

“BEHOLD THE KINDNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 11:19-24

Introduction.

If you want to know how muddled people’s thinking about God is these days, just ask them who is God and what is He like? How do they think about God? It will stagger the imagination. Everyone has their own pre-conceived ideas of what God is like.

Their ideas are shaped by individual experiences, personal struggles, cultural influences. Satan works overtime to cloud our minds with lies about God.

Most of modern culture rejects any notion of God as a God of divine wrath and judgment. Some imagine Him to be a great, wise old grandfatherly type figure. Others go with a Charlton Heston type man. I am sure you have noticed the modern God is a God of love, peace, tolerance and forgiveness. He is completely benevolent and indulgent. A celestial Santa Claus.

Santa Claus theology says sin is no big deal and atonement is unnecessary. God’s kindness extends just as much to those who completely ignore Him and disregard His commands as to those who love and obey Him.

People will say, “The God I worship is a God of love, He would never send anyone to hell. I believe in a God who is loving, merciful, forgiving. I don’t like to think of God as Judge but more as a Father.”

Most of the time when someone starts talking about the kind of God they believe in or worship, they are at the same time denying something else the Bible says about God. We are not free to think of God however we like or imagine.

At the very best these images or thoughts are only of a man, maybe the ideal man, but a man nevertheless. God is not like any man. We are made in His image, He is not made in our image.

It is the duty of everyone to know God, and to know God only as God has revealed Himself. We can't cherry pick attributes and characteristics of God. It is pride, arrogance and presumptuous to say what we think God is like without turning to His Word.

Romans 11:20-21

Romans 11:20-21 Stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.

Do not become proud, but fear. Why fear? For most of us when Scripture tells us to fear God, it seems counter-intuitive to us. We hear it as the opposite of love.

Listen to what Scripture says.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Nehemiah 1:11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of *your servants who delight to fear your name*.

Jeremiah 32:38-41 They shall be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And *I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me*. 41 I will rejoice in doing them good.

Notice the fear of the Lord is not the opposite of the joy of the Lord or the love of the Lord. You can have fear and joy and love and peace.

The fear of the Lord is about depth of knowledge and understanding, it is about taking God seriously.

We are to live by faith and fear, by a fear that drive us to faith in God, to cling to God. If you don't fear God, you will never cling to God. You will never cling to God until you see your sinful heart, and know your need of God. The wicked have no fear of God. In Godly people fear and love embrace, you will cling to God and you will feel safe.

Paul says to the Gentiles fearing God is the antidote to being proud and conceited, fearing God keeps you humble.

There is a reason to fear God, and the Jews are the example. If you chose to follow the path of unbelief, to not trust in Jesus Christ, then you will be cut off. Be afraid of unbelief, fear lack of faith, fear disobedience, fear when you feel those things in your heart.

In our knowledge of God faith and fear are together. So are two other words Paul uses in vs. 22.

Romans 11:22

Roman 11:22 Note (behold) the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you.

Note is weak, think behold! Notice, consider, wake up. Don't skim over this. What is the key word in that sentence? It is the word *and*.

Behold, look at the kindness and the severity of God, the toughness of God and the tenderness of God, the judgment of God and the salvation of God, the fierceness and the friendship of God.

Paul says the grafting in of the Gentiles and the cutting off of the Jews, are examples of the kindness and severity of God, expressions of God's love and justice, of His love and holiness.

Paul has just explained to the church in Rome God rejected the Jews for their unbelief, and brought the Gentiles to saving faith in Jesus Christ. But he urges the Christians in Rome to be careful in how they think about this.

They are not just to think about the kindness of God, nor are they just to think about the severity of God. There are two ditches on the path to knowing God and people often end up in one or the other. Christians are to guard their hearts and thinking, they are to not become imbalanced, but to strive to be balanced in their contemplation of God.

If you want to truly know God as He truly is, then you must take notice of both His kindness and His severity, His love and justice, His salvation and His judgment.

Do you think about this? Do you think about both aspects of the character and nature of God?

Kindness of God. Goodness of God. Gentle kindness of God.

The hesed of God, His steadfast love, His covenant kindness. This is not hard to grasp. Kindness of God speaks to His love, grace, mercy, goodness, graciousness.

God summed up this revelation of Himself to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 34:6–7 The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

God is not just kind and good, He is abounding in kindness and overflowing in goodness. God doesn't give according to what we deserve, but far exceeds it, going above and beyond.

God in His generous kindness gives us everything we have in this life, every material blessing and benefit, every meal, every dollar, every breath, every night's sleep, everything that sustains and enriches our lives.

And all of that is superseded and overshadowed by God's spiritual blessings and benefits. God's saving acts, His forgiveness, His grafting in of the wild olive branch. This is His kindness transforming human life.

We see God's kindness right out of the gate in Genesis. First, creating all things good. Then, in not leaving man alone. And when man fell, God's kindness didn't kill him instantly, God stooped down to make them clothes, and then made a promise to send a Savior.

The kindness of God is first wonder of the world.

Consider how God treated the children of Israel in the wilderness or David after his sin, or Jonah. Consider the kindness of God toward us us persistent, selfish, proud, lustful, greedy, envious sinners. Where our sin abounds, His grace abounds even more. Consider the kindness of God toward us all.

The severity of God. Sternness of God.

The severity of God is seen in His cutting off of the Jews. The severity of God is His withdrawing of His kindness to those who rejected God's kindness in sending His Son.

We see it in the rest of Exodus 34

Exodus 34:6–7 [First, the kindness] “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, [then the severity] but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

In Romans 2:4-5 we see both together, first kindness and then severity:

Romans 2:4-5 Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

The riches of God's kindness is meant to lead us sinners constantly to repentance. Behind every act and display of God's great kindness there is the threat of severity in judgment if His goodness is rejected, refused or denied.

Don't miss one important aspect of God's severity. Everywhere we read of God's severity we are reminded God is not impatient, but longsuffering. The Bible makes much of God's patience and forbearance. God in His grace long delays and postpones judgment.

The reason it has been two thousand years since the promise of Christ's return is the patience of God, His kindness in giving every opportunity to repent, before the judgment.

You have tasted the kindness and goodness of God every single day of your life, with every breath you take. Has it led you to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ? If not you are living under the threat of His severity.

Your faith is shaped by what you look at. If you only look only at God's gentler side, it will be bad for your faith. You will take sin lightly and grace will be cheap, leading to false assurance. If you look only at the severity of God, God will be a tyrant not a Father, and you will despair of guilt and miss the Gospel. If you look at the kindness and severity of God the way they are woven together in the Bible, you will see the holiness of God that never excuses sin and the love of God shows us His mercy in Christ, and you will grow in grace and truth.

Teach your children the kindness and the severity of God. Don't give them a one-sided God, an unbalanced God. Give them a glimpse of God in your love and discipline, your tenderness and toughness with sin. Balanced parenting tells the truth about God.

What God did to the Jews should make us tremble, it should put the fear of God in us.
But what God did to the Gentiles should stir us relief, hope, gratitude, and worship.

Never forget what you were, what you deserved, and never forget why you are where you are and have what you have. To forget leads to pride, and it was pride that cut the Jews off.

Implications and application.

Three applications.

Be deeply grateful for the kindness of God. Count the innumerable blessings and benefits of God richly poured out on you and your life. Don't take them for granted, don't take them lightly or dismissively. You have tasted the kindness and goodness of God every single day of your life, with every breath you take.

And rejoice in every spiritual gift bought and secured for you at incredible cost on the cross.

Be deeply grateful for the patience God has shown you all the days of your life, through all your sin and disobedience He continues to put up with you. Strive to not try His patience, and strive to render be patient to others in your life who are just as undeserving of it as you are of Gods.

Be deeply humbled by the discipline of God and grateful for it. His severity toward you is His love and kindness and grace. He disciplines those He loves, as a father does a son.

Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

Do you want to behold the kindness of God in its most glorious manifestation?
Behold the cross.

Do you want to behold the severity of God in its most stark manifestation?
Behold the cross.

Do you want to receive the blessing and benefit and fruit of both in your life?
Repent daily, worship Him with all your heart, walk humbly with God, and be patient and forgiving with others, as He has been with you.

Philippians 1:9-11 It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9-10 We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.