

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Romans 11:13-15, 28-32 NIV2011)

Mercy for Us All

“So that he may have mercy on them all.” God’s desire is to have mercy not on a certain group. All. Every one. Easy enough to say. But realizing what that means for us and everyone else is something different. It’s not too difficult to slip into this “us-versus-them” mentality. After all, our sinful nature is obsessed and loves “me”—selfishness is not something you or I or anyone else had to learn. Then there’s the devil who loves to sow division. So we like to hear that God’s mercy is for all—as long as that includes me...us. It’s a different story when it also includes them; especially when it doesn’t seem like they are holding up their end of the deal. In Romans 11 it’s not hard to see how an “us-versus-them” mentality takes hold of both Jews and Gentiles. At first glance it can seem like it was meant to be this way.

Remember who the Jews are. These are all the people who come from the line of Abraham. Out of all the people in the world God chooses him. And it’s from his family, the Israelites—also known as the Jews—that the Savior of the world to come. And so God takes an insignificant person and makes him and his family significant. They were God’s special people and set apart as God’s own. It’s to them that God gives his gifts and promises. To them he gives the gift of his Law. They didn’t have to try and guess how to please God; He told them. To them God gives his blessing—“The Lord bless you and keep you...” To them God gives the gift of His Son. Those are the Jews.

The Gentiles are everyone else. They are the non-Jews. They are the people on the outside looking in at this strange nation that lives differently from everyone else with their own laws and customs. And the Jews look down on them. To the Jews, the Gentiles are 2nd rate. Jesus calls them dogs in Matthew 15. And, sorry, dog people out there, he’s not saying this affectionately as some like to see their pets as their “fur babies” and children. Jesus says the children and the dogs are entirely different levels: “It’s not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs” (Matthew 15:26). And no matter how powerless and small this nation of Jews might be, they look down on

those who weren't like them or weren't born into this line of Abraham. It's us against them.

But what happens? God's chosen people quickly forgot who they were as they reject God's gifts and promises. They break his Law. They take advantage of his blessing. Instead of relying on him, they think they can save themselves. And if that wasn't bad enough, they reject Jesus and have him ruthlessly executed by the Romans who they utterly hate.

But God works their stubborn rejection into his plan to save and the Jew's disobedience brings reconciliation to the world. By Jesus' work of living and dying, perfect and innocent, mankind's broken relationship with God is fixed. It's no longer us vs. them who are people of God. God has reconciled the world to himself through his Son Jesus. In mercy does not treat us as our sins deserve but by Jesus and through Jesus mankind is now right with God. That broken relationship caused by disobedience is made whole. The disobedient are saved.

But the Jews want nothing to do with it. They didn't want Jesus to be the Chosen One in the first place; that's why they killed him. So why would they want Jesus to be the one who saves them? And so they reject God's promise, God's gift, and God's mercy.

But again, God uses their stubbornness into his gracious plan—their disobedience brings mercy to the Gentiles. Now the tables have turned. Now the Gentiles were the chosen ones—God had chosen to send Paul to them. Now they have the promise!

But what to do about the Jews? It would make sense that God should turn his back on them completely. After all, as far as the sharing of the Gospel and Good News, the Jews were enemies. They actively had tried to snuff it by persecuting Christians, throwing families into jail, stoning Stephen. Paul had more than enough personal experience at this persecution done to him. And then, on top of it all, they killed Jesus! They had their chance and they blew it. How quickly the Gentiles too seem to be forgetting who they were.

We wouldn't act that way would we? We know better. We know God wants all people to be saved. You know God loved the world. That means all people. We know sin is a sin is a sin and all is equally damning in God's sight. At the same time, you know that Jesus forgives all sin equally. You already know these things. But do you realize what this means? This means God's mercy and love is for the police defending the streets as well as the individuals rioting in the streets and burning down businesses. It's for the person who performs or has had an abortion. It's for the drunk driver who killed the teenager. He gives it to the drug addict who is looking for their next fix. God has mercy and loves them too. Don't forget the person who has a different political view from you. This includes the person who has a different world-view from you and different

priorities. This means the person who has rejected God and believes in no one but himself. This means the delinquent member who hasn't been back in some time. God has mercy on all of them.

Maybe you already know this. But as a misbehaving child knows what to do but fails to do it, so you and I may know God's will but fail to live it. You see that in how you might treat those who are on the outside of your cliques and social groups; they're different from you. You hear it by the way you talk about those individuals who do not live the same way you do. You see it with the posts you share online. It becomes more evident with whom you are willing to talk about Jesus. Have you decided someone is a lost cause?

Have we forgotten who we were at one time? Instead it can seem like we act like we are the chosen ones who can ignore certain sins because we didn't do a specific one. At least I'm in church, does it matter if I'm paying that close of attention? It's not that big of deal that I feel that way about someone, is it? Do you find yourself relying on your own gifts and talents you use to serve God as to why he should let slide that time you lost your patience? Should he look the other way when that service was done because you knew it would make you look good? Are you hoping that your own promises of doing better next time will convince God to ignore how you fell into that sin again?

Understand: God being merciful does not mean he condones, ignores, or excuses the sinful action. It doesn't give free license to do whatever you want. Those who do not confess their sinfulness reject their need for a Savior from sin and his gifts. Those who continue in their sin reject His mercy. Everyone has been bound and is locked up in the prison called disobedience. Notice, Paul doesn't point to a specific action that locks you up in this prison. It's just disobedience—an unwillingness or refusal to comply with the demands of the authority. And everyone knows it: nobody is perfect. But instead of excusing, this only condemns. For whether it's written on your conscience or it was written on the stone tablets at Mount Sinai, we should know better. And God demands better. So for our disobedience God binds us all because God is just. And no matter how much we shake those bars screaming "Unfair" or, "You expect too much," it will not set you free. Even if you try to defend yourself, standing in the courtroom with your evidence of morally good behavior, God the judge says, "It's not enough. It doesn't outweigh all your disobeying. Plus, I didn't say make up for it; I demand zero disobedience. But what condemns you isn't just that you did bad things—those are symptoms of the far worse problem. You are condemned because this is what you are by nature—not good people. Disobedient."

But here's the thing: God doesn't confine us and put us in that prison called "Disobedience" expecting you to get out on our own. Rather, he put us there to see we

can't. He leaves us there so we confess we won't. And all we can do is fall down confessing, "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner. Do not treat me as my disobedience deserves."

And that's when Jesus comes to unlock your door and sets you free saying, "God has been merciful on you a sinner. This has always been God's plan! While you were lost in your disobedience the Father gave me, his one and only Son. While you were still a sinner, I died for you. What you could not do on your own, I did perfectly. And for my sake, because I have lived and died, your sins are forgiven and taken from you. God the Father cannot treat you as your sins deserve. He's already punished me. I have set you from Satan's prison. The devil has no power over you—I crushed his head. I have broken you out from slavery to sin. It does not control you. Death's strong chains won't keep you bound to the grave. Because I live you too will live with me." God puts you into prison to set you free with his mercy.

And that's how God promises to keep treating you until he calls you home. He does not treat you as your sins deserve, but he loves you in mercy. It's not because you've done so many great, grand, glorious things. God gives his gifts and promises freely without regrets because Jesus take your sins away. Because he loves you. Because that's what he promised he would do for you the moment the water and Word touched your head at your baptism. He promised from that day until your last day on earth he would give you his mercy and love. That's what he assures you of as you come to the Lord's Supper: "I'm still not treating you as your sins deserve. Though you daily sin much, for the sake of my Son's body and blood given and poured out for you, your sins are forgiven."

It's God's mercy working in us that moves us to share his mercy with others. You do this at home with your spouse and children. You do it at work in how you treat your coworker. You show this mercy in how you talk about the unrest that is in our nation today. You look at Paul here and he is not willing to give up on his people after all that they had done. We pray the Lord work in our hearts with his merciful love that we do not give up sharing Jesus' love. It's not us versus them. It's still God's mercy for us all. Amen.