

26 “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

27 they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, **until the day** that Noah entered the ark, and **the flood came and destroyed them all.**

28 “It was the same as happened **in the days of Lot:** they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;

29 but **on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.**

30 “It will be just the same **on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.**

31 “On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field **must not turn back.**

32 “**Remember Lot’s wife.**

33 “Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

34 “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; **one will be taken and the other will be left.**

35 “There will be two women grinding at the same place; **one will be taken and the other will be left.**

36 [“Two men will be in the field; **one will be taken and the other will be left.**”]

Why are some taken in judgment and others spared judgment? It’s not because some are sinners and some are not – all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, all deserve the justice of death that fell on the city of Sodom and that fell on the world in Noah’s day, and all of us deserve the instant judgment on individuals like Lot’s wife.

Is that fair – I use the word in the sense of what is deserved – is it fair that some are not taken but others are? No! All of us deserve to be taken out. *Was it grace that any were spared? Yes!*

Were Noah’s sons especially righteous? No, we learn in the chapter after the flood of serious sin done by one of his sons. Was it fair that God spared Noah’s sons when many who died in the flood were guilty of similar sins? Was that fair that Ham, Shem, and Japheth lived? No! They deserved to be drowned in the floodwaters. *Was it grace? Yes!*

We are to remember Lot’s wife who disobeyed and she instantly was turned into a pillar of salt. God takes her out like that instantly. This almost doesn’t seem real to some of us. This seems more like Chronicles of Narnia, and someone being turned into stone. It seems more like a fairytale, because we don’t often think of God’s instant judgment, or we make jokes about it like God striking people with lightning. It’s hard to relate to these stories, but what *should be hard to believe* is the fact that God hasn’t taken us out!

God's justice not only falls on the pagan city, but the judgment of death also falls on those in the believing community who disregard the details of God's commands.

Is that fair that two entire cities and all the area around them would be destroyed? Is it just, that Lot's wife was instantly pulverized into salt just for partial obedience? I mean, after all, she obeyed the other parts of the command and only looked back once. It was fair if we use the word fair for what is deserved. Justice was served – this is what all sinners deserve. This is what you deserve and what I deserve.

Was Lot and the rest of his family such a virtuous and holy and righteous bunch? Is it because of their merits or superior character or goodness that God saved them? Read Genesis 19 and how Lot offers to give his own daughters to the sexual desires of those outside his house. *Was it fair they lived? No. Was it grace? Yes.*

Remember anytime you bring up the “fair card” that fair is for all of us to die this very day and go to hell. Genesis 19:29 suggests this grace had more to do with God than Lot.

Were Job's daughters virtuous women and is that why they were spared? No. Right after God's judgment falls, in the very next passage, verses 30 and following, both the two oldest daughters get their dad drunk and conceived children by incest. *Was the fact that this family was spared a totally undeserved grace by God? Yes.*

Incest was a sin in the O.T. that called for the death penalty just like homosexuality. Did they not deserve to die for this, as much as those in Sodom deserved to die? Absolutely. Is it fair that they were spared while other sinners perished? No – fire and brimstone for them too would have been fair and deserved. *Was it fair? No. Was it grace? Yes!*

What about the fact that Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed while other cities in biblical history were not? Is this because they were the only city in history deserving God's judgment and justice like this? We know that God did take out other cities like Tyre and Sidon. But what about cities like Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida in the days of Jesus? Were they less deserving of judgment?

Matthew 11:20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 “Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

23 “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

24 “Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

This passage indicates there will be degrees of hell, and that there were people groups whose sin was even worse than that of cities God wiped out. Justice will be served for, even if it's delayed – it is served in eternity. But if these other cities were more guilty and sinful in God's eyes and less hardhearted than Sodom and Tyre and Sidon, why weren't they destroyed as well?

Is it fair that God rains down judgment quickly on some but delays wrath for others? If we speak of equality and what the cities deserved in the day of Jesus, we have to answer the question “*Is it fair?*” *No. Instant judgment for all would be fair in the sense of equal. Is it grace? Yes!*

Don’t ever think for a moment that because God’s judgment hasn’t rained down on you that you are any better. The reason God takes out some right away and others He allows to live on borrowed time, walk on His earth, breathe His earth, and live many years while in rebellion against God is not because it is fair or deserved or because God owes man this – it is a manifestation of His grace. His patience and longsuffering should cause us to repent.

Luke 13:1-9 (NASB95)

1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

2 And Jesus said to them, “**Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners** than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?”

3 “I tell you, no, but **unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**”

4 “Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them **were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?**”

5 “I tell you, no, but **unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**”

The word “perish” in the Bible is not limited to physical death, it includes eternal death or separation from God, the opposite of eternal life (ex: John 3:16 “shall not perish but have everlasting life”). Unless you repent, you will perish and will not have everlasting life.

Belief and repentance are not two unrelated things – they’re two sides of the same coin, turning from sin to Christ. Conversion has only happened when there is repentant faith. To truly believe Jesus is Lord and all He claimed to be necessarily includes repentance, the end of you and desire to lay all your sin aside and all your pride at the feet of your new King, and the result of true conversion will always be fruit of a changed life. If your life does not have the fruit of the spirit in growing measure, it’s only a matter of time (no one knows how long) until God cuts down your life in judgment.

6 And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any.

7 “And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’”

8 “And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;

9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’ ”

We are so used to God’s grace and patience and mercy, that we think we deserve it and that it will always be there. And because our world has over-emphasized “God is love” (virtually *only*-emphasized that attribute) when we see His holy justice carried out, we are in shock and offended.

If we do not rightly understand God’s justice and holiness, we will not find grace amazing. In reality, it’s *justice* we find amazing.

*Amazing justice, how harsh it sounds That God would punish you or me
If God doesn’t show equal grace all the time It’s just not fair, you see*

We think mercy is owed to us perpetually by God, but of course if grace is obligatory or owed to all, it's no longer grace. Is it fair that God doesn't elect and save every human being? No – fair would be for Him not to save any of us, just like He didn't save any of the fallen angels or even provide a way for them to be saved. Is it fair that God would choose to save any? No. *Is it grace? Yes!*

Let's look at some other examples of how “death reigned from Adam to Moses,” particularly those who lived in the days of Moses.

Numbers 10:1-3 (NASB95)

Leviticus 10:1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, **which He had not commanded them.**
 2 And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and **they died** before the Lord.
 3 Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘**By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy,** And before all the people I will be honored.’ ” So **Aaron, therefore, kept silent.**

Numbers 11:1-6 (NASB95)

1 Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.
 2 The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out.
 3 So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.
 4 The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat?
 5 “We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic,
 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.”

[God does give them quail, but He also gives some judgment]

33 While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague.
 34 So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy.

Numbers 14:35-38 (NASB95)

35 ‘I, the Lord, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.’ ”
 36 As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land,
 37 even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the Lord.
 38 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land.

Numbers 16:25-35 (NASB95)

25 Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him,
 26 and he spoke to the congregation, saying, “Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin.”
 27 So they got back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the doorway of their tents, along with their wives and their sons and their little ones.
 28 Moses said, “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing.

29 “If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me.

30 “But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and **they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the Lord.**”

31 As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open;

32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions.

33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

34 All Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, “The earth may swallow us up!”

35 **Fire also came forth from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.**

Numbers 16:41-49 (NASB95)

41 **But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled** against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord’s people.”

42 It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared.

43 Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting,

44 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

45 “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces.

46 Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the Lord, the plague has begun!”

47 Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.

48 He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked.

49 **But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah.**

Numbers 21:5-6 (NASB95)

5 The people spoke against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.”

6 **The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.**

You might be thinking “wow, you’d think Israel would have learned the lesson.” I suspect God is thinking that same thing about us this morning – “you’d think after reading these scriptures, GCBC would learn this lesson, but they haven’t.”

The fact that you have not been killed by an instant plague or fiery serpents or that God’s fire has not burned you up when you grumbled and complained this past week is not because He hates your sin any less. It’s undeserved grace that He does not owe us and can take away at any time.

We might not think of sins like ingratitude or murmuring or wanting a little variety in our diet are a big deal, but that’s just evidence that we don’t have a clue about the holiness of God.

Does God really care that we do things exactly the way the Bible says? Doesn’t close count for something besides horseshoes or hand grenades? Isn’t it just the heart that counts, not whether we follow the precise precepts of God’s law?

The best and final illustration we’ll look at in the O.T. is the story of David and the ark.

2 Samuel 6:1-9 (NASB95)

1 Now David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.
 2 And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim.
 3 They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart.
 4 So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark.
 5 Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals.
 6 But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it.
 7 And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.
 8 **David became angry** because of the Lord's outburst against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day.
 9 **So David was afraid of the Lord that day**; and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?"

In verse 8, David became angry. One writer says this is putting the cart before the horse here (no pun intended). We've got David standing here mad at the Lord, when, in fact, the Lord was angry at David (Swindoll, 149).

God's law (ex: Numbers 4:15) had made clear that for sinful man to touch the holy ark of God's glory would mean death. The ground was not sinful, all of creation honors God except for sinful man, so for God's ark to touch the ground would have been ok. But it's not ok where God has clearly spoken for a sinful human being, even a sincere and well-meaning one who does not do God's work God's way, even for those like Uzzah, or for spiritual leaders like Nadab and Abihu, even for people like in Acts 5 who give big contributions to the church, it is not ok for any of us to violate the holiness of God. God takes His holy law seriously.

Dale Ralph Davis writes:

"Doesn't this offend you? After all, Uzzah was only trying to help – was he to allow the oxen to bounce the ark right off the cart (v. 6)? Why didn't Yahweh cut him some slack? Why so severe? So arbitrary? We should be angry, shouldn't we (v. 8)? Or, should we fear (v. 9)?"

For me, passages like this are evidence of the supernatural origin and trustworthiness of the Bible. This Uzzah story goes so against the grain of human preferences. We would never have 'invented' a God like this – not if we want to win converts and influence people. This God is not very marketable. Anyone who says the God of the Bible is merely a projection of our wish fulfillment has not read the Bible.

Back to the text. What was the problem, the error here? We must recall that Yahweh had long ago given specific instructions to Moses and the priesthood about how the ark, among other items, was to be transported (see Num. 4:4-6, 15, 17-20; and 7:9). The rules were: no touch, no look, no cart. The priests were to cover the sacred furniture after which they would carry such items (hence, implicitly, no carts). The Kohathites were not to touch or look upon the sacred items 'lest they die' (Num. 4:15, 20). Clearly, Yahweh did not want them to die; his *kindness* was written all over that warning. So it was not as though David and Uzzah and company had had no warning. Yahweh's blow was scarcely arbitrary ...

Uzzah's ultimate salvation is not at stake here. It is a temporal judgment he suffers. That,

however, does not mean we should stop shaking ... God's lethal holiness levels both pagans and churchmen ... Of course, as readers we can continue to object if we like. But the application of the text is clear: you dare not trifle with a God who is both real and holy. Yahweh is not your neat, warm, fuzzy friend in the sky ... And Yahweh's people tend to forget what sort of God they face. We forget that there is heat in his holiness. No, we do not need to be terrified, but being scared wouldn't hurt ... the God of 2 Samuel 6 is the same God you meet in the New Testament (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30-31; Heb. 10:26-31)." (Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel*, 64-65)

Acts 5:1-11 (NASB95)

1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,
 2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.
 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?
 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."
 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.
 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.
 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.
 8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."
 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well."
 10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.
 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

This is not a church growth strategy you'll find in any book, but the fear of the Lord and the holiness of God cause a church to grow. The N.T. talks about church discipline, how if members continue in unrepentant sin and the steps of Matthew 18 have been followed, there comes a time when they must be put out of the church. Well, this passage is an example of supernatural unilateral church discipline by God Himself – taking a sinful couple out of a church by taking them out, taking their lives!

1 Corinthians 11:27-30 (NASB95)

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.
 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.
 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.
 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

Those who do treat lightly God or His ordinances, those who do not reverence Him in communion or who partake in an unworthy manner bring judgment on themselves, and the Corinthian church were aware of a number in their midst who had died because of this.

R.C. Sproul ties this all back in with the Genesis 2 passage in his excellent classic book *The Holiness of God*:

‘In creation God is not obliged to give us the gift of life. He is not in debt to us. The gift of life comes by His grace and stands under His divine authority ... God put man on probation and said, “If you sin, you will die.” Sin brings the loss of the gift of life. The right to life is forfeited by sin ... In creation the penalty for sin was not only death, but instant death. Death that very day: death as swiftly as it fell upon Nadab and Abihu; death as sudden as it wiped out Uzzah; death as quick as it befell Ananias and Sapphira. “The day that you sin you will surely die.” ... Adam and Eve did suffer spiritual death that very day, but God granted mercy in terms of the full measure of the penalty ... We are all sitting on death row awaiting execution.’ (p. 114-15)

‘It was zeal for the God who slew Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah that consumed Christ. It was the God who destroyed the world by a flood who pours the waters of His grace out to us ... [Yet] the most brutal act of divine vengeance ever recorded in Scripture ... is not found in the Old Testament but in the New Testament. The most violent expression of God’s wrath and justice is seen in the cross. If ever a person had room to complain of injustice it was Jesus. He was the only innocent man ever to be punished by God. If we stagger at the wrath of God, let us stagger at the cross. Here is where our astonishment should be focused. If we have cause for moral outrage, let it be directed at Golgotha.’ (p. 121)

Was that fair? No. Was it grace? Yes!

‘the most mysterious aspect of the mystery of sin is not that the sinner deserves to die, but rather that the sinner in the average situation continues to exist ... The issue is not why does God punish sin, but why does He permit the ongoing rebellion of man? What prince, what king, what ruler would manifest so much patience with a continually rebellious populace? ... [Yet God] is indeed long-suffering, patient, and slow to anger. In fact He is so slow to anger that when His anger does erupt we are shocked and offended by it. We forget rather quickly that God’s patience is designed to lead us to repentance, to give us time to be redeemed. Instead of taking advantage of this patience by coming humbly to Him for forgiveness, we use this grace as an opportunity to become more bold in our sin.’ (p. 117)

It would be fair, it would be just, for God to destroy the entire world and save none – that would be justice. But amazingly we are all alive here this morning! *Is that fair? No. Is it grace? Yes.*

¹ The various translations and commentators are not united on whether the Hebrew *adam* is a reference to mankind or proper name Adam and/or an “Edenic Covenant” (many Reformed theologians would call it “a covenant of works”). *NET Bible Notes* discusses the other views of the word *adam* in this verse: (2) collective singular: “like [sinful] men” (3) proper location: “at Adam,” referring to a city in the Jordan Valley (Josh 3:16), emending comparative (*kaf*) to locative (◌*bet*, “at”): “at Adam”. BDB 9 s.v. 2 suggests the collective sense, referring to sinful men (Num 5:6; 1 Kgs 8:46; 2 Chr 6:36; Jer 10:14; Job 31:33; Hos 6:7). The English versions are divided: KJV margin, ASV, RSV margin, NASB, NIV, TEV margin, NLT “like Adam”; RSV, NRSV, TEV “at Adam”; KJV “like men.” ... The verb (◌*avar*) refers here to breaking a covenant and carries the nuance “to overstep, transgress” (BDB 717 s.v. ◌*i*). Cf. NAB “violated”; NRSV “transgressed.”