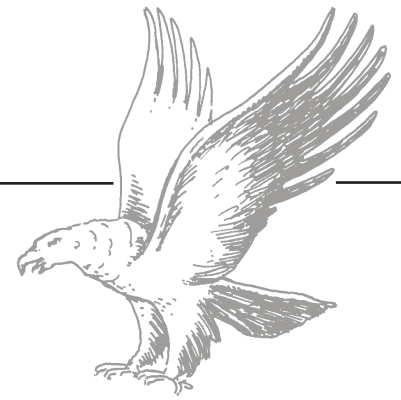


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



June 5, 2016

The Goodness and Severity of God

The Bible paints distinctly different portraits of God, leading some to think He's capricious and arbitrary in His treatment of humanity. But He's not the one who's behaving irrationally.

“God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies; The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. . . . Who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him” (Nahum 1:2-3, 6-7).

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:22).



Nahum's description of God sounds almost schizophrenic. At one moment God is furious and lashing out against His victims; yet in the next moment He is patient, kind, protective. What kind of God are we dealing with? Or are we subject to whatever whimsical mood He happens to be in? Where's the comfort in *that* kind of relationship?

God is not schizophrenic, and His behavior is quite reasonable, if we will take a few moments to ponder the context. Notice that Nahum is addressing two different kinds of people: God's enemies—those who willfully conspire against His authority (v. 2, 8, 9); and those who trust in Him (v. 7). The former arouse God's anger; the latter receive His sympathy and support.

Paul's description of “the goodness and severity of God” provides a simple commentary on this principle. If we choose to reject Him and disregard His instructions for our life, we will see the severe side of God. But if we strive to be good, we will see His good side. His behavior is entirely predictable once we understand with whom He is dealing.

Like any good parent, God's love for His children—all of them—is unconditional. But how His children respond to that love elicits different behaviors on His part. Children receive different treatment from their parents, not because the parents love them differently, but because each child's chosen path of life requires a different manage-

ment strategy. Defiance and disrespect will be met with firm punishment; submission and obedience will receive a tender embrace. It's a wise child who figures this out early, and adjusts his attitude and behavior accordingly.

The point here is not that we earn our salvation by our good works. Even the best of us make mistakes along the way, and God can handle that. What changes God's equation is the *intent* behind the behavior. A good heart that is set on doing the right thing—even if it occasionally stumbles—is precious in God's sight. He can work with people like that. Those who don't care what God wants and are determined to do their own thing will meet an entirely different God on judgment day.

But we don't have to wait until judgment day to experience the goodness and severity of God. His character is built into the moral fabric of the world in which we live, and our obedience or rebellion will bear fruit even as we live in this life. In the end, God is the reasonable one. We're the ones whose behavior is irrational.

– David King