

Pondering the Goodness and Severity of God

Hebrews 10:30-31

The title of this message is taken from Romans 11:22 where Christians are told to contemplate both the goodness of God's grace and the severity of God's justice. The fact that *we know God* is an act of grace. There is, however, a great deal of benefit that comes from contemplating the God of righteous justice.

I. To know God as He who takes vengeance on impenitent sinners brings eternal perspective.

This world is filled with all kinds of evil. We live in an age of hardened criminals with no remorse. Vengeance is defined as *"Punishment inflicted or retribution exacted for an injury or wrong."* Some of Hollywood's top-selling movies are built on the concept of vengeance and punishment for wrongs.

A. It is a universal belief that just punishment will always follow unjust actions.

The ancients even had a god they named "Vengeance." When Paul was shipwrecked on Malta: *"Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire; a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying, 'Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, vengeance has not allowed him to live'"* (Acts 28:3-5). The natives did not know Him.

B. We know Him who takes vengeance on impenitent sinners and have trusted Him.

"We know Him ..." and because of this, we will never experience any punishment from God. Jesus said clearly, "If you knew Me, you would also know my Father who sent me" (John 14:7). *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1). Christ came to receive the condemnation of our sins that we might receive the blessings of His righteousness.

C. The Lord will avenge His people and so His people should never seek to avenge themselves.

"And again, THE LORD WILL JUDGE [AVENGE] HIS PEOPLE" (v.30). This second phrase from verse 30 amplifies "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." Have you been wronged in this life? *"Avenge not yourselves, but give room for His wrath: it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord"* (Rom. 12:19; Deut. 32:35). This could be the wiping away of your tears.

II. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" so show others the way of escape.

This is one of the most powerful verses in all of the New Testament. It must be understood within the context of vengeance. God is the universal Judge; yet, God is Love. He gave to sinners His Son. *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men [of the good news]"* (II Corinthians 5:11).

A. It is a terrifying thing ...

The word translated terrifying is the Greek word *phobia*. Place yourself in the position of being a person heading toward a face-to-face confrontation with the God of this universe to give an account of "every thought, word and deed" (Romans 2:6) with a punishment coming for you. It's unwise to try to gauge the temperature of hell or the furniture of heaven, but they're real.

B. To fall into the hands ...

Notice the word "fall." The Lord once declared, "Their foot will slip in due time" (Deut. 32:35). Jonathan Edwards, in his message, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" used this portion of Scripture to preach to the people of Enfield, Connecticut in 1741 and the "Great Awakening" began. Sinners are walking along slippery places, and are liable to fall with sudden surprise. "Into the hands" speaks of God's responsibility as in "It's in your hands now." V for Vengeance.

C. Of the living God ...

"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).

*You sinners, seek His Grace, whose wrath you cannot bear:
Fly to the shelter of His Cross, and find salvation there.*