

God lovingly stretches out his hands to sinners. We see this demonstrated in Eric's testimony today! (Thank you Eric...) What we see evidenced in Eric's life... has been the subject of our study in Romans.

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In Romans chapter 11... we saw that Israel rejected God... so the gospel went out to the Gentiles. However... one day the blessing is going to return to Israel and there will be a great national repentance. ... God lovingly stretches out his hands to sinners.

In these closing moments... I am going to use Eric's testimony as a springboard for us to briefly dive into the final verses of Romans chapter 11. ... (We aren't going to dive too deep. We will just take a little swim.)

Eric's story is the story of God's mercy. (God lovingly stretches out His hands to sinners.) Paul's point in these last verses is that God desires to show mercy to all. ... God's desire is to pour out His mercy on both Jews and Gentiles — which is LITERALLY all people – everywhere!

Earlier (in this same letter to the Romans) Paul concluded, "*All people (whether Jews or Gentiles) are under the power of sin.*"

Romans 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Why is this important? Why do we need to know this?

We all stand guilty and under the judgment of God. ... No one... (neither Jew nor Gentile) – and remember that's everyone... including you and me... can lay claim to His favor — no one deserves it. The only hope for salvation lies in God's mercy.

As Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome... many Gentiles were coming to depend on this mercy... and were being saved. Israel as a nation... (which had been followers YHWH)... no longer followed. The Jews rejected God... by killing the Messiah that they were waiting for God to send to them.

But God is going to save them (anyway) and Paul writes down the principle by which God saves both Jew and Gentile: it is by mercy. ... Just as God showed mercy to the Gentiles... He will (in the future) show mercy to the nation Israel.

God lovingly stretches out his hands to sinners. All sinners (who ignore and disobey Him!) This is tremendous news.

Romans 11:30-32

Did you happen to catch how often Paul used the term “mercy” in these three verses...? ... (FOUR times!) ... The Apostle rarely repeated himself... so this is remarkable. The Greek word is *eleos* (“mercy.”) In Hebrew it is *hesed* (which describes the unrelenting... inexplicable... overwhelming grace of God for His covenant people.) ... The Greek term... as well as the Hebrew... is filled with emotion... referring to God's fondness to relieve our misery.

But the Apostle also used another word four times in the same space. The word is “*apeitheia*” which my Bible translates as “*disobedience*.” But the literal meaning is “the condition of being *un-persuadable*” or “obstinate.”

Two words! Interchangeably used! And both are packed with strong emotion. Because both words are emphasized like this... I suggest that there is something very important for us to see... and it is this:

To appreciate mercy - we must see it against the dark background of sin. It is only in the context of disobedience that mercy has relevance and meaning. ... For God to show mercy... there must *with it* be the recognition of sin and the misery that attends it. ... And that is exactly our condition as fallen human beings. ... Sin *abounds!* ... But it is precisely in that context and against that dark and stormy background that the mercy of God flashes BRIGHT like lightning.

Verse 32 presents this dark and stormy background... and the bright light of God's mercy... displayed in sharp contrast. It shows that man has chosen sin... choosing to go his own way in life. ... So God allows man to do his own thing. ... God locks man up in his own world of selfishness... allowing man to roam around in his world of sin. Why? ... He allows man to be who he is... so that His mercy would be *obvious* against the dark and stormy nature of man's sinfulness.

Frankly... I don't understand His motivation. Why would a holy God ever want to show such unmerited kindness to creatures who have *not only* rebelled... but are continuously resistant to His offer of love... mercy... and

grace? ... It makes no sense. But such is the nature of God's mercy. It cannot be explained... only received with gratitude as one in great need.

So... Paul breaks out in worship. It is all he can do. ... God's mercy is beyond our understanding.

Romans 11:33-36

Paul writes with amazement, "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the... knowledge of God.*" He is admitting that God's knowledge is so much greater than ours that we can only stand in awe of it.

How impossible it is for us to understand God's decisions and God's ways! We are unable fully to comprehend either the mind of God or the mysteries of life. In the end... all we can do is bow in submission to Him as Lord and give Him our praise.

(On the other-hand) as long as we are merely thinking about how God knows about things or other people... the idea of His perfect knowledge is not very disturbing to us. ... But when we consider that God also knows about us — ALL about us... we can get anxious... maybe even panicky! ... We do not mind an "ignorant God"... or a God who forgets. ... But what are we to do with a God "*before whom all hearts are open - all desires known*"? ... Such a God can be very threatening.

We can never fool Him (pull the wool over His eyes.) He knows our every imperfection and sinful thought! He is fully aware of our darkest (deepest) secrets. But because of His mercy... we need to be humble and very honest before Him. He knows it anyway.

God's perfect knowledge should comfort us. God intimately knows us. He knows the **worst** about us and He extends His hands of mercy to us anyway. ... And... He knows the **best** about us... even when other people do **not**... and blame us for things that are not our fault.

Now here is something **else** that is very comforting about God's perfect knowledge. We don't need to know all the reasons **why(?)** to all of our hardships. The Lord has all knowledge and all power... and He will always do what is right.

I don't know why a young mother (of two boys) who is a member of our church is suffering from a brain tumor. Why would God allow that to happen? I don't know. I have no explanations. Why would God allow our sister (Ann) to suffer so long with a broken neck? I don't know. ... I don't need to know why... and yet with these (and my own personal difficulties) I can affirm (even still)... that God is good and that He has knowledge and wisdom that is well beyond my comprehension.

Do you remember Hagar (Abraham's concubine who gave birth to Ishmael)? ... Early in the story... Hagar was so badly mistreated by Sarah (Abraham's wife) that she decided to run away. ... God appeared to her to say that He knew what she was suffering... but that she should return to Sarah and submit to her. ... As a result of this revelation... Hagar gave a new name to God... which is translated best as... "*You are the God who sees me*" (Gen. 16:13). ... It was a comfort to Hagar to know that God saw her and knew about her suffering. ... *God's perfect knowledge should also comfort us.*

If you are in difficult circumstances and no one on earth either sees or cares... remember that God sees and cares... and that (if you are a true Christian) He will make it all up to you one day.

Now... so far I have (mainly) been speaking to Christians... whose sins have already been judged in Jesus Christ. They can say thankfully, as Paul does in Romans, "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the... knowledge of God.*" But I cannot leave this subject without applying it also to those who are not Christians.

If you are not yet a believer... let me remind you that you have sinned and that you have sinned in the face of God. You have sinned knowingly... willfully... blatantly... and repeatedly. ... God is a holy God. How do you suppose you will be able to escape His judgment on the day when you stand before Him?

Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

What will you do in the day of God's judgment when your sins will be read out? "How does God know *that?*" you will ask. "And *that?* And *that?* I had almost forgotten it myself." On that day you will be humiliated... confounded... speechless... and overwhelmed... as God unfolds the records of your sinful past life... page after page and paragraph after paragraph.

"*Stop!*" you will cry. ... But it will not stop until every sinful thought... every evil deed... every curse... every theft... every sexual sin (merely thought or

actually committed)... every lie... every neglect of what you should have done... is read out and justly judged.

I counsel you: Do not wait for that day. Jesus died so that sinners (just like you) might be saved from judgment. The way to escape God's judgment is to come to Jesus... to believe on Him...trust Him... give your life to Him... follow Him... and serve Him. ... I tell you on the authority of God's Word that if you believe on Jesus Christ and truly trust Him, "you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

God lovingly stretches out his hands to sinners. Come and submit your life under His almighty hand.