

## ROMANS Part 107

# The kindness and severity of God.



Perceive, then, the kindness and severity of God! On those, indeed, who are falling, severity, yet on you, God's kindness, if you should be persisting in the kindness: else you also will be hewn out. 23 Now they also, if they should not be persisting in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were hewn out of an olive wild by nature, and, beside nature, are grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much rather shall these, who are in accord with nature, be grafted into their own olive tree!

If God is conciliated to the entire world, which He is (2 Corinthians 5:19), how then can Paul be talking about the kindness and severity of God? Keep in mind that we are still in the national section of Romans. The "falling" and the "persisting" here are the falling and persisting of nations, not of individuals. Nations that stand will feel God's kindness. Those that fall, His severity. People *in* these nations will be treated according to individual faith and will never feel the severity of God, personally, in spite of how God acts toward their nation. At issue in this context is national, not individual faith. You may want to call it national rather than individual *policy*.

### "Perceive, then, the kindness and severity of God!" (Romans 11:22).

Even considering this national viewpoint, we must also continually keep in mind that both the kindness and the severity of God occur under the umbrella of God being conciliated to the world. The kindness and severity are judgments meted out to nations for the ultimate good of those nations. Everything God does is ultimately motivated by His love, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Consider your children. You love your children (you are conciliated to them), but, based on their behavior, you still either reward or discipline them. You do this not because of some vindictive streak in you, but for the growth and maturity of those whom you love.

### "On those, indeed, who are falling, severity..." (Romans 11:22).

It would seem at first blush that God has Israel in mind here, but He doesn't. Paul just wrote eleven verses earlier—"I am saying, then, Do they not trip that they should be falling? May it not be coming to that!" (Romans 11:11). Israel trips but does *not* fall. Someone or something in this verse *can* fall. Then who or what? God can and will topple any other nation besides Israel who does not "toe the line" *toward* Israel. This is the falling. Witness how many nations have come and gone throughout time, yet Israel endures for the eon and beyond. The severity of God comes to any nation refusing kindness to Israel. The criteria of the judgment is kindness, and Israel is the litmus test. As such, Israel cannot fall no matter how bad she becomes.

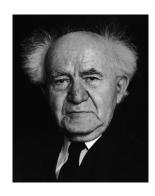
### "Yet on you, God's kindness, if you should be persisting in the kindness: else you also will be hewn out" (Romans 11:22).

What kindness? Kindness to Israel. Technically speaking, there were times throughout Israel's history when the nation did not exist as a sovereign state with discernible borders. In 1948, Zionist leader and Exec-



utive Head of the World Zionist Organization David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of a Jewish state, to be known as the State of Israel. Does this mean that, before 1948, there was no such thing as Israel? No. To God, there has always been an Israel. Like the body of

Christ, this organization transcends borders. It's organized by God. Therefore, the kindness in question isn't kindness to a state recognized by the United Nations, but rather a kindness to those who are Israelites. It may also refer to kindness toward the notion that there *is* an Israel and that it yet exists as the apple of



God's eye. I am thinking now of those who believe that God has permanently discarded Israel. How could such an erroneous belief be construed as kindness toward Israel? It is, rather, blatant hostility. I realize that I have gone now from national policy to individual opinion, but the opinion of the Preterists that God's promises to Israel are either imaginary or dead mirror the opinions of nations hating Israel. The Preterists may not hate Israel personally, but they despise God's promises to her.

## "Now they also, if they should not be persisting in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (Romans 11:23).

Israel's problem is unbelief. (The nations are being judged on their kindness, Israel on her belief.) We know that Israel's unbelief is a temporary problem; God will give Israel faith at the coming of the New Covenant. God does not thrust away His people. He casts them away for their unbelief, yes (verse 15), but does not thrust them away (verses 1 and 2).

### "Like the body of Christ, Israel transcends borders."

As an aside, "casting away" and "thrusting away" are the specific phrases used in this passage. A cast (ballo, in the Greek) is not a thrust (apotheo), and vice versa; we are considering two different Greek words. Ballo is not as violent as apotheo; apotheo follows on the heels of anger, ballo not necessarily so. One of two quarreling Israelites in Egypt "thrust away" Moses, telling him, "Who consti-

tutes you a chief and a justice over us?" (Acts 7:27). In Acts 13:46, the Jews, hating Paul, "thrust away" the Word of God. "Casting away," on the other hand is practical, not violent. In Galatians 4:30, Hagar and her son are "cast out." This was a time of sadness for the family, not a shouting/shoving match. The only other time in Scripture that the particular phrase "cast away" is used is in Acts 27:22. Paul addresses the storm-tossed souls on his ship bound for Rome, saying, "And now I am exhorting you to be cheerful, for not one soul from among you will be cast away, more than the ship." The ship was cast away. This was not an act of anger toward the ship, but of contrary winds. Who knows but that this very ship may be discovered someday by an intrepid salvage operation? It is not that a thrusting away is irreversible while a casting away is not, but rather that a thrusting away is anger induced, whereas a casting away is executed with forethought and therefore purpose.

Israel will be grafted again to the trees whose roots are the patriarchs. Why? Because Israel is able? No, but because God is able.

"For if you were hewn out of an olive wild by nature, and, beside nature, are grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much rather shall these, who are in accord with nature, be grafted into their own olive tree!" (Romans 11:24)

The nations best be careful, for they do not realize how unnatural it is for them, rather than Israel, to be heralding God's Word to the rest of the world. The nations are the wild bough grafted onto the cultivated tree, hanging on only by their kindness to Israel and God's grace and timing. Since Israel is the natural bough and since God still loves Israel, I am astounded at how any nation (or individual, for that matter) could think of God's favorite nation as defunct. If the nations, as a wild bough, have been miraculously grafted onto the cultivated olive tree, how much easier is it for God to re-graft the natural boughs?

Don't look behind you, Nations, something might be gaining on you.

#### JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

I believe Romans 11:22-24 to be a Paul-style, behindthe-scenes look at a passage familiar to all of us: the judgment of the nations in Matthew chapter 25:31-46—

"Now, whenever the Son of Mankind may be coming in His glory, and all the holy messengers with Him, then shall He be seated on the throne of His glory, 32 and in front of Him shall be gathered all the nations. And He shall be severing them from one another even as a shepherd is severing the sheep from the kids. 33 And He shall be standing the sheep, indeed, at His right, yet the kids at the left.

34 "Then shall the King be declaring to those at His right, 'Hither, blessed of My Father! Enjoy the allotment of the kingdom made ready for you from the disruption of the world. 35 For I hunger and you give Me to eat' I thirst and you give Me drink; a stranger was I and you took Me in; 36 naked and you clothed Me; infirm am I and you visit Me; in jail was I and you come to Me.' 37 "Then the just will be answering Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we perceive Thee hungering and nourish Thee, or thirsting and we give Thee drink? 38 Now when did we perceive Thee a stranger and took Thee in, or naked and we clothed Thee? 39 Now when did we perceive Thee infirm, or in jail, and we came to Thee?'

40 "And, answering, the King shall be declaring to them, 'Verily, I am saying to you, In as much as you do it to one of these, the least of My brethren, you do it to Me.'



41 "Then shall He be declaring to those also at His left, 'Go from Me, you cursed, into the fire eonian, made ready for the Adversary and his messengers. 42 For I hunger and you do not give Me to eat; I thirst and you do not give Me drink; 43 a stranger was I and you did not take Me in; naked and you did not clothe Me; infirm and in jail and you did not visit Me.'

44 "Then shall they also be answering, saying, 'Lord, when did we perceive you hungering or thirsting, or a stranger, or naked, or infirm, or in jail, and we did not serve you?' 45 "Then shall He be answering them, saying, 'Verily, I am saying to you, In as much as you do it not to one of these, the least, neither do you it to Me.' 46 And these shall be coming away into chastening eonian, yet the just into life eonian."

#### THE KEY AT THE DOOR

The key at the door of this passage is verse 32, "and in front of Him shall be gathered all the nations." These are not individuals gathered before Him, but nations. Could words be plainer? Each sheep and goat of this passage, therefore, represents a nation, not a person. This is not Fred and John and Debbie and Louise, but France and Russia and Iraq and Brazil. We have been told that this passage describes the "general judgment" of "all people" of "all time" to determine their "eternal destiny." The only flaw with this theory is that every single element of it is mistaken. Few passages have been so tortured and taken out of context as this one.

How can this be a judgment of all people of all time when it occurs at the end of this eon in the valley of Jehoshaphat, at which time the majority of humanity is still dead and will not be resurrected until the Great White Throne judgment one thousand years later? (Revelation 20:11-12). The judgment isn't of people anyway, but of nations; nearly every expositor misses the key at the door in verse 32. Next, these nations are not sent to either eternal torment or eternal life, but into either



"chastening eonian" of "life eonian." The "fire eonian" of verse 41 is figurative; people can't literally live in fire. It speaks of a time of trial. The goat nations are exiled to the four corners of the Earth, far away from the capital of Jerusalem, where they will suffer relative to the other nations' proximity to Christ. "Made ready for the Adversary and his messengers" refers to Satan being loosed at the end of the thousand-years to visit these outlying, chastened rebels in order to incite an insurrection,

which he will have no trouble doing. The insurrection is comedically (to me) short-lived. Revelation 20:8-9—

And [Satan] will be coming out to deceive all the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to be mobilizing them for battle, their number being as the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and surround the citadel of the saints and the beloved city. And fire descended from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Gog and Magog don't yet exist. These will be nations *then*, at the tail end of the thousand-years. I am always asked, "Martin, who are Gog and Magog?" My faith-filled answer is always: "Gog and Magog."

#### PAUL PASSES IT ALONG

When Jesus returns to Earth for Israel, He will re-distribute the nations. The conquering Christ will redraw the political map based, not on the power, might or right of any nation, but on the nations' treatment of Jews.

Those who want to make this the general judgment of all humanity must overcome not only the obvious hurdles detailed above, but also the fact that the basis of this judgment is not faith in Jesus Christ, but treatment of Jews. If those who wish this passage to be what it isn't want to be consistent, they will institute "Visit Jews in Jail" or "Hydrate an Israelite" programs, so that as many people as possible can be saved.

Paul, then, is teaching the nations a teaching of Jesus. If not Paul—then who? Paul is the apostle to the nations, and the newly-smug nations *need* a Jesus-inspired primer on the coming shake-up of national/political fortunes. Paul might have added on the side: "If you don't believe *me* concerning your present negative attitude toward Jews, then believe Jesus. You're skating on thin ice, people."

The teaching of our Lord in Matthew 25 and the teaching of Paul in Romans 11:22-24 is basically the same. Our intrepid apostle takes up where the Lord left off, however, and will now reveal a secret that neither man nor angel has ever imagined.

Stay tuned! —MZ

Thank you for your support, your letters, and your contributions to this work. I'm behind on my emails, but will be catching up. God bless you all! I could not be doing any of this without you.

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