

Romans 11:13-24

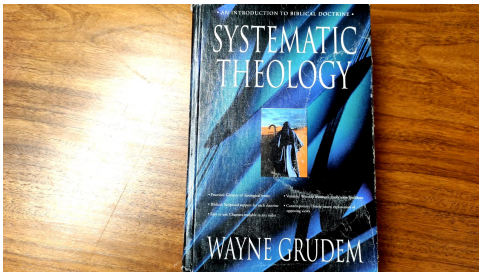
God's Kindness and Severity (Reconciliation to the World)

Main idea: God is far greater than we can imagine. He is kind and severe. His grace and His wrath are perfect, which means life from the dead and reconciliation to the world.

Most of us probably have heard and know that, “You can’t put God in a box.” We’ve all been guilty of this. Republicans, Democrats, Catholics, Baptists, even Atheists have all attempted to put God into a box that makes them comfortable.¹

This book is a box for God.

[Picture of Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology]



I think I've shown you this book at least a couple times before. Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology really is a great book that's more like an encyclopedia. It describes God, explaining much about who the Bible says God is and what He does, and effectively puts God into a box so that we can better understand Him. Here's how Wayne Grudem defines God:

¹ Psalm 90:2, Psalm 139:7-12, Psalm 115:3, Jeremiah 32:17, 1 Timothy 1:17

God's attributes include His independence, unchangeableness, eternity, omnipresence, unity, spirituality, invisibility, knowledge, wisdom, truthfulness, goodness, love, mercy, holiness, peace, righteousness, jealousy, wrath, will, freedom, omnipotence, perfection, blessedness, beauty, and glory. -Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

Now that's a great description of God! Such a list of God's qualities ought to inspire wonder and awe in each of us, especially as we think about how God doesn't just have a little bit of these qualities, but the fullness of each of these qualities. He's not just a little free; He's completely free.² He doesn't just have a little knowledge and wisdom, but all knowledge and wisdom.³ And, of course, we should all know that God doesn't have just a little love, but all love, because Scripture says very plainly that God is love.⁴

This is a great description of God. And I like this book, but it's still a box.

And you can't put God in a box, because God won't fit in a box. God is much bigger than any box that we might try to put Him in. In other words, we'll never fully comprehend God, because God is beyond our comprehension.⁵

And yet, God reveals Himself to us through Scripture.⁶ And often when God reveals Himself in Scripture, He breaks the boxes that we've tried to put Him in. God is much bigger, and He's doing

² Psalm 115:3

³ Proverbs 2:6

⁴ 1 John 4:7-8

⁵ Romans 11:33

⁶ John 17:3

something so much bigger and better than we can think or imagine.⁷

Romans 11, starting in verse 13.

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles [that's the Romans, and that's us]. Insofar as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if I might somehow make my own people jealous and save some of them. For if their rejection brings reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? Now if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. (Romans 11:13-16)

Father, we confess that we cannot fully comprehend You or Your plan, or how the circumstances of our lives fit into that plan. And yet, we know that You are holy. You are entirely separate from us, distinct from us, even unknowable to us. You're holy. And yet You make us holy as we trust in You. So we pray that You would help us to trust in You today. In Jesus's name, Amen.

This car belongs to a man named Joe Cline.

[Picture of Joe Cline's car]



⁷ Isaiah 55:8-9

Joe Cline is a hypermiler, which means that he tries to squeeze as many miles as he can out of every gallon of gas. And with gas prices the way they are, it's not such a bad idea, but Joe Cline takes it to the extreme. He made a custom plastic extension for the back of the vehicle that reduces drag. He installed smaller-than-normal side mirrors for the same reason. He took out the back seats in order to make the car lighter. And he over inflates his tires to 40 PSI, which will technically improve gas mileage, even though it's not the best for the tires themselves.

Joe Cline also drives in such a way as to maximize his gas mileage. For example, he found that his car gets the best gas mileage at 60 miles per hour. So if the speed limit is 55, he goes 60, and even if the speed limit is 65, he goes 60. And if there's a red light ahead, he slows down far in advance so that when he gets to the light, and it turns green, he's already still rolling!⁸

Here's the thing: Joe Cline knows what his goal is. When you have a clear goal and you're committed to it, you become very mindful of all the little things that must be done to reach that goal. That describes the Apostle Paul. He was the original hypermiler. No one else traveled so far, or conformed themselves so efficiently, or lived with more purpose to reach his goal of spreading the message of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.⁹

Paul wrote that he was appointed by God to be an apostle, or missionary, to the Gentiles. I'm sure that was a big part of why he

⁸ <https://wtop.com/calvert-county/2016/05/story-behind-strange-looking-car-named-dino>

⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

was writing this letter to the Romans at all. He saw that his ministry was to preach to Gentiles. And yet, as we saw last week, he also had a heart for his own people, the Jews.¹⁰ So as he preached to the Gentiles, he hoped that in doing so, his own people would become jealous, so that they, too, would trust in Jesus and be saved through his ministry.¹¹

But how could their jealousy lead to their salvation? And if God is most glorified in us when we're most satisfied in Him, then why doesn't God just make us satisfied in Him? In other words, why does God allow us to sin?

Well, we're going to answer that question more next time, but for now, I just want to point out that even though God doesn't tempt us to sin,¹² and certainly isn't glorified when we sin,¹³ God does have a plan to take us from where we are, in a state of sin, to where He wants us to be, saved by grace alone through faith alone.¹⁴

And I think that's exactly why Paul wanted to make the Jews jealous. Being that they were given the law of God, and because they had an ego that caused them to think that they could live according to the law of God, they were still relying on their own righteousness, which doesn't lead to salvation.¹⁵ But if they were to see that God was inviting the Gentiles, us, who the Jews at that time considered to be filthy, ungodly heathens, and if they were to see that God was even blessing Paul in his ministry toward us, then maybe they would get jealous, and turn to Jesus.

¹⁰ Isaiah 11:1-12

¹¹ Isaiah 11:11

¹² James 1:13

¹³ Romans 3:23

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:1-10

¹⁵ Romans 3:19-20

There's a great illustration of this in the movie Forest Gump. In the movie, Forest loves Jenny. But Jenny is too enamored by worldly things and looks past Forest in her search for fulfillment. Jenny searches for happiness in other men, in fame, and success but finds disappointment and heartache instead. All the while, Forest waits for her until the very end of her life, when she realizes how good Forest has been to her.

In the same way, God doesn't approve of your sin, but God does love you, a sinner.¹⁶ And even if you continually reject Him, He still loves you and invites you to rest in His love.¹⁷

Well, most of the Jews in the first century AD, who were supposed to be the people of God, continually rejected Jesus, who was sent from God. So then the gospel went to the Gentiles. Verse 15.

For if their rejection brings reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? Now if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. (Romans 11:15-16)

So because the Jews largely rejected Jesus, God rejected them. It's not that God wanted to reject them, but rather that Jesus is the only name under heaven through which we must be saved.¹⁸ Salvation is in Jesus alone.¹⁹

¹⁶ Romans 5:8

¹⁷ Romans 10:21

¹⁸ Acts 4:12

¹⁹ John 14:6

So because they largely rejected Jesus, the gospel went to us, the Gentiles, and Paul says that it brought reconciliation to the world. God is reconciling the world to Himself through Jesus.²⁰ Not some of the world, but the world. It's good news for all nations.²¹

Paul writes in verse 16 that if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. In other words, since Jesus is holy, and since He's the root of our salvation, and He's the Maker of us all, God is making all of us holy.

You see, God only makes good things.²² And since God makes all things, then He's going to make all things new and good.²³ And that means that if we look at the world and see bad things, it's only because those things haven't yet been perfected in His love.²⁴

Verse 17.

Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast—you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." True enough; they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but beware, because if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Therefore, consider God's kindness

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:19

²¹ Genesis 12:1-3, Luke 2:10

²² James 1:17

²³ Revelation 21:1-5

²⁴ 1 John 4:18

and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God's kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from your native wild olive tree and against nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these—the natural branches—be grafted into their own olive tree? (Romans 11:17-24)

This is one of those passages that many genuine Christians disagree about. Can you lose your salvation, or not? And if you can, can you then get saved again, and then lose it again, and then get saved again over and over again?

Well, I'm firmly in the "once saved, always saved" camp. Once you've truly placed your faith in Jesus, you are in your Father's hand, and nothing can pluck you from His hand.²⁵ And yet, there are many people who appear to have trusted in Christ, but their later confession and later actions prove that it was a false confession.²⁶ In other words, if you confess that Jesus is your Savior and Lord, it's impossible for you to later say that Jesus is not your Savior and Lord, and if you say that, then you prove that Jesus was never really your Savior and Lord.

It's to these that Jesus will say, "Depart from Me, for I never knew you."²⁷

²⁵ John 10:27-30

²⁶ Hebrews 6:4-6

²⁷ Matthew 7:21-23

Maybe instead of trusting in Jesus, they were trusted in their own reasoning about Jesus, or they made the confession out of fear. And even though the fear of punishment in hell certainly ought to get our attention and even wake us up to the reality of spiritual things, God doesn't want you to have faith in Jesus out of fear. It's His kindness that leads us to repentance.²⁸

So Paul calls attention to the mind-boggling reality that God is both kind and severe. The constant temptation for so many is to make God in their own image.²⁹ They want God to fit the mold of how they want Him to be. But if you do that, you're not worshiping the one true God. Paul writes, "consider God's kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God's kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness."

I find that most Christians want to focus on one extreme or the other, but neither in its entirety. A lot of Christians today think that God's kindness means that God doesn't judge sin. But that's not true. That's why Jesus died on the cross: to judge sin.³⁰ And it seems that even more Christians today think that God's severity means that God gives only so many chances, limited by our finite number of days in this life, but no more. But I don't think that's true either, because God's steadfast love and mercy never come to an end.³¹

God is far greater than we can imagine. He is kind and severe. His grace and His wrath are perfect, which Paul says means life from

²⁸ Romans 2:4

²⁹ Exodus 20:4-6

³⁰ John 12:31

³¹ Lamentations 3:22-23

the dead and reconciliation to the world. And that happens through Jesus.

You see, even though God is beyond our comprehension, and won't fit in any box that we construct for Him, God condescends Himself down to our level so that we might know Him. God makes Himself knowable. Jesus is the unique God-Man, and Jesus says that if we've seen Him, we've seen the Father.³²

So many people today think that God is unknowable. But that's exactly why Jesus came. Jesus came to make the Father known. In Jesus, we see the heart of God. And this is what Jesus said:

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

That's the gospel in a nutshell. In four words, the gospel is simply this: We sin, Jesus saves. That's what John 3:16-17 says. But does anyone know what comes immediately after John 3:16-17? John 3:18.

Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. (John 3:18)

³² John 14:9

So once again, we see the kindness and severity of God. The Bible says that God doesn't need to condemn us. Apart from faith in Christ, we're already condemned. We're self-condemned. We've condemned ourselves to the opposite of eternal life, which is hell. And that's pretty severe. It's cutting ourselves off from experiencing the goodness of God.

And yet, even then, God has the power to graft us in again, because the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercy is new every morning, and it's God's kindness which leads us to repentance.