

Romans 9:24-29

Introduction

Today we are going to talk about mercy.

When we are sinned against, it is very hard to respond the way we know that we should. Let me give you three glimpses into my wicked merciless heart...

1. Ask anyone who knows me and they will tell you that I don't have a particularly good memory about times and dates and certainly not about conversations. But I have this inner attorney that comes out when I am sinned against. He remembers times, dates, and even the exact wording of conversations!: "How can you say you never did this before! I remember exactly when you did this! 47 months and 3 days ago you came home late and you said...and it hurt me deeply!"

2. I remember distinctly being wronged by someone and try as I might I just couldn't seem to suppress the desire for revenge. I would replay dialogues in your head and dwell on how they wronged me. I couldn't even look at them without thinking of how I was sinned against and I dreamed of vindication.

3. When people sin against me I have this temptation to hold them hostage until they get what they deserve or they ask for my forgiveness with just the right amount of groveling. I have actually had someone ask me for forgiveness and I stood there thinking "he is not sorry enough."

I believe I have mercy deficit disorder. For some reason, there are times when my heart does not have any mercy to give. How can I kill my inner attorney? How can I get rid of my overwhelming desire for revenge? How can I free people who have wronged me rather than hold them hostage? I hope to come up with some real answers to all of these questions as we look at our text today.

Read Romans 9:24-29

Context and flow of thought

Romans 9:1-5

The problem of Israel's lost state is introduced. They had all the benefits of being God's chosen people, and yet they are lost.

Romans 9:6-13

The apparent problem that God's word has failed...that He did not make good on his promise because the vast majority of Jews are lost is raised and solved. If Paul had been unable to solve this problem, God would not be able to be trusted and we would never have been able to praise God nor be assured of our own salvation. The solution is that God never promised that every last ethnic Israelite would be saved. According to Paul, God does to regard all ethnic Israel as spiritual Israel. Rather, God has always chosen people from within ethnic Israel to be part of his true people and rejected others. Paul proves this from the Old Testament. Why did God do it this way? He tells us in relation to his love toward Jacob and

his hatred toward Esau in regards to salvation: “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” (v 11)

Romans 9:14-23

This raises the next problem that Paul solves. It seems unjust for God to choose some people for salvation and others for damnation. Paul's answer is that justice must be defined by God and not us. God has always had mercy on whomever he desires and he has hardened whomever he desires. This is God's M.O. We cannot take God to court over this because we have no rights. We are like clay and he is the potter. The clay has no rights and the potter has every right to do with the clay whatever he desires...even throwing it into the fire. The reason God has made vessels of wrath prepared for destruction is to make known the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy. So it is all about the glory of God and the mercy of God.

Romans 9:24-29

Paul's point in this paragraph is to prove that the current state of affairs in regards to who is part of the people of God has all been foretold in the Scriptures. The thesis of this short paragraph is verse 24. God prepared vessels of mercy beforehand for Glory: “even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.” Notice the link with verse 11. Paul is still talking about God's sovereign call to salvation. Verse 24 is also conceptually linked with verse 6. Some but not all ethnic Israelites are vessels of mercy. But now Paul goes a surprising step further. He tells us that many Gentiles are vessels of mercy. This is Paul's first mention in this passage of anyone other than ethnic Israelites. This is how the passage breaks down.

1. v. 24 Thesis: God has vessels of mercy among Jews and Gentiles.
2. v. 25 and 26 are about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God.
3. v. 27 through 29 are about the exclusion of all but a remnant of Israelites from the people of God.

So here we have the same emphases of mercy and hardening that Paul spoke about earlier. The shock is that God is having much mercy on the Gentiles and he is hardening most Israelites. You would have expected it to be the other way around. But this actually highlights God's mercy. Tom Schreiner puts it like this: “To the Jews of Paul's day Gentiles were particularly deserving of God's wrath. Thus their calling into the church through Paul's ministry highlights God's mercy in a way that the inclusion of the Jews does not” (525).

v. 25-26

As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” 26 “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

So how does Paul get inclusion of the Gentiles from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10? Let's briefly look at the context of Hosea. Hosea was written in the 8th century B.C. The book is about a prophet of God, Hosea, who is commanded to take a wife, Gomer, who is continually

unfaithful. God then uses their relationship as a picture of God's relationship to his unfaithful people, Israel. God names each of Gomer's children names that speak of God's rejection of his people. This was to tell the people that God was going to judge them. But, God goes on to reveal that there would be a day in the future when God would take those that he has rejected and has called "not my people" and he would accept them and call them "sons of the living God." It seems that this passage has nothing to do with Gentiles. But Paul seems to be considering prophecies about renewed Israel as fulfilled in the church.

Prophecy About Restoration of Israel Fulfilled in Gentiles

Tom Schreiner in his commentary on Romans puts it well: "Paul conceives of Hosea's prophecy as fulfilled in the calling of the Gentiles. The church is the renewed Israel and the arena in which God's promises find their fulfillment. Paul wants to show his Jewish contemporaries that the calling of the Gentiles was not without precedent; it fits with the surprising way God has always acted" (528).

This use of the Old Testament is surprising but not uncommon. Peter also applies these same OT verses and others to the Gentiles in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

"But you are a chosen race, a priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim royal the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Stott writes: "Old Testament prophecies often have a three-fold fulfillment. The first is immediate and literal (in the history of Israel), the second is intermediate and spiritual (in Christ and his church), the third is ultimate and eternal (in God's consummated kingdom). A good example is the prophecies of the rebuilding of the temple" (274).

It seems that the church, made up of some Jews and mostly Gentiles who trust in Jesus Christ to be saved from God's wrath, are the fulfillment of the many Old Testament prophecies about God's future restoration of Israel.

Verses 27-29

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel [3] be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." 29 And as Isaiah predicted,

"If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah."

In these verses Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah to support the exclusion of most of the Israelites. He uses Isaiah 10:22-23 and Isaiah 1:9.

The background of the two Isaiah texts is again one of the unfaithfulness of God's people in the 8th century BC, although it now relates to the southern kingdom of Judah. They have

forsaken God and have been judged by God—he sent the Assyrians to destroy Judah so that only a few survivors are left. God goes on to promise, however, that a believing remnant will return to the Lord. In fact, the name of Isaiah’s son was Shear Jashub—“a remnant will return.”

Paul is quoting these passages from Isaiah to show that God has already revealed that although they all deserved to be wiped out because of their unfaithfulness, God will save a remnant.

God has shocked us by pouring out his mercy on Gentiles...we never would have expected it. But he has also surprised us in that he is pouring out his mercy on only a small number of Jews. But no one deserved mercy. That is what makes it mercy. They all deserved wrath, Israel most of all because she had much greater knowledge of the God she was unfaithful to. But God is rich in mercy.

The Cure for Mercy Deficit Disorder

We have talked a lot about mercy. My own difficulties with it as well as God’s surprising bestowal of mercy throughout history. So what exactly is mercy?

According to Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane in their book *Relationships* “(1) mercy is the kind, sympathetic, and forgiving treatment of others that works to relieve their distress and cancel their debt. (2) Mercy is compassion combined with forbearance in action” Tripp and Lane, *Relationships*, 135.

Korean Pastor Son Yang Won (Pastor Son) (1902-1950) knew mercy. He never could get over being forgiven by God through the blood of Christ and adopted into God’s family. He never could get over being loved by God in spite of his many sins. He poured out his life into his congregation and into the spiritual and material care of lepers in the colonies in the surrounding area of the city of Suncheon. He lived in a turbulent time in Korean history when Japanese aggression and civil unrest were high. Pastor Son had two teenage boys, Matthew and John, who he loved very much. These two boys loved God just like their father. In 1948 there was a communist insurrection in Korea called the Yosu Suncheon revolt. This revolt was led by soldiers and student radicals. Mobs of crazed youths roamed the streets looking for victims. It was so violent that these mobs actually dragged the chief of police into the street, stripped him, wrapped him in barbed wire and dragged him through the city. They finally left him bleeding in the middle of the street to be eaten by wild dogs. One of the boys in these mobs knew Pastor Son’s boys, Matthew and John. He informed the other youths that these boys were Christians and where they could be found. The angry group of young people found Matthew and John and dragged them out in the streets. They beat the boys and tortured them trying to get them to renounce Christianity and to tell them of other Christians. Matthew and John, like their Lord, were faithful to the end when they were each shot in the head.

The revolt was soon put down by the Korean government and the youths who killed Matthew and John were brought to court. At the trial Pastor Son spoke on forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation. He saved all of the youths from the death sentence. He made a special request of the court concerning the boy who was responsible for informing

on Matthew and John- He asked if this boy could be his “replacement son.” He took him into his home and loved him as his own son.

How did Pastor Son do it? How did he overcome his mercy deficit disorder? He lived with a constant awareness that God had amazingly merciful to him. He was rich in mercy, therefore he had mercy to give when he was sinned against.

Back to my 3 questions:

1. How can I kill my inner attorney?
2. How can I get rid of my overwhelming desire for revenge?
3. How can I free people who have wronged me rather than hold them hostage?

I think that we do this through the “experience” of mercy. Not the one time experience of mercy that we get at the moment of conversion, as important as that is. It is the constant experience of mercy. Ezekiel 16:61 says something very interesting. Just after Ezekiel makes it abundantly clear that God is going to restore his people, he says to Israel, “you will remember your ways and be ashamed.” In verse 63 the prophet says, as a result of God establishing this covenant of forgiveness, “that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done.”

Pastor Son did not open his mouth against those who sinned against him because of his shame at his own sin. He was able to be merciful to those who killed his sons because he was constantly tasting God’s mercy to him. He was rich in mercy.

I remember as Michelle and I were really wrestling with a season of bitterness a friend of ours encouraged us by saying, “Steve and Michelle, we have no rights. We deserve hell. We are simply forgiven sinners. We need to be servants to those who sin against us because we have been served.” Suddenly we were ashamed, we were forgiven, and suddenly we were rich in mercy. It changed us. It activated something in us that allowed spill over in mercy rather than to shrivel up in revenge. But we need to keep looking back at our shame and his mercy...we need to remember his death and our new life in order to day to day be able to live as one who is rich in mercy.