

### God's Manifestations of His Mercy

“And, as Isaiah hath said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We had become as Sodom, and had been made like unto Gomorrah” (Romans 9:29 - ASV).

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The story has been told of the mother who visited Napoleon on behalf of her condemned son. The emperor told her the young man had committed the same offense twice, and justice demanded the death penalty. “But Sire,” she pleaded, “I don't ask for justice — only for mercy.” “He doesn't deserve it,” said Napoleon. “No, he doesn't,” she admitted, “but it would not be *mercy* if he deserved it.” “You're right!” said the ruler quickly, “I'll grant your request and show him mercy!”

In the day of judgement, when man stands before God, he is going to want mercy, not justice. For all are in need of God's mercy. Not one man stands righteous before God, but all have sinned and are in need of mercy (Romans 3:10, 23).

Jehovah God is a merciful God (Psalm 103:8; Ephesians 2:4-5). Yet, many have developed their own ideas of God's mercy. There are some who have developed the concept of universalism, i.e., that God will be merciful toward all without exception. This view sees God forgiving and saving all men in spite of what they believe and how they live. It matters not whether one is a blaspheming atheist or a faithful believer in God. Others have adopted the beliefs of Calvinism, that God alone decides without any reason given to man whether one is saved or lost. Keith Mosher, Sr. quoted Loraine Boettner from her book, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*:

This doctrine of eternal and unconditional election has sometimes been called the “heart” of the Reformed Faith. It emphasized the sovereignty and grace of God in salvation...In the Calvinistic system it is God alone who chooses those who are to be the heirs of heaven, those with whom He will share His riches in glory... (734)

Still others have chosen to teach the mercy of God based upon their own conditions rather than God's, e.g., faith only. They claim that as long as one believes in God and in Jesus as the Son of God, he will be saved.

The purpose of this lesson is to consider *God's Manifestations of His Mercy* based upon Paul's statement to the church at Rome, “And, as Isaiah hath said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We had become as Sodom, and had been made like unto Gomorrah” (Romans 9:29 - ASV). Paul was quoting from Isaiah 1:9. Three things will be observed as that statement is considered: 1) the demonstration of God's mercy toward Judah in the days of Isaiah and toward national Israel in Paul's day; 2) the conditional nature of God's mercy toward Judah and the nation of Israel in Paul's day; and 3) finally, the conditions of God's mercy toward all men.

### A Demonstration of God's Mercy

God's mercy was demonstrated toward the tiny nation of Judah. As mentioned before, Paul, in Romans 9:29, was quoting from Isaiah 1:9. At the time of that writing, Isaiah was describing the state of Judah, the people of God. By that time, Israel, the northern kingdom had probably been

taken into captivity never to return. Isaiah described Judah as a rebellious, sinful nation that had been left desolate from destruction as a result (Isaiah 1:2-8).

Likely the prophetic perfect tense is meant here [verses 7-9] as Isaiah describes in the grammatical present tense an apparently current condition in Judah. In other words, Isaiah seems to be using a literary device by which he speaks of a future state in Judah though describing it as a present state (Berard 50).

Judah, therefore, was set for destruction such as came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, which were totally destroyed by fire and brimstone (Genesis 19). Yet, God's mercy was manifested in that a very small remnant was to be spared.

God's mercy was also demonstrated toward national Israel in the days of Paul. That is seen by the application the Holy Spirit, through Paul, made of this quote in Romans 9:29. The Jews looked upon themselves as saved, as being God's people and in the right relationship with God based upon their heritage, being born Jews. For instance, on one occasion when Jesus was at the temple teaching, they responded, "We are Abraham's seed" (John 8:33 - ASV), "Abraham is our father" (John 8:39 - ASV). Yet, Jesus said they were children of the devil (John 8:44). John the baptizer had also warned them during his ministry that they should not rely upon their heritage of being of the physical seed of Abraham (Matthew 3:9). When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, the nation of Israel was no longer the chosen of God. Paul had a concern for them (Romans 9:2-3). They were lost and needed to be saved (Romans 10:1). However, God continued to demonstrate His mercy toward them, for not all Jews were lost. Paul was applying the quote from Isaiah to the situation of the nation of Israel in his day. There was a remnant that had been saved. God had not cast off all of His people, for Paul himself was an example (Romans 11:1). He went on to say, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5 - ASV). So God's mercy was manifested in that a remnant of national Israel was spared.

### **The Conditional Nature of God's Mercy**

Paul, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, made it very clear by quoting Isaiah 1:9 that God does not extend His mercy unconditionally to all (universalism). The fact that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the punishment of eternal fire because of their great wickedness (Jude 7) is ample evidence that universalism is not true. The one example provided in Paul's quote suffices to prove such. However, one can find many other statements in Scripture showing the same. Jesus, in His sermon on the mount, said that there is a choice of two paths that one might walk in life, the broad way through the wide gate and the straightened way through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14). The former leads to destruction, while the latter leads to life. That is not universalism.

Second, the conditional nature of God's mercy is seen in what Isaiah originally recorded regarding the nation of Judah (Isaiah 1:18-20). *If* they obeyed, they would eat the good of the land. Yet, *if* they refused and rebelled, they would be devoured of the sword. The word "if" indicates a conditional statement. God's mercy is conditional.

Thirdly, the conditional nature of God's mercy is seen in that he made known "the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23 - ASV). Those vessels of mercy were both Jews and Gentiles. One must understand that God did not choose national Israel for the purpose of salvation. They were chosen because of the oath made to Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:2). Abraham was chosen that God might fulfill His plan of salvation (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 22:18). That plan involved blessing those of all nations, not just Israel, through his seed, who was the Christ (Galatians 3:16). Paul indicated that not all descendants of Israel were Israel (Romans 9:6), meaning not all the Jews of his day were part of the spiritual Israel who was saved through the seed of Abraham. To the churches of Galatia Paul wrote, "And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29 - ASV). God's promise had not failed (Romans 9:6), it had just been misunderstood by the Jews. Paul pointed out that God was not unrighteous to choose as he did (Romans 9:8-14).

We must keep in mind that in this chapter we are dealing with selections which God made in connection with the carrying out of His purpose—the gradual development of God's plan. The selection was not a matter of personal salvation or personal condemnation. God selected the family of Abraham through whom to bring the Christ to the world. Of the sons of Abraham, God selected Isaac, and rejected Ishmael. Of the sons of Isaac, God selected Jacob, and rejected Esau. Of the sons of Jacob, God selected Judah. These selections were made by God, for reasons known only to Himself, and in spite of any desire and plans of Abraham with regard to Ishmael, and in spite of any desires and plans of Isaac and Esau, or of Jacob and Judah. (Deaver 348)

Paul then quoted from Exodus 33:19, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Romans 9:15 - ASV). In other words, the parameters of God's mercy are determined by God Himself, not by or based upon anything that any man can do (Romans 9:16). God does not, however, force His mercy or His will upon anyone unconditionally, as some might think. Paul makes that clear with the illustration of Pharaoh (Romans 9:17-18). There are sixteen references in Exodus to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Nine of those refer to Jehovah hardening Pharaoh's heart. Three refer to Pharaoh hardening his own heart. Four merely indicate that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. So how did all of this take place? Moses told Pharaoh Jehovah's word. Pharaoh refused to listen. Thus, God hardened his heart through His word. Yet, Pharaoh made the choice himself (Exodus 7:14, 23 and Exodus 9:17). God's power was going to be shown through Pharaoh. Yet, Pharaoh had a choice as to how. It could have been demonstrated by Pharaoh, the ruler (and considered a god) of the great kingdom of Egypt, yielding to God. Yet, it was shown by God demonstrating His power over Pharaoh and his gods. God chose the parameters through which he would deal with Pharaoh. Pharaoh's choices determined whether or not he would receive the mercy offered by God or be hardened. God does not force His will and His mercy upon any man. No one has the right to question and blame God for his plight (Romans 9:19-21). It is the potter that works the clay and forms it into a vessel. But the potter can only fashion the clay according to the consistency of the clay. The clay must yield to the hands of the potter. Yet, different clays have different qualities. Not all clays can be made into the same vessels, but different clays must be used for different purposes. "Each clay has its own distinct make-up, resulting in a different handling quality, colour, temperature range and plasticity, or workability" (Warshaw 14).

With all of this in mind, Paul's statement in Romans 9:22-23 will now be considered. God had endured with longsuffering the nation of the Jews, a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction (Romans 9:22) in order to bring about His overall plan, to "make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:23). Those vessels of mercy were those "afore prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23). Who were those vessels? Paul wrote, "even us" both Jews and Gentiles whom He called (Romans 9:24). Paul, here, is referring to those who were called by the gospel of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:14). After all, the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16 - ASV). It was before the foundation of the world that God determined the parameters of His mercy, that it would be in Christ that there would be an adoption of sons spiritually according to His will (Ephesians 1:4-5). Paul went on to explain that it was prophesied that the gentiles were to be included in God's plan (Romans 9:25-26), and it was prophesied that most Jews would reject His plan with only a remnant being saved (Romans 9:27-29). Thus, the conditional nature of God's plan is seen. God's grace appears to all with the instructions (Titus 2:11-12). Yet, as with Pharaoh, God allows every individual the right to make the choices. He will have mercy upon whom He will and whom He will He hardens (Romans 9:18). His plan, through Jesus the Lamb of God, is for all. All receive the same gospel plan, both Jew and Gentile. Some make the choice to accept the parameters or conditions God has given, and others are hardened by the same gospel and turn away.

### **The Conditions of God's Mercy Toward All Men**

Through God's plan, the Gentiles had attained the righteousness, the source of which is faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Most Jews stumbled over that same plan, hardened their heart and rejected it (Romans 9:30-33). Paul went on to show that the Jews could still attain unto that righteousness. For Christ was the very end, or purpose, of the law (Romans 10:4). The purpose of the law was to bring the Jew to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Righteousness was not attainable through the law. One would have to keep the law perfectly (Romans 10:5). The law could not justify, or make one alive spiritually (Galatians 3:21). What is said of that righteousness which is of faith? It is near, attainable through the word of faith which is preached (Romans 10:6-8). What does that word of faith indicate as God's conditions of salvation? It indicates that one must confess Jesus, believing that He is the resurrected Christ (Romans 10:9-10). This is true for both Jew and Gentile (Romans 10:11-12). That same word of faith indicates that one who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13). It is understood that there are many subjective ideas about calling on the name of the Lord, but would God leave mankind without a clear understanding of the conditions for receiving His mercy? Certainly, if He loves man enough to send His only begotten Son into the world that man might live (have eternal life) through Him (1 John 4:9), He would see to it that man has the full revelation of His conditions for mercy. If one studies the Scriptures, one will find God's own commentary on this concept of calling on the name of the Lord. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, was revealing to the Jews in Jerusalem God's conditions for receiving mercy. He quoted the same passage from Joel 2:32 that Paul quoted in Romans 10:13. As he preached, he said, "And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21 - ASV). He continued to preach about the Christ, how they had crucified Him and how God had raised Him from the dead in fulfillment of the prophetic scriptures. He then declared, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36 - ASV). When they heard this preaching, they were pricked in their heart and asked what they were to do (Acts 2:37). But had not Peter already told them that they could be saved by calling on the name of the Lord? He had. However, he had

not given God's explanation of what that meant. When they asked, he answered, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38 - ASV). Calling on the name of the Lord, therefore, includes repentance of sins and baptism. Their belief was evident by their question. They undoubtedly were ready to confess. But they needed to know how to call on the name of the Lord. This seems to be consistent with what Paul was told to do when he went into Damascus as he was instructed when the Lord appeared to him (Acts 9). According to Paul's own account, Ananias came to him and told him to "...be baptized, and wash away thy sins, *calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16 - ASV, emphasis TLM). It is interesting to note that on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, three thousand were baptized and added to the saved (Acts 2:42, 47). That sounds like a large number, which it is. Yet, history tells us that it was normal for hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Three thousand is relative. It was a very small number relative to the number in Jerusalem at the time. This is in keeping with the fact that very few Jews have turned in truth to accept God's mercy on His terms. This is also consistent with the prophecy quoted by Paul indicating Israel continued to be a disobedient people who would not hearken (Romans 10:16-21).

### Conclusion

It has been established that God manifested His mercy toward the tiny nation of Judah by sparing a very small remnant. It has been established that God manifested His mercy toward the Jews of Paul's day by sparing a remnant that was saved along with many Gentiles. It has been established that there were conditions that had to be met for that remnant of Judah to be spared by God's mercy. It has been established that there were conditions that had to be met for the remnant of physical Israel to be saved, or spared, by God's mercy in the days of Paul. It has been established that the conditions that had to be met by those Jews to receive God's mercy were the same conditions that had to be met by the Gentiles to receive God's mercy. It has also been established that those are the same conditions that must be met by those today who are to receive God's mercy. One must hear the word of faith, believe that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God, confess Him as Lord and Christ, and call on the name of the Lord by turning from his sins to God (repentance), and being baptized into Christ to have his sins forgiven, or washed away.

God has manifested His mercy.

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