

The Kindness and Severity of God

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[0:00] The meat of J.I. Packer's book, *Knowing God*, and we're following Packer through different aspects of God's character, different attributes. Packer's list isn't exhaustive, and he never claimed that it would be. Remember, he's focusing more on the practical aspects of God's character, of knowing God.

And remember, we are on the road traveling. We're not on the Spanish veranda overlooking the travelers walking by. And so that means that we have different concerns, other than theoretical concerns. We have practical concerns.

Last week, we talked about God's wrath. And the people on the veranda, people overlooking this, who aren't journeying themselves, might be asking, you know, where's the equity in eternal punishment?

That doesn't seem right, or for their thinking, it doesn't seem right. Is the wrath of God real, they might ask. These are all theoretical questions, but the people who are on the road have a different set of questions, and that's us.

And we're asking, how do we avoid the wrath of God? I mean, it is real. How do we avoid it? And other than avoiding it, what practical outworking should the wrath of God have on our lives?

[1:24] What effect should it have on our lives? And so, as a way of review, while we're talking about this, what is the wrath of God? And that's for you to answer.

What is the wrath of God? It has several different aspects, but feel free to bring any of them up. What's that?

It's a form of anger. That's right. I think in Nahum, it called it his fierce anger. What else? It's against sin.

Against evil. What else? There's more. Yes, there. It's just, right? It's his just reaction to sin and evil. It's his fierce anger against sin and evil. Well, here's another question. How would you answer the person who says, God can't be wrathful.

[2:30] I mean, that makes God out to be a monster. And God just can't be that way. How can you answer, or how would you answer a person who had those objections?

It's what the scripture says. So, in one sense, it doesn't matter what your opinion of the matter is. It is what the Bible says, that God does have wrath.

What else could we say? Yes, Roger. The wrath of God finds its foundation. Its roots are down deep in the holiness of God. And so, it's not in the fact that he's a monster that he has wrath.

It's because he's holy. What else could we say? Okay, in what ways? That's good. Right. Our wrath is not rooted in holiness most of the time.

And so, we have to be careful that we don't think of God's wrath as we think of our wrath. God's wrath is not out of control. He's not flying off the handle, exploding in anger. God's wrath is controlled, holy reaction.

[3:39] And he directs it towards sinners. And so, it's not that God is out of control. He's not a monster. And I think what Dare said is very important, that this is fair.

We might not like God's wrath in one sense, but God's wrath is God giving to every sinner exactly what they deserve.

It's completely judicial. It's the anger of the judge. It's the reaction of the judge towards the criminal. And so, he's not a monster. He's being the judge.

Well, like I said before, we're traveling on the road. We are trying to make it to the celestial city. And so, what different...

How should the wrath of God affect us? I mean, what changes really should it have on our lives? Or should it create in our lives? It should affect our evangelism.

[4:36] Hell is real, and it is terrible. And if we have any love in our hearts, we would want to save men from it. Evangelism.

What else could we say? Yes, Steve. Yeah, very good. Our hearts should be overflowing with praise, even as we remember God's wrath, because Jesus has saved us from the day of wrath, from the wrath to come.

It also should create in us, it should birth in us, a fear of the Lord. That's how Jesus used it to talk to his disciples.

Don't be afraid of men who can kill you, and then after that, they can do nothing else. Be afraid of God. Yes, Lou? Yes. I think that goes hand in hand with what Steve said.

Our hearts, the wrath of God opens up to us the glory of Calvary. It helps us to see what Calvary was all about, and how much Jesus gave to us, how much he suffered on our behalf.

[5:45] And I don't think we'll ever understand the complete, how that all worked out, how the wrath of God was poured out in such a short time, so that so many could be saved.

It's really, it's very hard to understand, but it does show us the glory of the cross. Well, did you find yourself thinking more about the wrath of God this week?

Did it affect the way that you live? And I hope it did. I hope that wasn't just a Sunday school lesson, a theoretical exercise in understanding God.

These things have practical purposes, and God means them to have practical effects in our life. Well, this morning we're going to go further into knowing God.

Today we're going to explore God's love, and his grace, his goodness, and how it relates to his justice, and his wrath. And, so we're going to begin in Romans chapter 11.

[6:48] Let's turn there, Romans chapter 11, verse 22. Romans 11, 22. And, this is what Paul writes. Consider, therefore, the kindness and sternness of God, sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness.

Otherwise, you also will be cut off. Paul tells us how to handle both of these, these attributes of God, both sides of, of God.

He simply says, we have to hold on to both. We can't let go of either one. He tells us to consider God's kindness, or his goodness, and his sternness.

The King James, and the ESV, translates, it's severity. His kindness and his severity. And, I like severity better, because, literally, the word carries with it this idea of being cut off.

And, you can hear that in severity. He's talking, he's saying that God is good, but he will cut off. People will face that side of him if they don't continue in his kindness.

[8:06] So, that's how we should handle God's goodness, his love, his grace, and his wrath, and his justice. We need to hold on to both. And, obviously, few people struggle with holding on to God's goodness.

We like the fact that God is good. The danger comes, and the temptation is that we'll let go of God's severity and play that down. So, let me ask you, when men let go of God's severity, so they don't think about God's severity anymore, they don't think that he is a God that has that, he takes those kind of actions, what kind of God do you get?

What kind of God has created? There. Or Mike. Either one. You're one ontological unit, so. One with diminished authority.

Very good. Not very powerful. Not very authoritative. What else, there? Or were you thinking that? Okay.

We have no reason to be obedient, so he's a soft God. What else could we say? Those are both good. Pastor Aaron, you... Yes.

[9:34] There's no hope for justice. We're going to talk about that in a few minutes. J.I. Packer basically says, you end up with a Santa Claus God, don't you?

Who's all good, who's all giving, and he doesn't expect any wrongs. And if anything else, now that I think about it, even Santa has a good and a bad list, right?

But God, that God doesn't have any kind of list. He's required to be good to everyone. Well, in the 19th century, some very clever German theologians rethought who God was.

And they emphasized his grace and his goodness, and they basically ruled out all of God's wrath. And so they took away the severity of God.

In effect, they created a God they could handle, a God that they liked, that they could like. And so they made this Santa Claus God. And once that was done, then a whole line of mistakes, mistakes,

falling away, took place.

[10:43] I mean, the Bible was thrown out eventually. The cross had to be re-evaluated because, as we said last week, if you don't have the wrath of God, the cross really makes no sense.

And so these theologians and all their followers, they had to re-imagine, rethink the cross. And so Christ's work was twisted and perverted and it was made into something that the Bible knows nothing about.

And step by step, Christianity was lost. And the shell remained. They still called themselves Christians, but there were no strong timbers holding up this structure.

And so that's where you get liberal theology. The Santa Claus theology ends up destroying itself. Like all of Satan's work, it carries close to its heart its own suicide.

Now, all of a sudden, a problem came to the surface. It came in front of everyone's minds. If God is so good and God is so powerful, then why is there evil in the world?

[11:56] And you know that argument. It's the so-called problem of evil. And believe it or not, that is a very historically new problem. Men have historically not struggled with it, but it came on the scene when these theologians changed who God was.

So there's the dilemma. God is good, God is powerful, but there's real evil in the world. So how do you take care of that dilemma? Which one goes?

How do you fix the problem? God is dead? Wow. Wow. I don't know how to tie that in.

That actually, that actually came later historically. Basically, what that was, they were saying there was, God has become totally irrelevant. And actually, that's where we're going.

Roger, what did you have to say? Okay. Okay. Good exist in everyone. I'm asking, what goes?

[13:01] God's goodness or God's power? Roger. Roger. Right.

So, basically, that's what happened. God became, he lost his power. They took it away from him. And, that's where the suicide comes in.

you have people believing, you have people believe that God is good but he isn't powerful. And, I'm not sure who said it, but that basically means God can't protect or save his people.

He doesn't have that ability. And, really, what's the point of holding on to a God like that? And so, people quit believing altogether.

Now, liberal Christianity is a dying breed. The mainline churches are quickly emptying. The evangelical church is growing.

[14:06] The number of secular unbelievers who profess no faith, they're growing. But, liberalism is dead and it killed itself. Committed suicide. And, the reason I'm talking about this, this might seem irrelevant, but it's not.

The reason I'm giving you this history lesson is, there is a danger if we do not listen to what Paul says here in Romans 11, 28, 22. If we don't hold on to both God's goodness and God's severity, what inevitably happens is we will lose our Christianity and we will become irrelevant.

They'll write, Ichabod, the glory has departed, they'll write that over Grace Fellowship Church. if we don't hold on to God's goodness and severity. And, I don't want that.

And, I'm sure you don't want that either. So, what does the Bible say about God's goodness and His severity? Well, let's talk about, let's talk first of all about God's kindness, His goodness.

One Bible dictionary defined the Greek word like this. first, goodness, the goodness of the divine attributes. So, it's sort of like how all the divine attributes are good.

[15:25] Benevolence to man, hence goodness and its attractiveness. Secondly, kindness, benevolence, that sweetness of disposition, active beneficence in spite of ingratitude.

So, you get the flavor of that word. God is good. He's sweet. He's kind. He's gentle.

He's ready to give and to help. And, more than that, it ties up all of God's perfections, all of His moral perfections.

It sort of puts all of God's attributes in a box and puts a beautiful bow on it. God is good. Now, the scripture is full of places that talk about the goodness of God.

But, probably nowhere clearer than Exodus chapter 34. So, let's turn there. Exodus 34. Moses is on Mount Sinai and the Lord comes down and He proclaims His name.

[16:31] And, keep in mind that the people have just sinned with the golden calf. And, the Lord's anger has lashed out against them. And, so, Moses is back on the mountain again.

And, everyone is probably wondering, what kind of God have we involved ourselves with? What kind of God do we have here? Well, listen to how the Lord describes Himself.

And, this is in verse 6 and 7. Listen as I read. 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. Yet, He does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. So, here God is proclaiming His character, all of His moral perfections, all of His goodness.

And, God says that, first of all, He's compassionate. When God sees the widow and the orphan, His heart goes out to them. When Jesus saw the widow of Nain, it says that He saw her and His heart was moved towards her, for her.

[17 : 54] He had compassion on her. Psalm 103 says, as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. So, our God isn't some sort of great metaphysical, spiritual iceberg in the sky without feelings.

His heart is moved for people who are in need. Well, He goes on, the Lord is gracious. The Israelites had just worshipped an idol and they just thrown themselves into sexual sin.

And so, the question is, will God destroy them? Will God just be done with them? Forsake them? No, He's gracious. This is a word that means He helps those who are in need.

The Israelites need mercy. And, God is the strong one in the relationship. And so, will He use His strength to destroy or to help? And He says, my heart is moved to help.

I use my strength to help. So, that's our God. He's strong and we are weak. We can't make any claim on Him. And yet, He is moved to help us despite of our sin.

[19 : 09] Well, the Lord goes on. He says, I'm slow to anger. God always takes a long, deep breath before He becomes angry.

Because God is holy, as Roger said, He is going to show justice. He's going to respond with wrath and judgment. But, God isn't in a hurry to deal out justice.

God isn't like you and me. He says that judgment is in damnation. It's a strange work. He's not like us. Remember, James and John, in the city, the Samaritan city, they said, Lord, they said this to Jesus, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?

So, the Samaritans had rebuffed them and now they're saying, are we going to rain fire down from heaven now? And Jesus turned and rebuked them. That's us. Any time is the right time for final judgment for us.

But God is slow to anger. Next, it says, God is, God says, I'm abounding in love. This is Kased, Kased, God's covenant love.

[20 : 27] Included in this idea is kindness and mercy and faithfulness. It's all, it's all thrown in there. One children's Bible called it, God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always, and forever love.

God abounds in that kind of love. He's overflowing and never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always, and forever love.

He, he doesn't give up on his people. So many times we are ready to give up on ourselves. We're saying, I'm done for. There's no way God can love me after I did that.

And yet he comes again and there he is, loving us, sending darts of affection into our heart and he's stirring us up. See, God is abounding in love.

He has no shortage. He's overflowing in it. He abounds in faithfulness. God is loyal. He's reliable. He's dependable. Has God said it and will he not do it?

[21 : 32] So he doesn't change like the shifting shadows. He doesn't get tired. He doesn't lose focus. He doesn't get weak. He is steady. He's reliable. He's faithful in all that he does.

He goes on. Maintaining love to thousands. That's the same word as before. And this is probably thousands of generations. God keeps extending his covenant love as never stopping, never failing, unbreaking, always and forever love.

He keeps extending it generation generation after generation. And so the same love that flowed to Israel is still overflowing into our lives and to all those who trust him.

So he's this, he's never, he's a never stopping fountain of goodness. Well, he forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. If people are repentant, God is forgiving.

He forgives when people miss the mark. He forgives when people who have sinned high-handedly against him are humbled and ask for mercy.

[22:45] He forgives them. And Paul says, now consider the goodness of God. Think about it. And I would encourage you to take Exodus 34, 6 and 7 and memorize it.

this is God's opening up of his heart to us. And so we really should take that revelation and give it back to him in praise.

Memorize it and use it as a springboard to praise him. Well, that's the goodness of God. Let's talk about God's severity. And like I said earlier, that word carries with it the idea of cutting off to sever. Yes, God is good. But there's another side of the story. And that's the story, the side that liberal Christianity and modern man have totally disregarded.

And it's the fact that God will cut off people who do not continue in his kindness, who spurn his goodness. Well, in Exodus 34, God finishes proclaiming who he is with these words.

[23:51] Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. God punishes the stubborn and the impenitent.

He doesn't allow them to escape his wrath if they spurn his goodness. Now, in Romans, this verse, Romans 11, 22, comes in the context of Paul talking about Israel and their response to the gospel. God had severed Israel from the olive tree of his grace. And he had grafted in the Gentiles. And so, Israel had presumed on God's goodness.

They had assumed that they would always have it. And so, they didn't repent. God's goodness didn't move them to repent. And so, God sent John the Baptist and they didn't repent.

And they didn't repent when Jesus came. And they did just the opposite. They took God's greatest gift, the greatest manifestation of his goodness, and they crucified him.

[25:03] And so, God cut them off. He severed them. So, remember Jesus' words as he wrote into Jerusalem in the triumphal entry.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Look, your house has left to you desolate. So, Israel scorned God's goodness and God lopped them off.

He cut them off. And brothers and sisters, this is not just a theological exercise. This isn't just a recording of how God has treated Israel.

You're not sitting in front of the TV watching the gazelle, the lion chase the gazelle. That's not how this is. You are the gazelle and God is the lion and I understand that's not a perfect illustration, but this should affect you.

[26:13] This should be very personal to you because he is talking to you. If you spurn God's goodness, he will cut you off. So, don't do what Israel did.

If we don't take God's goodness as a warning shot off of our bow and make a stop and think, I need to repent. I need to be thankful.

I need to bring my life more into obedience to him. Then, if that's not how God's goodness changes you, affects you, then don't be surprised when the lion turns on you and devours you.

So, God severs those who don't make a good return for his blessing, who hide their talent in the ground, and they don't make a good return on it.

Paul's already said it in Romans 2. Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

[27:24] God's goodness is meant to lead us closer to him. It's meant to lead us away from sin and closer into a better relationship with him.

It's designed to entice you away from your sin and to him. And so, is it doing that in your life? Men, suppose you bought flowers for your wife just because you loved her, you wanted to improve, you wanted to make your relationship better, you wanted to entice her to love you more.

And so, in a gallant flourish, you say, here honey, here's the flowers, I love you. And she looks at the flowers and says, oh, that's nice, and she just kind of throws them on the counter.

And perhaps you think, hmm, maybe she wasn't feeling well. Maybe she just wasn't in a good mood that time. Maybe she doesn't like flowers. I'll try something different. And so, the next week you buy chocolates.

And with great flourish, you said, here honey, I love you. And she takes those chocolates and says, oh, that's nice, and throws them on the counter. And the next week you try again.

[28 : 38] And the same response. Let me ask you, and this is all theoretical because this would never happen. I really believe that. but what would happen in your heart if your wife spurned your gifts and didn't love you for your gifts or loved you for your goodness to her?

Well, every time the walls in your heart would go up higher, wouldn't they? Distance would start to develop in the relationship.

You meant the gifts to bring you closer to each other. And in fact, they're actually tearing you apart. They're having the opposite effect.

They're driving you further from each other. And that's what happens when we spurn God's goodness. When we don't repent and rejoice in Him, His gifts can drive us further from Him. And so His goodness is wasted on us. And so there is nothing left to do but to build the wall up to sever the relationship after a time.

[29 : 51] So let me ask you, are you taking God's good gifts and are you thanking Him for them and enjoying them? Or are you just saying, oh, that's nice and just sort of throwing them on the counter?

Paul says consider, consider the kindness and the severity of God. So God is not some sort of cosmic Santa Claus. He is holy and He is good and He wants your heart.

And His goodness is yearning for you to have a closer walk with Him. And He deserves your heart because of who He is. So how should we respond?

How should we respond to God's goodness and His severity? God's good gifts every day of our life. His ordinary provision for our life. We should enjoy them. And we should appreciate God's goodness, especially in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us.

[31 : 19] So count your blessings. Praise God for them. Rejoice in the Lord. That's how you appreciate God's goodness.

And thank Him for it. Thank Him for all of His goodness. Have an active relationship or have an active involvement in God's goodness.

Don't just be a receiver. Receive in praise. Receive in thanks. Second, appreciate the patience of God. When we hear this goodness and severity and if we don't enjoy God's gifts, if they don't lead us to repentance, God's severs us, when we hear those things, it can scare us.

But we need to remember that God's severity is tempered by His goodness and by His patience. He's slow to anger. He's slow to cut people off.

He doesn't have the hair trigger. He's slow. And so how patient has God been with you and me? I mean, we just receive and receive and receive all the time, and a lot of times we don't thank Him.

[32 : 36] We receive His food and we just sort of say our prayers. But God is patient. Patient. He could have cut us off.

He could have scraped us off His shoe a long time ago. But He's patient. And if God has been so patient with your failings, how should you treat your brothers and sisters and theirs?

three, appreciate the discipline of God. No discipline is pleasant. But brothers and sisters, if God disciplines you, if He disciplines us, it's only because He loves us.

And it's much better to have His discipline than to have the full brunt of His severity. See, God disciplines us so He doesn't have to sever us off from the relationship.

from His goodness. So George Whitefield said that sometimes God puts thorns in the bed of His saints. So we're there sleeping in our sinfulness, in our sloth, in our hard-heartedness, and God puts thorns in our beds.

[33 : 47] He gives us trials, and He does it to wake us up, and so that our hearts will be stirred to seek His mercy again. So is God disciplining you right now?

I mean, He's disciplining all of us in one way or the other, but are you facing particular difficult times? Then we can thank Him. You can thank Him. Because He is doing that so He doesn't have to sever you.

He doesn't have to cut you off. He's being merciful. He's treating you as a child. And so we could say with the psalmist, you know, it was good that I was afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Those thorns have a way of opening our hearts to leading us to repentance that sheer enjoyment of God's gifts don't have.

They keep us from being callous about those things. So appreciate the discipline of God. Well, we have a few minutes. Any questions?

[34 : 51] Any responses? Yes, Roger? two ways to look at that.

One, God doesn't punish anyone judicially for the sins of someone else. Okay? I mean, you know my dad. My dad's a sinner.

But he doesn't, he's not sending me to hell for my dad's sins. Right? And he doesn't send you to hell or he doesn't punish you in that way, judicially. I think what that means is that God lets the consequences of sin go to the third and fourth generation.

And actually, if you think about it, God maintains love to thousands of generations. But he's going to cut off the consequences. He's going to shape the consequences after the third and fourth generation.

And so God's severity, his punishment, is tempered with his goodness, with his mercy. Is that a clear answer?

[36:01] I mean, so you understand, it's not talking about judicial punishment in the third and fourth generation. I think it's best taken to understand the third and fourth generation. Secondly, we could also say that in the old covenant, God was dealing with Israel as a nation.

And a lot of these things have direct, there's, it has a direct connection with them. In the giving of the new covenant, in Jeremiah, and I think in Ezekiel, he quotes a thing, a proverb, where it says, no longer will the teeth of the children.

How does that go? Yeah. Right. So, in the new covenant, it's going to be very different.

This whole organic, this whole familial, national way of dealing with people is going to be changed. And so now, each one has a new heart, and each one are forgiven, and no longer is God going to deal with people in a family, national context.

He's going to deal with them as individuals. That's not everything that could be said, and maybe some people would want to change what I'm saying a little bit, but I think that helps.

[37:33] Yeah. I think so. The problem is as soon as you give people that license, they almost always take it too far.

But yes, I think God is making us more Christ-like, and Christ had a perfect righteous anger. We didn't, but it should be noticed, we didn't see that righteous anger a whole lot.

Okay? He was angry when people sinned, he was angry in the temple, he was angry, he was exasperated at the Pharisees, and so yes, I guess it was there, but that wasn't the predominant theme, I don't think, in Jesus' life.

There was a lot of goodness and graciousness that we need to keep on both, his goodness and his severity. Well, we are out of time, we're dismissed.