

God's Longsuffering Romans 9:22-24 (NKJV)

22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

As we have seen the last few weeks, God is sovereign over all His creatures and all of creation.

And as we know men are sinners and deserving of God's wrath, but God is merciful to whom He will be merciful and whom He wills He hardens.

The question then is why does He still find fault if it all works out as He has planned?

I like the way that Warren Wiersbe introduces this section.

“But this fact of God's sovereign will only seems to create a new problem. “If God is sovereign, then who can resist Him? And if one does resist Him, what right does He have to judge?” It is the age-old question of the justice of God as He works in human history.

“I recall sharing in a street meeting in Chicago and passing out tracts at the corner of Madison and Kedzie. Most of the people graciously accepted the tracts, but one man took the tract and with a snarl crumpled it up and threw it in the gutter. The name of the tract was “Four Things God Wants You to Know.”

“There are a few things I would like God to know!” the man said. “Why is there so much sorrow and tragedy in this world? Why do the innocent suffer while the rich go free? Bah! Don't tell me there's a God! If there is, then God is the biggest sinner that ever lived!” And he turned away with a sneer and was lost in the crowd. *Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 544.*

There is the natural man's real response to God. He is to blame for everything wrong.

But Paul explains that God has several attributes that He wants to display for His glory.

And we find them in this section.

I. His wrath

A. Defined

1. WRATH — the personal manifestation of God's holy, moral character in judgment against sin. Wrath is neither an impersonal process nor irrational and fitful like anger. It is in no way vindictive or malicious. It is holy indignation—God's anger directed against sin. *Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).*

2. God's wrath is the proper response of God toward the sinner because of his sin.
 - a. De 9:8 "Also in Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry enough with you to have destroyed you."
 3. Ex 32:10 "Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."
 4. After the destruction of Pharaoh and his armies the children of Israel sing.
 - a. Ex 15:7 And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble.
- B. God's wrath is from His holiness.
1. If God was not holy He would not be angry about sin.
 2. His wrath would not be promised to the wicked.
 3. God's holiness and wrath is seen most dramatically in that He required the sacrifice of His own Son in order to bring us forgiveness of sins.
- C. But why does not God put to death the sinner early in life rather than putting up with him for decades?
1. We will answer that question in a minute.
- D. God's wrath brings Him glory.
- II. His power
- A. God's power is seen in His mighty works.
1. Creation.
 2. Wrath, the flood.
 3. His defeating Satan, sin and death.
 4. His power is seen when He does the impossible.
- B. God's power is seen around us all the time every day.
1. Ps 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.
 2. Man with all his technology cannot produces a single blade of grass.
 3. We cannot stop a storm or even a gentle breeze.
 4. We have to build the Hadron Collider 17 miles in circumference and we

accelerate protons to a collision of speed almost twice the speed of light because that is the only way we can break down the force that binds it together.

5. Col 1:17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Are held together)

C. We give Him glory for His power over death, the power to raise the dead.

III. His longsuffering

A. Why does God not just destroy the sinners sooner rather than later.

1. Or as Blake once asked, "Why doesn't God just get rid of Satan?"
2. There are two main reasons.
 - a. He allows the sinner to become more sinful so that there is no question concerning His wrath against sinners.
 - b. Ge 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.
 - c. The Amorites were sinners no doubt, but they would continue to become more and more sinful until the day of Joshua when God would command the Israelites to destroy them all.
3. "God's dealing with Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus is a prototype for God's patience as described by Paul. How many times could God have justifiably struck down the ruler of Egypt because of his insolence? Yet, in order that Pharaoh might see the glory of God in redeeming the least of the land of Egypt, he allowed Pharaoh to live. Pharaoh witnessed the plagues, the pillar of fire, the parting of the Red Sea, the granting of miraculous powers to his adopted Hebrew son, and most of all, the redemption (think "calling" in Rom. 8:30) of a people so despised in Pharaoh's sight that the Egyptians would not even eat with them (Gen. 43:32; 46:34). *Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, Romans, vol. 6, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000),*
4. Therefore: "Patience is a most personal quality. Vessels of wrath "presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience" and do "not know that God's kindness is meant to lead . . . to repentance," and in so doing "the hard and impenitent heart" stores up wrath for "the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed," to borrow words already discussed (2:4-5; cf. 2 Peter 3:9). *The Broadman Bible Commentary 1970; Vol 10.*
5. **Romans 2:4-5** (NKJV) 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God

leads you to repentance? 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

6. Also the children of Israel:

a. “So also, under all their provocations in the wilderness during the space of forty years, and under all their apostasies from Him in the land of Canaan for the space of fifteen hundred years, He might, if He had seen fit, have destroyed them: To say the least, He did them no injury in bearing with them until, by the crucifixion of their Messiah, they had "filled up the measure of their own and their fathers' iniquities." *Donald Grey Barnhouse*

b. “He may continue to cultivate the barren fig tree year after year, if He be so pleased, in order to show more clearly its incurable sterility. *Donald Grey Barnhouse*

B. The second reason is that He will have mercy eventually upon some.

1. Paul is a case in point.

a. 1 Timothy 1:15-16 (NKJV) 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

b. Yet God was patient with Paul. Instead of striking him down, God suffered him to march along his own self-righteous path, heaping sin upon sin, until at last God called him to faith in the Jesus he was persecuting. God did it so the horror of Paul’s earlier conduct might form a more striking contrast to the grace, mercy, and glory of God that he afterward received. *James Montgomery Boice, Romans: God and History, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 1111.*

2. 2 Peter 3:15 (NKJV) 15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

IV. His mercy

A. Romans 3:25-26 (NKJV) 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one

who has faith in Jesus.

- B. Psalm 86:15 (NKJV) 15 But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.
- C. Isaiah 30:18 (NKJV) 18 Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him.

V. All for His glory

Martin Luther said to Erasmus: "Mere human reason can never comprehend how God is good and merciful; and therefore you make to yourself a god of your own fancy, who hardens nobody, condemns nobody, pities everybody. You cannot comprehend how a just God can condemn those who are born in sin, and cannot help themselves, but must, by a necessity of their natural constitution, continue in sin, and remain children of wrath. The answer is, God is incomprehensible throughout, and therefore His justice, as well as His other attributes, must be incomprehensible. It is on this very ground that St. Paul exclaims, "O the depth of the riches of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Now, His judgments would not be past finding out, if we could always perceive them to be just. (See Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston [Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957], pp. 314-15) *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.*

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV) 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

“In other words, rather than destroying the nonelect immediately, he bears with them patiently in order that they might see the riches of his glory as revealed in his actions toward the objects of his mercy.”

Donald Grey Barnhouse has some good comments:

THE GOLDEN CALF

In like manner, the nation of Israel might justly have been cut off when they renounced their allegiance to God and worshipped the golden calf. God might, without any impeachment of His justice, have executed the threatened judgment of destroying instantly that rebellious nation and raising up another from the loins of Moses. But He saw fit to exercise mercy toward them and to impart to them yet more abundant communications of His grace and favor. Surely in this He did them no injury. So also, under all their provocations in the wilderness during the space of forty years, and under all their apostasies from Him in the land of Canaan for the space of fifteen hundred years, He might, if He had seen fit, have destroyed them: To say the least, He did them no injury in bearing with them until, by the crucifixion of their Messiah, they had "filled up the measure of their own and their fathers' iniquities." God's foreknowledge of how much they would abuse His mercies was no reason why He should not exercise mercy toward them. By His patience and forbearance, His mercy was displayed; and by their accumulated guilt and aggravated condemnation, His indignation against sin and His power to avenge it were the more conspicuously displayed. We may say the same in reference to any person or number of persons; God is not bound to cut them off the moment they sin against Him; He may continue to cultivate the barren fig tree year after year, if He be so pleased, in order to show more clearly its incurable sterility.

GOD'S DEALING WITH HIS CHILDREN

So also He may pursue a similar line of conduct toward the vessels of mercy, in order ultimately to "make known upon them the riches of His glory." God was not compelled to bring Abraham out from his family and his country while he was yet a child. God was at liberty to leave him (as He did) bowing down to sticks and stones like all the rest around him, until the hour had arrived which He in His secret counsel had appointed for His effectual calling. Nor, when God called Abraham, was He compelled to call other Gentiles at the same time. He was at liberty to leave them to their own ways until the time of the Messiah in order to show more fully that "the world by wisdom knew not God," and that, if left to themselves, nothing but universal ruin would follow.

When we consider the life of Paul, we have the same truth illustrated. Paul tells us, twice, that God had separated him as a chosen vessel even from his mother's womb. Yet, in spite of this, God left him for many years to his own ways, even to the committing of murder. Was God unjust in this? Was there any obligation binding God to Paul earlier than He

did? Was not God free to allow Paul to go on, deceived, until the enormity of his conduct could furnish a more solid contrast to the grace of God which becomes more glorious when we see it exercised in such a way, on such a man, and at such a time? Consider also the thief whom God saved when he was dying beside Christ on the cross. Certainly God was at liberty to allow him to continue in his course of robbery and murder up to the very last hour of his life, in order that He might show, even in the moment of dying, that grace could come to the worst of sinners at the eleventh hour in their life span if God so desired it. In acting as He acted, God did not injure those whom He thus blessed, nor did He injure those whom He did not save; they were already in the provision for which they had fitted themselves. If God had not saved Abraham, Paul, or the thief on the cross, He would certainly not have done them any injustice, for they deserved nothing of Him.

God allowed misery and sin and death to proceed on their terrible way in order that when He moved to deliver someone from them, His own grace and power might shine forth all the more brightly. Thus it was that Christ, though He had the power to heal Lazarus at a distance, allowed him to sicken and die, and allowed his body to be corrupted for four days. He did this on purpose so that His own power might be the more abundantly visible and glorious. *Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans.*

It should be remembered that the revelation of wrath is just as necessary for the moral education of man as the revelation of mercy. They are in fact the two sides of the shield.

. . . not 'destined for wrath' but fit only to exhibit or effect wrath (cf. S. H.). They have become so fit, by their own neglect of what they could know of GOD (cf. 1:18) *R. St. John Parry, ed., The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 133.*

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2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV) 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

1 Peter 3:20 (NKJV) 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

But that is not the only purpose. The patience of God is also displayed so that those whom God is calling to faith might have space to repent. Both purposes are good. The second purpose is gracious. *James Montgomery Boice, Romans: God and History, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991-), 1109.*