

Today's Sermon

Behold the Severity of God

Romans 11:22

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, May 15, 2022

Grad – DJ Mattson storyr, pray for Judy?

Please turn to Rom 11 and as you do I want to share an old fable from India: 'six men blind from birth...decided to visit a nearby palace. When they arrived, there was an elephant standing in the courtyard [they bumped into].

- The first blind man touched the side of the elephant and said "...a wall."
- The second blind man touched the trunk and said [it's] "like a snake."
- The third blind man touched the tusk and said [it's] "like a spear."
- The fourth blind man touched the leg and said, [it's] "like a tree."
- The fifth blind man touched the ear and said, [it's] "like a fan."
- The sixth blind man touched the tail and said, [it feels] like a rope."¹

Each blind man touched only one aspect, so they misunderstood what it was they were bumping into. They had an incomplete and incorrect conclusion by only feeling a part without the whole. God has no body parts, but if we only touch or know 1 attribute, like God is love, we'll have wrong thoughts of who He is and how big He is. And like those blind men were in danger as they came close and could've been crushed, it's a danger for us to go by our feelings, or bring God down to our level, or what we like to think He's like.

To the spiritually blind, the gospel of Rom 1-11 helps us fully truly see God

Rom 11:22 *Note then [usual translation 'see'] the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*

We've seen God's kindness and goodness already in our studies through the book of Romans (2 messages), but God's Word also calls us to see God's severity. So that will be our study today as we're studying all that God is in Romans. We don't pick and choose truths, we know His kindness and must note His severity. This is a command to take special note of God's severity.

NASB '**Behold** then the kindness and severity of God ...'

NKJV '*Therefore **consider** the goodness and severity of God ...'*

C.S. Lewis wrote of Aslan 'he's good', but 'he isn't safe'²

MLJ: 'How much do we know about the severity of God? How much time have we given to a consideration of the severity of God? ... we are hearing less and less about the severity, the justice...wrath of God upon sin. That is where all our troubles come from. That is why the church is as she is.'³

Many churches won't preach this today, but we must

- Outline:**
- 1. Behold God's severity**
 - 2. Be humbled and fear**
 - 3. Be hopeful in the gospel**

First behold the severity of God

... not just God's kindness; severity, too.

v. 22 tells us to consider both, and His '*severity to those who have fallen...*'

That's the same word *fallen* in Heb 6:6 for those who fall and never repent. Jesus used this word of the Jews who didn't want Him to rule over them and so they were slaughtered and Jerusalem was severely judged (Lk 19:27, 44).

He said in the same context religious hypocrites with showy lengthy prayers who take advantage of widows '*will be punished **most severely***' (20:47 NIV)

Behold/consider the severity of God

The Greek verb form is in Titus 1:13 '*rebuke them **sharply***' (false teaching).

The basic idea of 'severity' is sharpness, swiftness, literally it's cutting off.

Behold God's severity, He acts severely, swiftly, abruptly to cut off sinners.

The word severe is related to **sever**, like a severed limb or a branch cut off.

TALK ABOUT recent yard cutting with pole saw, burn pile, etc.

End of v. 22 is a warning: you, too, can be cut off like Israel in Bible times. v. 19: *Then you will say, "Branches were **broken off** so that I might be grafted in."*²⁰ *That is true.*

*They were **broken off because of their unbelief**, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.*²¹ *For if God did not spare the natural branches*

*[unbelieving Israel], neither will he spare you [unbelieving Gentiles].*²² *Note then the kindness and the **severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen**, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise **you too will be cut off.***

Continue in his kindness=continue in it by faith (v. 20)

A dynamic equivalent version: **Notice** how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off (NLT)

'Cut off' is the word John the Baptist used to warn Israel's leaders of God's severity in Mt 3, as he talked about fleeing from the wrath to come: '*Repent ...Bear fruit in keeping with repentance...Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is **cut down** and thrown into the fire...he will burn with unquenchable fire*' v. 8-12

Tree imagery like Rom 11, the fruitless faithless broken and burned

Behold the severity of God and be repentant or you too can be cut off, cut down and cast in the eternal unquenchable fire. The kingdom of God is at hand and His kindness is near but if you don't continue in it and bear good fruit from it in repentant faith, God's axe of judgment will soon sever you.

Repent=180 degree turn from sin to the Savior, flee -> follow

Jesus used this verb for severing a hand from a body: '*if your right hand causes you to sin, **cut it off** and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell*' (Mt 5:30)⁴

This is serious language of the severest judgment, everlasting conscious punishment.

Hell is for real forever. Repent, sever your sin before it severs you from God. Cut off what makes you sin before God cuts you off. Behold God's kindness and severity. He's kind to show severity before it's too late.

Flee the wrath to come by fleeing to Christ in faith, trust His lovingkindness

Look back at Rom 2:4: *Or 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...* Behold God's kindness and severity of wrath for the unrepentant who reject His kindness.

2 Cor 5:11 knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade...

Pr 15:10 *'There is **severe** discipline for him who forsakes the way...'* Some translations use the word severe for 'very severe' fire of judgment, or how God struck dead greedy Israelites with a 'very severe plague' (Ex 9:3, Num 11:33-34 NAS). Most graphic is Rev 16 where every living thing in the sea dies, heat scorches sinners, and cities of nations fall in a '**severe** earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake' (v. 18 NIV). How bad will it get? *'every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was **so severe*** (v. 20-21 ESV)

But that's not just people who curse God or people living in the end times. Heb 10:26: *'If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,* ²⁷ *but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.* ²⁸ *Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.* ²⁹ ***How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished*** *who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant ...* ³¹ *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'* (NIV).

It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of God's severity and be cut off.

Behold God's severity, that's #1, but now point #2.

#2. Be humble and fear

Fear can mean dread, deep reverence and awe, driven to your knees

Look at Rom 3, v. 18, after talking about how we're all fallen in sin and all deserve the severity of God cutting us off, 3:18 is a summarizing statement: *There is no fear of God before their eyes.* v. 10-12 are a catalog of sin, but v. 18 is a climactic conclusion on our corrupt condition: we don't fear God.

Go back to Rom 11, if you behold His severity you'll be humble and fear.

Look at Rom 11:20, end of the verse: *...So do not become proud, but fear.*

Before it gets to wisdom in v. 33, it starts with the fear of the Lord that's the beginning of wisdom. Behold God's severity and be humbled He hasn't cut you off. You're no better than Israel, don't be proud, fear God who is severe

Eccl 12 'fear God and keep his commands, for this is the whole duty of man'

Fear the Creator who sent the Genesis flood to cut off all life outside the ark.

Fear the God of Exodus who brings severe plagues and strikes down all the firstborn of Egypt and Pharaoh's army in the sea and thundered at Sinai. In Leviticus, Nadab and Abihu didn't fear and died for offering up strange fire.

In Numbers, fearless grumblers had their days numbered, ground opens up!

In Deuteronomy, the law called for sinners to be stoned, so others will fear.

If you're unsaved, be afraid, be very afraid

That's not just the OT. In Acts 5, Ananias was cut off in God's severity. Peter said '*You have not lied to man but to God.*' *When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And **great fear** came upon all who heard of it...* [3 hours later Sapphira lies] *Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last...And **great fear** came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things...None of the rest dared join them...*

Behold God's severity, lest you too could be cut off. Maybe you feel that's severe, but you should feel that fear in Acts 5. We've all lied, the wages of sin is death. Don't ask why God is so severe, ask why are we still here? Our sin deserves to be judged severely and swiftly, and yet we're still breathing! Behold God's severity and kindness that you're still here! Be humble, fear!

It's grace that taught my heart to fear...how precious did that grace appear!

Grace is amazing and humbling if you behold God's severity you deserve

*Thus says the LORD, '... this is the one to whom I will look; him who is **humble** and contrite in spirit and **trembles** at my Word... Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at my word...' (Isa 66:2, 5). Hear and fear God.*

When God gave His Law, there was great fear and trembling and God said: '*the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning*' (Ex 20:20 NIV).

Godly fear falls on its face but TO God, not AWAY FROM God

What is fearing God? Prov 8:14 defines it: '*To fear the LORD is to hate evil.*' God says in Jer 32:40 '*I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.*' Fear of God in our hearts keeps us from turning away to sin. Healthy fear of God is hating evil and what it does to your relationship with God. Believers don't fear we'll lose salvation, but we fear grieving the Spirit who seals our salvation (Eph 4:30), or displeasing our loving Father.

I fear sin that disqualifies me from service or discredits the cause of Christ.

Behold God's severity, be humble and fear,

#3. be hopeful in the gospel

11:22 NKJV: *consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness.*

We continue in God's goodness by continuing to trust the good news. 1:16 says the gospel is the power of God to those who believe (that's a continual tense participle – those continually believing in the good news). Rom 5 says as we continue in His goodness, there is hope in salvation, even in suffering

TALK ABOUT DJ, gospel hope amid his loss, urgency to preach

Losing a loved one is a severe loss but there's hope in the gospel of God at work. We behold God's severity and goodness together at the cross where Jesus was cut off for us in the severity of God's wrath. The Good shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, and His goodness and mercy will follow us

In Rom 11 there's hope, even for Jews who long refused, it's not hopeless.

Behold the severity of God in cutting off Israel but behold His goodness in grafting them back in the future, saving them and many Gentiles in the end. ²⁴ *For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.* ²⁵ *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* ²⁶ *And in this way all Israel will be saved ...*

Then he quotes the OT prophets where this salvation of Israel is tied to the goodness of God, even after centuries of hopelessness. Listen to Hosea 3:4

'Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice ... [no king since OT times, no sacrifices since 70 AD but it says] the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God...they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.' Behold the goodness of God in the last days when Israel will come in fear to God and His goodness!

Rom 11:27 quotes God's covenant promise to take away the sin of Israel.

The OT promises connect His goodness and godly fear. God says in Jer 32 of Israel *'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. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land...'* (v. 41-42). Behold God's goodness that He won't turn away from doing to Israel, and the godly fear He'll put in them so they won't turn away from Him and His goodness He rejoices to show. God says right before that: *Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath [i.e., behold His severity] ... 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 [behold His goodness]*⁵

Jer 33:9 says the Gentiles will behold God's goodness to the Jews in the end *'all the nations of the earth...shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide [Israel]...Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel...Judah will be saved.'*⁶

This is the hope of the ages that launches Paul's praise at the end of Rom 11

This was the great Puritan hope, the salvation of Israel and Gentile nations.

The Israel that's hardened in v. 25 is only partially and temporarily blinded until the full number of Gentiles comes in to salvation along with all Israel.

Iain Murray's book The Puritan Hope shows it was a very common view in the 1600s and onward that God will save ethnic national Israel in the end.⁷

The Westminster Directory of Public Worship called for corporate prayers for 'the conversion of the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles' in Rom 11:25. The Larger Catechism teaches to pray for Israel's salvation (Q191). That hope goes back century by century in church history to the early church.⁸

But just look back to v. 12, end of the verse talks about their full inclusion in the future tense. And look at v. 15, middle of the verse: *'what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?'* This is the hope of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation for the Jew first, and also for the Gentile.

Eph 2 says we as Gentiles were once hopeless, but God, when we were dead, God made us alive to be saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Jesus died the most severe death on Good Friday, it seemed hopeless for the disciples that weekend, but the gospel says on the 3rd day *'behold, a **severe earthquake** had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone...The guards **shook for fear of him and became like dead men**. Angels tell the women He is risen indeed, and *'they left the tomb quickly **with fear and great joy** and ran to report it...'*⁹*

We can pray Ps 119:107 *'I am **severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD...***

118:18 *The LORD has **disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death...***²⁴ *This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it...*²⁹ *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for **he is good...*** cf. Rom 11:22

Our missionary Sandi Luciano was with us just a few weeks ago when her husband Allan preached. I want to end with her words she wrote this week

A couple weeks ago my dad and I exchanged some text messages.

"Since your diagnosis I have found comfort in Jesus' power over death the grave. "Oh death where is your sting?!" And how the grave couldn't hold Him. All of a sudden my belief, my **hope**, in that sure and steadfast promise gives me **hope**. It's an aspect of my Savior I didn't know personally but now I do.

The last couple years have been hard for my faith. My faith has been weaker because of the ramifications of lockdown and not having fellowship. Part of me has slowly started to become numb and bitter at the distance it feels like my Savior is from me.

But your health and path now has forced me to look up. To return to my Savior. And for the first time in awhile I can feel the Gospel and power of my Savior stir my heart and strengthen my weak knees. God words all things together for good for those who love Him. So even in this awful pain **I can see goodness** and that awakens and strengthens my heart to again trust the promises of my Savior.

<https://philiinggood.com/2022/05/09/inheritance-sealed-and-guaranteed/>

¹ John MacArthur, *Our Awesome God*, p. 7.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 11: To God's Glory* (Banner of Truth), p. 132.

⁴ NIV.

⁵ v. 37-40.

⁶ v. 14, 16.

⁷ Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*: 'From the first quarter of the seventeenth century, belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans.' See also <https://www.monergism.com/noted-theologians-history-who-believed-future-conversion-nationaethnic-israel>

⁸ <https://thecripplegate.com/church-history-and-israels-future/>

⁹ Matthew 28 NASB.