

## *8. The Goodness and Severity of God*

God does not have a split personality disorder, but in Romans 11:22 (KJV) Paul draws his readers attention to 'the goodness and severity of God'. That is, through the preaching of the gospel, God has been kind to the gentiles in joining them to his chosen people; yet the Jews, in their rejection of the same gospel, experience the severity God in being cut off from him. God is both kind and severe in the way he treats people. He is both the merciful saviour and the righteous judge. In Romans 11 Paul concludes that both God's goodness and severity are intended to highlight his mercy in bringing people to himself.

1. How do you think good times and an experience of God's kindness might lead some people to depend on his mercy?
2. How do you think hard times experienced at the hand of God might lead some people to depend on his mercy?

Hebrews 12 is another passage that highlights both God's kindness and severity used in bringing people to himself.

*Read Hebrews 12:1-11*

3. In what ways do verses 1-4 compare the Christian life like a marathon?

*The Character of God: Study 8*

4. What is the function of the great cloud of witnesses<sup>1</sup> in relation to the runners of the race (i.e., us)?
5. What kinds of things can hinder or entangle us as Christians?
6. In verses 5–11 the imagery changes to family. What 'word of encouragement' does the Father address to his children here?
7. We often want our lives to be free from hardship and difficulty. How do verses 8–11 challenge such an attitude?
8. [optional] Sometimes we may hear people cry out against God and say that he cannot possibly good and kind since they are experiencing such hardship. What have we learned from this passage about how discipline can be God's severe mercy?
9. How have you experienced God's goodness and severity in your life?
10. What does this passage encourage you to do in response to your experience of God's goodness and severity?

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<sup>1</sup> At very least, the 'great cloud of witnesses' refers to the heroes of the faith in Heb 11, and may also refer to the angels (Heb 12:22; 1:4 etc) and possibly also to Jesus, now seated at God's right hand (Heb 12:2; 10:12 etc)