

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY
& ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

Romans 9:19-32 (Isaiah 29:13-21)

Almighty God, you show the light of your truth to those who are in error so that they may return into the way of righteousness: grant to all who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ the discernment to reject everything that is contrary to our profession and to follow whatever is in agreement with it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Why did God choose to harden Pharaoh's heart prior to the Exodus of His People from Egypt? **READ Romans 9:17.** As we have seen, God chooses who He will have mercy on, and no one deserves His mercy. Pharaoh was God's vessel to demonstrate His just wrath against hard-hearted rebellion, so that His mercy upon the undeserved Israelites would be revealed and spread to others witnessing God's judgment plagues. In light of this, today we will consider human responsibility in relation to God's sovereign choice to show mercy to whomever He pleases, and how His divine mercy actually overflows to us as Gentiles.

1. **Why Does God Blame Us? Who Can Resist His Will? Verse 19 (READ)**

- a. Why would God blame us, hard-hearted rebels, when He is the one Who sovereignly has mercy on some and sovereignly hardens others? Why would God find fault in those He hardens if His almighty will cannot be resisted?
- b. This objection is common for many who would deny that we, as people, cannot truly be free if God is completely sovereign. Nevertheless, the Bible affirms both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and the Apostle makes no attempt to diminish either nor does he resolve the tension. Rather, Paul puts us in our proper creaturely place.
- c. **Verses 20-24 (READ)**

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY, HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY
& ISRAEL’S UNBELIEF

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK’S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

- i. The tension between God’s mercy and judgment being entirely dependent on His will and our human responsibility for our sinful rebellion are held in tension by the Apostle. Both are true.
 1. However, the more we become acquainted with God’s righteousness and mercy (fully revealed in the Cross of Christ) the more we trust in His goodness and grace.
- ii. Consider the great patience of God toward the objects of His wrath, Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Rather than immediately issuing the plague of the death of the first born, the Lord issued nine other plagues with clear warnings and expectations that remained unheeded by Pharaoh; because, he, along with other hard-hearted unbelieving Egyptians, were prepared for destruction as objects of God’s wrath, which is the condition into which all human beings are born – ‘children of wrath’ undeserving of God’s mercy. However, both Hebrews and others were seeing God’s patient power displayed in His wrath throughout this time leading up to the Exodus (*ref. verse 17*). To onlookers, God’s wrath that plagued the Egyptians was simultaneously a revealing of the riches of His glory, so that some of those onlookers, like the Hebrews, would become objects of God’s mercy with new hearts of flesh prepared in advance for glory.
- iii. God predestined some people, from the unredeemed lump of clay we call sinful humanity “in Adam”, for glory “in Christ” to be conformed to His image; while leaving the rest of the sinful lump of clay to hard-hearted rebelliousness; being forever solidified in the

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY, HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY
& ISRAEL’S UNBELIEF

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK’S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

image of Adam without the moistening renewal and remolding of the Holy Spirit.

1. **READ *Romans 8:28-30***
 2. Includes BOTH Jew and Gentile (*verse 24*). The abounding mercy of God is extended toward all those who once appeared to be excluded such as Ishmael, Esau, the Egyptians, and even us, while many of the privileged people of God who were physical descendants of Abraham proved to be “not truly Israel”; because, they lacked the faith of Abraham.
- iv. Paul’s Use of Hosea (**READ Verses 25-26**)
1. The tribes in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, had broken their covenant with God through their lawlessness and idolatry. Yet, God in His mercy, makes a promise to restore these people who had become “not his people” back into the covenant as ‘his children’. Paul amazingly applies this to Gentiles; because, we, like those of Israel during the time of Hosea, were separated from God’s promise of inheriting the world. Paul wants to show that God’s sovereign choice of who He shows mercy to is very, very inclusive.
- v. Paul’s Use of Isaiah (**READ Verse 27-29**)
1. Again, God’s mercy is highlighted here; mercy toward God’s Privileged People who possessed the transmission of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, yet Paul warns that simply being part of these physical descendants of the patriarchs does not mean one is entitled to be a recipient of God’s sovereign mercy. Israel’s idolatry required God’s just judgment upon the

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY
& ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

entire nation; a complete annihilation like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, but God would show mercy to a few, a remnant, that He may fulfil His promise. Israel, who deserves condemnation like the rest of the world for her rebellion, is not entitled to God's mercy. Divine mercy is according to God's sovereign choice.

2. What then Shall We Say? Verse 30a (READ)

a. ...about God's unlikely inclusion of Gentiles to receive His mercy, and about only a remnant of those physically/biologically descended from Israel receiving God's mercy?

i. **Verses 30b-32a (READ)**

1. Gentiles who did not seek righteousness, who did not even possess the oracles of God and the heritage of the patriarchs, have received God's righteousness through faith in Christ Who reveals the righteousness of God, but Israel, as a people, failed to receive it because many self-reliantly thought they could obtain and sustain their own righteousness through the observance of the Law.

b. **Verses 32b-33 (READ)**

i. Paul again references Isaiah to demonstrate that Jesus Christ has become a stumbling stone to the Jews who thought they could establish their own righteousness. They had fallen, as we all will, if we self-righteously think we can merit God's favor through our works rather than receiving His mercy through faith in Christ.

God's Sovereignty (is real), Human Responsibility (is real) and Israel's Unbelief (is evidence of these two realities). No one deserves God's mercy. We all deserve God's wrath; because, we are all born with

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY, HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY
& ISRAEL’S UNBELIEF

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK’S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

hard-hearts inclined to rebel against God. Israel, as demonstrated in their worship of the golden calf (their lawlessness), revealed they were just as deserving of God’s judgment as Pharaoh, yet God was merciful to Israel according to His promise. Nevertheless, after Judah’s Exile in Babylon up to the time of Paul, there were many Jews who forgot about God’s sovereign mercy and believed they could merit and sustain their righteousness before God by observing the Law. Such legalism, like Israel’s prior lawlessness, is symptomatic of a hard heart that fails to trust in God’s promises and to seek His sovereign mercy that involves God circumcising our hearts and transferring us from the lump of clay prepared for destruction “in Adam” to life “in Christ” as objects of mercy predestined for glory.

God’s patience in revealing His wrath (as He did with Pharaoh prior to the Exodus and with His Own People prior to their Exile) displays His glory. The more God’s glory is displayed, the more opportunity there is for others to receive His mercy. Those who see and receive God’s mercy will be glorified in conformity to the image of His Son, Jesus. Consider the Egyptians that saw the devastating effects of the plagues upon their people and, subsequently, become favorably disposed toward God’s People (*Exodus 12:36*). While we know that God hardened some of the Egyptians’ hearts as well as Pharaoh’s to gain glory among them (*Exodus 14:17-18*), I presume that a number of Egyptians believed in Yahweh and joined the Hebrews in their Exodus. How unlikely would that have been for the Egyptians, objects of God’s wrath, to turn to and trust in the One who took time displaying and explaining His wrath as warnings to them? How does God mercifully warn people today in His patient wrath that points to the coming totality of His just judgment against humanity’s hard-hearted rebellion?

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY
& ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

We, as Gentiles, are just as unexpected recipients of God's mercy to the Jews of Paul's time as some of those Egyptians were to the Hebrews at the time of the Exodus. I am sure that some of you, just as I am to many of my family and friends, are very surprising recipients of God's mercy. Who is an unexpected recipient of God's mercy in your mind? Might it be that you are God's means of mercy to them by sharing with them the Gospel? Perhaps God will be merciful to them. If not, they will receive what their hard-hearts' desire. Be assured that no one condemned ever seeks out God's mercy. God's hardening is simply His just way of handing rebellious humanity over to their wicked heart-desires (**READ *Romans 1:18-2:5***). This is God's merciful warning to our world today of the future judgment to come. Once we see God's glorious patience in displaying His just wrath, we also see His overflowing mercy toward those who, by His sovereign grace, recognize their need for His mercy, and give Him thanks and praise for receiving it through Christ our Lord.

AMEN