



Clanking Chains: Contrast between Benevolence & Severity: Benevolence: “Chrestotes,” Rom 11:22a

- 67) The contrast between divine benevolence and severity is found in Romans 11:22 and becomes a tutorial to parents on the difference between the two approaches.

Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 8:108:

The noun **ἀποτομία, *apotomia***, occurs in the New Testament only at Romans 11:22. Here we find it twice as the opposite of **χρηστότης, *chrēstotēs***: benevolence. Those who do not cleave to God's goodness [“benevolence”] are threatened by the “inflexible hardness and severity” of the Judge as the only alternative. The severity of the divine judgment is thus described here by an expression which was used already in Greek for the pitiless severity of the law and which was applied by Paul to God's judicial work.

- 1) Romans 9-11 is a parenthesis that is apart from the rest of Romans and is separate from it:
 1. Chapter 9: Israel in the past has been **selected** as God's client nation. (Exodus 19:6)
 2. Chapter 10: Israel at present, the Church Age, is **rejected** as God's client nation.
 3. Chapter 11: Israel in the future is **accepted** as God's client nation.
- 2) Romans 11 is divided into three paragraphs:
 1. The rejection of Israel is not total. Even though God has rejected Israel as a client nation in the Church Age, there will emerge a remnant of Jewish believers out from the Tribulation at the Second Advent. (vv. 1-10)
 2. The rejection of Israel is not final. The Jewish remnant out from the Tribulation will make up the population of client nation Israel in the millennial kingdom. (vv. 11-24)
 3. The perpetuation of the Jewish remnant in the Church Age. The Jews form the nucleus of the Body of Christ in the Church Age since the first believers of the Church Age were Jewish. (vv. 25-36)
- 3) It therefore becomes the height of arrogance for Gentile believers to be anti-Semitic. Gentiles are grafted into the Good Branch among the original Jewish believers. (The 120 Jewish disciples in Acts 1:15 and 2:1-4, compared with the Roman Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10.)
- 4) Romans 11:22 is in the second paragraph and contains the information we seek with regard to divine management of client nations. Presently Israel is under divine severity while Gentile client nations vacillate between benevolence and severity.

Romans 11:22 - Behold the benevolence of God [**χρηστότης, *chrēstotēs*: blessing and reward from the justice of God**] and the severity of God [**ἀποτομία, *apotomia*: punishment and discipline from the justice of God**]: on the one hand, severity to those who fell [**Jewish unbelievers**], but on the other hand, the benevolence of God to you [**Gentile believers**], if you persist in the sphere of His integrity [**3d class condition for maintenance of client nation status**]. Otherwise you also will be cut off [**5th cycle of discipline**].



- 5) This verse is introduced by an aorist active imperative of the verb:
ὀράω, horaō - This is a mandate to focus one's attention on two objects, the benevolence and the severity of God.

- 6) The first direct object is the accusative singular of the noun:

χρηστότης, chrēstotēs - "benevolence"

The choice of this translation is a conclusion drawn from the etymology provided by:

Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated and edited by James D. Ernest. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 3:512-515:

Chrēstotēs is a divine attribute. The major acclamation of Israelite worship is of the Lord who is chrēstos, benevolent, favorable, and merciful. (p. 512)

These words describe God's goodness toward His children. Parents must strive to imitate these characteristics and teach them to their children.

A virtue of honest folk. Anyone who shows goodness and concern toward others can be described as chrēstos. The term takes on an ethical meaning: the person who is chrēstos (man, woman, or child) behaves properly, conforms to the rule of honesty, what is called "good morals." (p. 513)

Paul borrows from this vocabulary, making *chrēstotēs* a fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22, a virtue of the apostles in 2 Corinthians 6:6, and of all Christians in Ephesians 4:32. (p. 514)

We recently translated *chrēstotēs* in Ephesians 4:32 as "become kind, performing gracious acts." Whether the source of *chrēstotēs* is divine or human, it is a reflection of divine love and integrity that may be described as "benevolence":

An expression of love. The occurrences are so common and so diverse that it is impossible to discern the specific nuance in each instance: goodness, kindness, willingness to be of service, honesty, nobility, loyalty, probity. The point is love, a loving attitude that includes a willingness to serve one's neighbor. This virtue is possessed only by magnanimous and unselfish souls who are characterized by kindness, friendliness, and liberality: the Christian is both delicate and generous in his relations with other believers, seeking to be useful, considerate, helpful, beneficent, always in an agreeable way, even with a smile; the expression of a person who is happy to meet his neighbor and to be able to offer him his help. (p. 515)

In his commentary on Galatians 5:22, Jerome says, "... the Greek **χρηστότης, chrēstotēs** means a mild, tender, tranquil virtue, prepared to share its goods; it invites to friendship; it is ...moderate in its morals." (p. 515, n. 20)

All of these attributes when assigned to God add up to benevolence, the expression of His grace policy to the positive and advancing believer in the form of blessings and rewards.