

God Alone Bestows Mercy on Whom He Will and Whom He Will, He Hardens

By Duane A. Linn

Ro 9:14 ¶ What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

Ro 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Ro 9:16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Ro 9:17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Ro 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Last week, we covered the Biblical doctrine of Double Predestination.

This week, we will dig deeper and discover why God shows mercy on some and hardens all the rest of humanity in their sin.

It is a difficult thing to comprehend in the human mind on how or why God shows grace to some and leaves others to die (as is the proper and necessary punishment for all Adam's posterity); for we all think that we deserve to be treated well if we follow the rules set before us in our society.

Yet, God shows us in His Word repeatedly, that men are evil from their youth (Genesis 6:5, 8:21. Jeremiah 17:9) and that mankind is constantly in rebellion against Him. Below are a couple of examples.

De 31:27 For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?

We see here, Moses in his farewell address to the Israelites, telling these stiff-necked Hebrews that they have been rebellious against the Lord. We explained last week in what manner their parents rebelled against the Lord in their worship of the golden calf, their complaining ten times against Him, the evil report that was delivered by ten of the scouts that returned from spying out the Land of Canaan, and even Korah's rebellion (which we did not cover last week).

Now remember... these Hebrews that Moses is addressing are the children of those who died in the wilderness for their sin; yet, Moses is calling them “stiff necked and rebellious”. We see later on in Joshua and the Book of the Judges, how they were indeed rebellious against the LORD when they refused to drive out all the inhabitants of the Land and went after other gods.

In this context, their rebellion is called so because they did not obey God’s Commandments. We will see a more singular example in the next verse.

1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Here, in this example, we have the Prophet Samuel admonishing King Saul for his disobedience in not killing Agag as he as commanded to do, and also sparing some of the livestock.

We look at this and wonder... how is it that Saul sinned?

Saul gives this excuse as to why he disobeyed God. I will read 1 Samuel 15 up through verse 29 to establish the events leading to verse 23 and also the consequences of disobeying the Commandment of the LORD.

1Sa 15:1 ¶ Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.

1Sa 15:2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.

1Sa 15:3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

1Sa 15:4 And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah.

1Sa 15:5 And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley.

1Sa 15:6 And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

1Sa 15:7 And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.

1Sa 15:8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

1Sa 15:9 But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

1Sa 15:10 ¶ Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying,

1Sa 15:11 It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

1Sa 15:12 And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal.

1Sa 15:13 And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD.

1Sa 15:14 And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

1Sa 15:15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

1Sa 15:16 Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

1Sa 15:17 And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?

1Sa 15:18 And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

1Sa 15:19 Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?

1Sa 15:20 And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

1Sa 15:21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

1Sa 15:24 ¶ And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

1Sa 15:25 Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD.

1Sa 15:26 And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.

1Sa 15:27 And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

1Sa 15:28 And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.

1Sa 15:29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.

So, because King Saul leaned unto his own understanding and trusted in the strength of his own arm, God threw him down.

Saul wanted to feed his army, for one, and had considered political reasons for sparing Agag; reasons that to us, sound reasonable and prudent. Yet God said otherwise. We know how Saul met his end. The day after meeting with the Witch of Endor, he was killed in battle along with his sons.

Here are the remainder of the verses I wish to utilize in order to finish the point on why man deserves death.

Ro 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Ro 1:19 ¶ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

Ro 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Ro 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Ro 1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Ro 1:23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Ro 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

Ro 1:25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Ro 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

Ro 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

Ro 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

Ro 1:29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

Ro 1:30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

Ro 1:31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Ro 1:32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

The above scriptures are in fact, the natural state of man. This is who we are.

Ro 11:7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

Ro 11:8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

These two verses echo the sentiment from last week. Eyes to see, and ears to hear they have not.

The election obtains and the rest are blinded.

Regarding Pharaoh...

Ex 4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.

God DELIBERATELY hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he had no choice but to continue in his path. Any normal person would've seen the calamity that had befallen Egypt and would've let Israel go post haste.

But this was not to be. Exodus 4:21 mirrors precisely what the Apostle Paul declared in Romans 9:17. The “why” if you will.

Here are some more examples of God hardening the hearts of others.

De 2:30 But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.

The reason why God hardened Sihon’s spirit, follows in the next verse.

De 2:31 And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land.

Jos 11:20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

It seems as if the hardening of men’s hearts are a prerequisite to their destruction (as we learned of the Children of Israel last week).

Rebellion in no greater terms, is to disobey God; which we ALL do.

I won’t go any further to explain why we deserve death and damnation as human beings, as this explanation above will and should suffice.

Now on to mercy.

We see in the text that preceded this sermon; that God will have mercy on whom He will and on whom he will, he hardens their hearts, blinds their eyes, plugs their ears, and prevents them from repentance.

This is why GRACE, or MERCY, is so special. It is not common. It is not earned. It cannot be bought.

If one were to ask the question, “why is grace, grace?”; we now see and understand why it is so.

Here are some more verses to place the proverbial exclamation point on the matter.

Ro 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Ro 5:21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

I think now is a good time to bring in our definition of the word, “mercy” to further illustrate why mercy is as such.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary

mercy

MER'CY, n. L. misericordia.

1. That benevolence, mildness or tenderness of heart which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves; the disposition that tempers justice, and induces an injured person to forgive trespasses and injuries, and to forbear punishment, or inflict less than law or justice will warrant. In this sense, there is perhaps no word in our language precisely synonymous with mercy. That which comes nearest to it is grace. It implies benevolence, tenderness, mildness, pity or compassion, and clemency, but exercised only towards offenders. Mercy is a distinguishing attribute of the Supreme Being.

The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty. Num.14.

2. An act or exercise of mercy or favor. It is a mercy that they escaped.

I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies. Gen.32.

3. Pity; compassion manifested towards a person in distress.

And he said, he that showed mercy on him. Luke.10.

4. Clemency and bounty.

Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upheld by mercy. Prov.28.

5. *Charity, or the duties of charity and benevolence.*

I will have mercy and not sacrifice. Matt.9.

6. *Grace; favor. 1 Cor.7. Jude 2.*

7. *Eternal life, the fruit of mercy. 2 Tim.1.*

8. *Pardon.*

I cry thee mercy with all my heart.

9. *The act of sparing, or the forbearance of a violent act expected. The prisoner cried for mercy.*

To be or to lie at the mercy of, to have no means of self-defense, but to be dependent for safety on the mercy or compassion of another, or in the power of that which is irresistible; as, to be at the mercy of a foe, or of the waves.

We see now why mercy is what it is. As the whole human race lies in wickedness, disobedience, and rebellion against God, we deserve hell and finally, eternal damnation. We own it.

Yet, God has chosen to forgive some; for no other reason than He chose to do so. He explains in Isaiah that the Lord Jesus was to die for His people. Well, in order to have a people to die for, God needed to save some out of mankind.

Now there are many who look at this doctrine and declare that “it is not fair that I should be left out of salvation. I go to church, I pay my tithes, I visit the sick in the hospitals and the felons in the prisons. I share my wealth with the less fortunate and I have done many good things for the cause of Christianity”.

Well, here is what the Lord Jesus says to you who would go before the Judgement seat with such a claim...

Mt 7:21 ¶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Mt 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

Mt 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The Lord Jesus will indeed say that to a great many people. Why? Simple. You were not chosen.

Mt 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

Say the conversation goes like such; Here is the man (or woman) standing before the Judgement seat and they've just heard the Lord Jesus respond to their claims of piety and faithful service.

The Lord Jesus gives them the answer from Matthew 7:21-23 and then continues...

"I never loved you from the beginning. You only did what you did to avoid hell. Not because you really loved Me with all your heart, soul, strength, or mind. You did what you did also to be seen of others; to show yourself outwardly to be a Christian, yet inwardly, you were scheming to enter in another way. By works and not by grace through My Faith. You never looked at your own personal shortcomings and wept over your iniquity. You never came to Me to forgive you for your sins. You never worked out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Therefore, you were never Mine. Be gone; Into outer darkness with you (where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth)."

Such a horrifying thought to consider.

Paul also anticipates mankind's response to such a matter in the following verse (verse 19).

Ro 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

Now we see the anticipation of the fear arising in the hearts and minds of the people.

"Why is God doing this to us? Why? Why? Why? WHY?"

Paul responds with this.

Ro 9:20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Ro 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Ro 9:22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

Ro 9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Ro 9:24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Ro 9:25 ¶ As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.

Ro 9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Ro 9:27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

This is why mercy is mercy. This is why grace is grace.

I think this should suffice for the time being.

God is merciful to some of us only because He chose to be merciful. The rest, are justly receiving their due punishment, as we should've received were it not for His mercy and grace.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

We thank you most humbly for the mercy You have shown us when we were not deserving of it. While we still fall far short of Your glory in these bodies, yet, we are grateful that You are faithful to your promise and that You forgive us our iniquities and grant us repentance for our sins.

We are grateful for Your mercy.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen