

Explore the Bible Series for Dec. 4: Need for Mercy

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Need for Mercy

- Romans 9:1-6,14-24

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Sometimes it would be great to get 'this patience thing' finally worked out. Most of the people this minister knows are impatient. That would include the he himself. The clock is always ticking, there are too many things to do to be patient. Sometimes the prayer is, "Lord, help me not get behind this week so that I can keep up next week." After some defeats November 8th, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger admitted to his supporters how he is expecting too much too soon in California politics. The unsigned little rhyme says:

Patience is a virtue,

Possess it if you can.

Found seldom in a woman,

Never in a man.

Patience may be a virtue, but impatience drives the American psyche, not to mention its economy.

What if God was intolerant with Christians' impatience? Maybe he is, after all a part of Christian fruitfulness is 'patience.'" Christians are much more accepting of impatience than other Christian failures. Why does it get a free pass? Does it give the illusion of seriousness— people who are ready for business?

The earliest Gentile Christians were at various stages of frustration with the Jewish Christians and vice versa. Ironically, while personally taking an offering from the Gentile Christians to the Christians who live in Jerusalem, Paul takes the occasion in his letter to the Romans to talk about God's patience with all people. Today it seems Christians try to have patience with people who are not Christian. They will try to have patience with ignorance, but that patience comes in small quantities and only in short-lived bursts. Some may ask about a person who commits the same crime multiple times, "Why does God allow him to live?" Or if a person has had multiple opportunities to respond to the gospel but does not, "He does not deserve another chance." But, God's longsuffering is perplexing. It is also an example which calls believers to patience.

Reflect God's Concern (Romans 9:1-5)

Paul lets the believers in Rome inside his thinking about the Jewish people. He could be frustrated with his people, after having been rejected and the attempted murders on his life. His expression of belief shows his great emotions for them as well. Paul loves the Jewish people. He has great compassion on them, going so far as to say that he wishes he could somehow take their blinders off so they could see his Lord, Jesus Christ. As it stands, they only have a great heritage. It seems their advantage of having received the covenants, the temple, the law have not served to make receiving Christ easier, but harder.

This is to Paul's credit. The Lord's compassion toward his people beats now within Paul's chest. Paul reflects God's concern for them too.

Remember God's Mercy (Romans 9:6, 14-18)

The reason for Paul's concern is nothing less than the hope he sees in scripture. Israel's history demonstrates God's patience. God's word reflects it too. God is sovereign. He will decide when to close the book on each person. Paul sees God's mercy toward his people and is content to wait in eager expectation for God's plan to be fulfilled. These same Jews who are rejecting the message of Christ now, will find their ultimate purpose in Jesus Christ making them "true Israel" (6) Paul holds out expectation that God will complete his people as they receive Christ. Paul helps his readers to remember God's mercy.

Recognize God's Patience (Romans 9:19-24)

Paul anticipates that when he says "he [God] hardens" their hearts (18) there are those who say, "Aha!" God hardens people hearts, then who can blame them when they reject God? God's sovereignty does not do away with human responsibility. Paul answers this question with four of his own questions. (1) Who has the right to question God? (2) Who can ask, 'Why did you make me like this?' (3) Who can ask, 'Why are you doing this with me?' (4) What if he did this to make himself known to others too? God does not use his sovereignty for judgment, but demonstrates his love and patience with people. If God's purpose for hardening Jewish hearts is to allow time for Gentiles all over this world to receive Christ, then he has demonstrated his patience. He could have judged Jewish unbelief, but he chooses instead to show mercy and salvation to Gentiles and Jews. Paul helps his hearers to anticipate the result of his plan through his patience. That is Paul's hope, it is biblical hope, watching God's plan unfold in an awe inspiring future of fulfillment.

Christians show patient expectation in hope of God's continued work—without pronouncing judgment that God is finished with people. Jonah saw that God had a plan for Nineveh; he wrote the people of Nineveh off before God was done with them. People show they are children of God when they believe with hope and love people expectantly.

Discussion questions

- Describe God's patience with you. Does your patience look similar? How do you show mercy while holding convictions?
- What is difficult about letting God have his time with people who are not living toward God's standards?
- What are some possible ways to respond to them? What do you pray while responding to them?

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