

Today's Sermon

The Mercy of God

Romans 9:15-23

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, May 10, 2022

For those of you that drive, or young people who will be in the years ahead, I want you to think of a car you think is the best or would love to drive, if you could afford it. The problem is you can't afford it, but imagine someone gives you a free gift of keys to the car you always wanted. He paid the title and registration and the insurance, and the keys are yours for the taking, if you accept the gift. He'll even pay for your gas no matter what prices rise to

Sounds too good to be true, a costly free gift of grace you didn't earn or deserve but it's up to you whether you take the key or not. Kevin DeYoung says this is more like it: 'You are lying unconscious on a hospital bed. You don't know where you are, who you are, or what is going on. You should be dead. In fact, the doctor pronounced you dead a minute ago, but now your heart is beating. The hospital staff had pumped blood into your veins when you had bled out... That's quite a gift: someone else's blood for free, put into you when you had no ability to ask for it, resist it, or receive it... God gives new life, not new cars... Both are freely given. Both are undeserved. But one gift is presented for you to accept, while the other is a new quality infused within us. The gift, as represented in these scenarios, is... faith. Is saving faith a gift that we can accept [and naturally want], or is it a new principle worked in us by God's sovereign and unfailingly effectual will?'¹

Turn to Rom 9 for the answer but as you do let me read from Eph 2. It **says you were dead in your sins**, no moving toward God or choosing things of God, no hand reaching out to receive God's gift, and you didn't even want it. Eph 2:4 '*But God, being **rich in mercy**, because of the great love with which he loved us,*⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—... through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...* The gift is life itself, including faith, but even that wasn't your own doing, faith is part of the gift.

It's a new principle actually given to us, new life, new desires by rich mercy.

Then we can see the Great Physician and what He did for us and we respond It's sovereign mercy as God wills. Look at Rom 9:15, God '*says to Moses, "**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.**"*¹⁶ *So then **it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.***¹⁷ *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."*¹⁸ *So then **he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.***

¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist **his will**?”

²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for **vessels of mercy**, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— He gives mercy to us to give it through us as vessels

He’s a wonderful merciful Savior whose merciful and mighty

We’ve studied in Romans God’s glory, wrath, power, and name (last week focusing on v. 17). We’ve seen He’s loving, holy, jealous, just, righteous, gracious, good, faithful—today as we keep working our way through the book, we’ll see He’s merciful. Is there difference between grace and mercy?

GRACE = giving favor we **don’t** deserve

MERCY = *not* giving judgment we deserve

Mercy is for the guilty, or those in misery or inability

Placerville is known as **Hangtown**. Mercy would be a guilty criminal on the gallows who deserves to die. He’s a dead man. He feels the noose around his neck, his face is covered so he’s blind to what’s going on. He can’t do anything to deliver himself. He feels the shaky platform under his feet about to give way at any moment, and then suddenly someone else come in, stops the execution, sets him free, takes the hood off, so now the death-deserver sees his deliverer and responds with humble thanks. That man knows mercy

He’s guilty and in misery with no ability, but God is rich in mercy!

The Puritan Goodwin wrote ‘He has a multitude of mercies of every kind...

If your heart be dead, he has mercy to liven it...

If your heart be hard, his mercies are tender.

If you be sick, he has mercy to heal you.

If you be sinful, he has mercies to sanctify and cleanse you.

As large and as various are our wants, so large and various are his mercies. So we may come boldly to find...mercy to help us in time of need, a mercy for every need. All the mercies that are in his own heart he has transplanted into several beds into the gardens of his promises, where they grow...’²

Tozer: ‘mercy is not [just] something God has but something God is’³

OUTLINE:

1. How does God’s mercy relate to compassion? (v. 15)
2. How does God’s mercy relate to man’s choice? (v. 16)
3. How does God’s mercy relate to God hardening? (v. 17-22)
4. How are we to relate to others as vessels of mercy? (v. 23)

1st how mercy and compassion relate:

Rom 9: 15 *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*

Ps 145:8 says the Lord is *'full of compassion...and great in mercy'* (NKJV).

God's mercy is related to compassion and often linked to other attributes:

- Ps 23:6 *'surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life'*
- Lam. 3:22 *'the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness'*
- Ex 34:6 Most repeated phrase of God *'merciful and gracious, slow to anger...'*

Those are all OT verses. Some people think the God of the OT is angry and the God of the NT is merciful, but God never changes, and the OT actually mentions His mercy 4x more than the NT.⁴ Just in one Psalm, His mercy is mentioned 36x (Ps 136 NKJV). In Ps 51, David's prayer for repentance starts:

'Have mercy on me, O God...according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.' The NASB has *'according to Your great compassion...'* So mercy and compassion are very related, some translations interchange them.

'Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner' is how salvation comes in Lk 18

Ps 103 *'He has not dealt with us according to our sins'* -that's mercy, not giving us what our sins deserve. Then it says *'as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion ... For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust'* (v. 10, 13-14 NASB). That shows the distinction, compassion is fatherly pity, mindful of our weak frail frame. Ps 72 *'He will have compassion on the poor and needy...the afflicted...who has no helper'* (v. 12-13). Sounds like Rom 5:6 *while we were still helpless*

Or 'weak/without strength/powerless, Christ died for...'

Compassion emphasizes pity, *com* (with) + *passion* (feeling). It's feeling with, seeing need and being moved to show mercy. Lam 3:22 *'Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not'* (NKJV). We deserve to be consumed for our sin, but through His mercies we're not getting what we deserve, because of His unending compassions.

Mercy= no punishment to the deserving, **compassion**= pity to the desperate.

The blind cry 'have mercy on us, Son of David!' and Jesus has pity⁵

Jesus shows us a God of compassion and mercy. The gospels tell us He was moved with compassion in His heart as He saw the multitudes as helpless sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). We read of His compassion on hungry people, a grieving mother, a demon-possessed boy, a man with leprosy, etc.

Compassion moved Him to help the helpless begging *'have mercy on me!'*

He told a story of a 'good Samaritan' who felt compassion and acted. So *'which of these 3 proved to be a neighbor?'* *'the one who showed mercy.'*⁶

Compassion is something felt that than **moves into the action of mercy**. He told another story we call the ‘prodigal son.’ He treated his father horribly, squandered his inheritance on prostitutes, but he comes back knowing he doesn’t deserve to be called a son but just hoping he could be a servant. It says ‘*while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was **filled with compassion for him**; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him...the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ (Lk 15 NIV).*

That’s the Father’s compassion and mercy in action in salvation

That’s #1, mercy and compassion,

#2 is mercy and man’s choice, see v. 16:

Rom 9:16 *So then it depends not on human will or exertion but on God who has mercy*

v. 10 gives the example of Isaac and Rebekah as she’s pregnant with twins.

¹¹ *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that **God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls**—* ¹² *she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”* Same DNA, same parents, same womb at same time!

They were womb-mates! It wasn’t dependent on their will or works, it was God’s purpose of election, end of v. 11 says it was because of God’s call.

That’s language in Rom 8:28, *called according to his purpose.*

Look at 8:30 “*And those whom he predestined he also **called** [word for election in 9:11], and those whom he **called** he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified...³³ **Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?***”

God’s elect who He calls by election and predestination all make it to glory.

No one can bring a charge against His elect. But some want to charge God.

The context of 9:14 is a question, whether God is unjust to choose to have mercy on some and not others, Jacob and not Esau, Moses and not Pharaoh. Jacob was loved, Esau was hated, Moses got mercy, Pharaoh was hardened. Egypt was destroyed by plagues, their army dead, but Israel got compassion

One translation of v. 16: ‘**God’s choice does not depend on a person’s will.**’⁷

Another says we can’t choose it, God decides, and says in v. 15 ‘*I will show mercy to anyone I choose...*[v. 18] *God chooses to show mercy to some...*’⁸

This is **God’s unconditional choice** to show **mercy independent of our will**.

In other words, it’s not us making a decision, **it’s God mercifully showing up**.

A sinner’s will or choice is why he needs mercy, not how he gets mercy.

Is that fair? Was there something in Jacob or Moses or Israel that made God choose them? Jacob is a heel-grasping scoundrel, deceiving his own brother then his dying dad—I wouldn't choose Jacob to be in my family! Moses is a **murderer**; he killed an Egyptian in cold blood for hitting a slave and Moses had to run away. **God chose Moses but not because Moses wanted it**, there were all kinds of excuses Moses made along the way when God called him. God chose to have mercy on Israel, but they complained the whole way!

And if God didn't choose me first, I would refuse Him still

Rom 9 is hard to swallow if we don't taste and see what Rom 1-3 says. If we believe Rom 3:11 (*'no one seeks for God'*), then we can receive Rom 9:11. If I don't seek God, I need His mercy to seek me. 1 Pet 1:3 says blessed be God, *'who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again...'*

It doesn't say according to our great choice, it says His great mercy. Being born again is not caused by me; it's all by mercy (see Jn 1:13, James 1:18). Nothing we do or choose brings about our first birth, or our second birth.

Why me? I don't know, but I can't point to me or what's in me

That begs a 3rd question: **how does God's mercy relate to God's hardening?**

¹⁸ So then **he has mercy on whomever he wills**, and he hardens whomever he wills. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist **his will**?" This is a harder question about Pharaoh's hardening.

Last week we look at v. 17 and Exodus, and it says several times in Exodus his 'heart was hardened,' **'Pharaoh hardened his heart,'** then **'God hardened his heart.'** It's been said the same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay.

REPROBATION – DOUBLE PREDESTINATION (equal ultimacy error)

v. 14 asked is God unjust? No, v. 15 says some get mercy rather than what's just, remember mercy is not getting what we justly deserve. God chooses to show mercy and it's not dependent on man's will. And hardened sinners get what they justly deserve. No one gets injustice, but God gives some mercy.

v. 19 raises the question, how can God find fault if we can't resist His will?

How is our fault if salvation is all of mercy? How is Pharaoh judged if God hardened him? Is Esau responsible if he didn't get God's love like Esau?

But v. 20 basically says who do you think you are to question God? God is God, we're the clay, He's the potter! The potter knows more than the clay! He's free to do what we chooses without our will, permission or approval – but know in v. 22 even vessels of wrath He *'endures with much patience.'*

And in the end of ch 11, even in hardening there's mercy (11:25-26, 30-32).

But **God doesn't answer Rom 9:19 head on**, so don't expect me to satisfy it. Is there a mystery why Pharaoh or Esau aren't saved? The real mystery is why Jacob is (or we can be!). God doesn't say why He chose Jacob or me.

Back in Romans 1:20 the end of the verse says **all "... are without excuse."**

In Romans 1:32 Paul says **man is "worthy of death"** then says '*Therefore, you have **no excuse.***' If fair=what's deserved, death is what we all deserve.

Romans 3:19 says God's law stops every mouth and makes all accountable. If God says sinners are accountable and responsible, we can know they are. No one will have an excuse or any objection "it's not fair" on judgment day. Paul expects that you've **read Romans 1-3 before** you come to **Romans 9:19**.

Esau received justice, Jacob received mercy, but **no one received injustice.**

God would be just to send us all to hell. There's no injustice in Him sending all there right now, but v. 22 says He gives great patience before He gives wrath. Rom 1-2 shows us common grace, creation, kindness. Esau deserved rejection but Jacob got *undeserved saving love.* Why? I don't know. I know

Pharaoh's not a good guy God hardened. I know Esau rejected the blessings.

There is a judicial hardening of reprobates, like Rom 1 'God gave them over'

Charles Spurgeon said if you find it hard that God chooses some and leaves others in the sin they chose and love: 'I will ask you one question. Is there any of you here this morning who wishes to be holy...regenerate, to leave off sin ...? "Yes..." says some one, "I do." Then God has elected you. But another says, "No; I don't want to be holy; I don't want to give up my lusts ..." Why should you grumble, then, that God has not elected you to it? For if you were elected you would not like it, according to your own confession ...Supposing I had in my hand something which you do not value, and I said I shall give it to such-and-such a person, you ... could not be so foolish as to grumble that the other has got what you do not care about. According to your own confession, many of you do not want...a new heart and a right spirit, do not want the forgiveness of sins, do not want sanctification; you do not want to be elected to these things: why should you grumble? ...

Suppose a man in the street should say, "What a shame it is I cannot have a seat in the chapel to hear ... I hate the preacher; I can't bear his doctrine; but still it's a shame I have not a seat." ... That man does not care for it. Why should he trouble himself about other people having what they value and he despises? ... If any of you desire to have salvation, you are elected to have it, if you desire it sincerely and earnestly. But, if you don't desire it, why on earth should you be so preposterously foolish as to grumble because God gives *that which you do not like* to other people?⁹

Know this: His mercy turns no one away, today if you hear, do not harden

4th final question: how are we to relate to others as vessels of mercy?

9:23 says God's purpose was to make known His glory to *vessels of mercy.*

Mercy isn't just something to us, His mercy must flow through us as vessels.

Look at Rom. 11 for **God's mercy through Gentiles to Israel. 11:31** *so they too [Israel] have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they*

also may now receive mercy...12:1 *I appeal to you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ...*

You're not saved to sit, you're saved to sacrificially serve the body (v. 4ff)

God desires mercy more than sacrifice, but His mercy calls us to sacrifice, a living daily offering ourselves. He shows us mercy so we can show others.

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...*¹⁷ *Repay no one evil for evil...* [you think they deserve evil back, but in view of mercies of God not giving what we deserve for evil, don't pay back, show mercy]...²⁰ *To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink..."* [but they don't deserve that? Exactly! Mercy!]

Jesus taught '**Blessed are the merciful ... Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.**'¹⁰ Paul taught in Col 3:12 '**Put on a heart of compassion** [NKJV 'tender mercies'], *kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.* **If you complain, you need to put on a compassionate heart, or tender mercies, and forgive.**

Jesus explained it with a man who owed ten thousand talents, great need and no ability to repay, so he pleads prostrate for mercy, and it says the lord '*felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.*' And he told him '*Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?*' (Mt 18 NASB). Don't make others pay you for what you think their sins deserve, feel compassion, release the bitterness and forgive, have mercy based on God not making you pay what's deserved

We're vessels for God's gifts of grace and mercy to flow through. **12:6** *Having gifts that differ according to the **grace given to us**, let us use them...*

Look at v. 8, where he also comes back to that word mercy: ⁸ *the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does **acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.***

God is a cheerful giver in acts of mercy to us, and that must flow through us

Think of yourself as a vessel of mercy filled to overflow to others

Look at v. 7: *if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching ...*¹³ *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to **show hospitality.*** The saints here need more hospitality, inviting people into homes, serving. We have needs for fellowship, relationship, discipleship, we leaders can't fully meet. There are **immediate service needs** (TABLES ON THE WAY OUT).

Look at ch 15 for a **final purpose of God's mercy.** One more 'in order that' statement about God's mercy. **15:9** *in order that the Gentiles might **glorify God for***

his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and **sing to your name.**” We’re about to sing ‘His mercy is more’

The Bible calls us to ‘**sing of the mercies of the Lord forever**, we will sing. With our mouth will we make known your faithfulness to all generations.’¹¹

Others say ‘*sing aloud of Your mercy*’ or often ‘*give thanks to the LORD for He is good, for His mercy endures forever* (NKJV, Ps 59:16, Ps 136, etc.).

In 2 Chronicles they sing praises to His mercy with musical instruments.

Beautiful **Eulogy’s song ‘Instruments of Mercy’** I leave you with, a prayer:

[Our merciful God is] playing the harp with the various parts of our hearts instrument

A symphony of saints saved from sin singing ... our glorious Lord

... to compose a score being stitched together in melodious chord ...

Organize and order my days according to Your ordinance

I'm an instrument in Your orchestra Lord and You are my only audience

Holding Your promises close and watching as Your plan unfolds

All for Your glory and praise playing the song that You composed

Chorus: With Your hands, play Your song **Use my life I'm Your instrument**

Tune my heart **to sing Your song** Use my life I'm Your instrument

What to do as we go? Mk 5:19 ‘**Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.**’

References:

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *Grace Defined and Defended*, 63-64.

² As cited by Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, p. 131.

³ A.W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, p. 77.

⁴ Tozer, 77.

⁵ Matthew 20:30-34.

⁶ Mark 8:2, 9:22, Luke 7:13, 18:38-39, Matthew 9:27, 15:22, Luke 10:33-37, etc.

⁷ ISV.

⁸ NLT.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Election," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), Sermon # 41-42, p. 316–317.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:7, Luke 6:36.

¹¹ Adapted from Psalm 89:1 NKJV.