

The Two “Sides” of God

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In Romans 11:22 Paul invites us to take notice of both the “goodness and severity of God.” While we like to think of God in terms of His goodness for the most part, we dare not ignore the frequent teaching that there is a severe side of His nature. In our super tolerant, wishy-washy culture some (even among professing “believers”) not only ignore, but outright deny that God is ever severe. He is pictured somewhat like an ever-smiling, doting grandfather-type who exists only to spoil His unworthy grandchildren. To such people, God never gets upset with or becomes inclined to punish anyone, no matter how rebellious they become. Perhaps the foregoing popular mindset at least in part explains why so many modern parents are overly permissive with their own children.

However, such a concept of God is as foolish as it is erroneous. It must give the Devil great joy that so many have been deceived by it. God’s severity is illustrated in our natural world. Generally, those who abuse their bodies with illicit drugs, alcohol, nicotine, or other poisons, can expect to suffer the sad consequences of breaking a natural law. Likewise, generally, those who defy God’s physical “law” of gravity invite a severe penalty for so doing. The laws of our physical universe are for our blessing, however, and if we live within them, they protect us and provide a sphere of consistency for our lives.

God’s severity is seen in spiritual matters, also. The wrath of God is against the ungodly acts of men as a very part of His nature (Rom. 1:18). This severity of God is seen in the final Judgment by His Son when we shall give an account of both the good and the evil we have done (2 Cor. 5:10). **Those who argue that judgment and eternal hell are incompatible with the goodness and mercy of God make the fatal mistake of believing what they want to believe instead of what the Bible teaches.** Such people create God in their own image and likeness.

God’s goodness isn’t incongruous with His severity. In fact, God’s goodness lies partly in His severity. We can see His goodness in nature when we plant a seed which He alone can make grow to produce food and fiber. He created a world that possesses every sort of beautiful terrain. But especially in spiritual matters do we see the demonstration of His goodness. The Father sent the pre-incarnate Word in the person of Jesus the Christ (John 1:1–2, 14; 3:16) to seek and to save us (Luke 19:10). God provides eternal life through Christ (Rom. 6:23) for those who will believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16). While it is a delight to dwell on the goodness of God, we dare not either forget or ignore the severity of God that will call to account all unforgiven sin. May we all let the goodness of God lead us to repentance when sin overtakes us (Rom. 2:4).

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