


Living Under God's Mercy

Teaching Tips

August 14, 2016

Bible Study Guide 11

Words You Should Know

A. Show mercy ([Romans 9:16](#)) *elaeo* (Gk.)—To show compassion, extend help for the consequence of sin. 

B. Harden (v. 18) *skleruno* (Gk.)—To become inflexible, dried out, obstinately stubborn, resisting what God says is right.

Unifying Principle—To Know Self. People's need for healthy self-worth and self-esteem creates a longing to know who they are and where they came from. Besides ancestry, what other connections with the past and people determine who they are? Paul said all those who trust in God and what Jesus Christ has done for them, by God's mercy, will become God's new creatures in Jesus Christ.

A. Read the Focus Verses in the two translations along with the student lesson.

B. When you think of being God's child and a part of His family, how does this change your relationships and feelings?

C. Read More Light on the Text and highlight additional information.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Ask: How many students remember the Black power movement back in the '60s? Did this movement lack a Christian emphasis? Discuss your answer.

B. Read Aim for Change and Keep in Mind together. Ask someone to pray for the class, that students will better understand God's graciousness in accepting them into His family.

C. Read the In Focus story. How is Dante's message helpful to today's generation?

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Put the At-A-Glance outline on the board and read In Depth.

B. Ask students to identify ideas or concepts that were new.

C. Break up the class into small groups to discuss Search the Scriptures.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. With the students still in their groups, complete Discuss the Meaning, Lesson in Our Society, and Make It Happen.

Have one student from each group report the answers.

B. Attempt to summarize the students' answers and refer to the Lesson Aim.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Ask a couple of students to share a highlight of the lesson.

B. Close with prayer and ask if anyone is willing to share what he or she learned today and will take away and apply.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Living Under God's Mercy

Song: "Oh Lord Have Mercy"

Devotional Reading: [James 5:7–12](#)



Bible Background • [ROMANS 9:6–29](#)



Printed Text • [ROMANS 9:6–18](#) | Devotional Reading • [JAMES 5:7–12](#)



Aim for Change



By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** the details of Paul's teaching about who are the true descendants and inheritors of God's promise; **FEEL** a strong familial connection to the people of God as inheritors of the promise God intended from creation; and **PROCLAIM** God as the author and reason for all the good we do in order that God may be glorified.

In Focus

Dante sat down on his front steps and looked across the street at the thugs going in and out of his neighbor Ricky's house. Cars full of random people were also pulling up and buying drugs. Ever since Dante and his family had moved to the neighborhood, Ricky and his friends were in and out of jail. Dante badly wanted to share Christ with them, but he worried they would laugh at him and reject the Gospel. Maybe they were beyond the Gospel's reach. Suddenly, Ricky came out of the house and started walking toward Dante. "What's up, Dante?" Ricky said. "Everything's good, man," Dante said. "Listen," Ricky said, "I know you be going to church and stuff, I wonder if you mind throwing up a prayer for me?"

Dante couldn't cover his sense of shock. "I know you surprised that I would ask you that, but thugs need Jesus too," Ricky said. Dante knew that this moment had come from God. He had judged Ricky and written him off as someone whom God could not save. "Let's pray right now," Dante said. As the two young men bowed their heads on the steps, they also attracted the attention of the other gang members across the street. Dante hoped that even this time of prayer would be a seed sown not just for Ricky but for all of those guys he once believed were excluded from God's mercy.

In this lesson, we will learn that it is God who decides to show mercy and who will inherit His promises. In what ways can we include certain people as recipients of God's mercy?

Keep in Mind

“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” ([Romans 9:18](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Romans 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:



7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;

11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

NLT

Romans 9:6 Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel? No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God's people!



7 Being descendants of Abraham doesn't make them truly Abraham's children. For the Scriptures say, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted," though Abraham had other children, too.

8 This means that Abraham's physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham's children.

9 For God had promised, "I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

10 This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins.

11 But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that God chooses people according to his own purposes;

12 he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, “Your older son will serve your younger son.”

13 In the words of the Scriptures, “I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.”

14 Are we saying, then, that God was unfair? Of course not!

15 For God said to Moses, “I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.”

16 So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it.

17 For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, “I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth.”

18 So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen.

The People, Places, and Times

Him that wills. A person who wants to be saved. This person thinks he can choose eternal life based merely on a willingness to be saved. He believes the salvation process leans heavily on man’s free will and choices, but God does not give salvation based on desire.

Him that runs. A person who is working toward salvation. This person thinks, “I can be good, I’ve done all these good things, I’ve got my list and I’m getting into heaven, my good is going to outweigh my bad,” but God does not give salvation based on good works.

Pharaoh. The common reference to rulers in Egypt. The word means “the sun.” Several pharaohs are mentioned throughout the Scriptures. The Pharaoh during the time of Abraham ([Genesis 12:15](#)), about 2081 B.C., was Salatis. The Pharaoh who appointed Joseph second in command to oversee the famine crisis in Egypt, was Apepi, 1876–1850 B.C. ([Genesis 41:1](#)). The Pharaoh 400 years later who claimed to have no knowledge of Joseph and the promises given to the Hebrews, therefore enslaving the growing Israelite population, was Amois (or Ahmes) or some identify him as Ramses II, 1340 B.C. ([Exodus 1:8](#)).



Background

Although many believe the book of Romans to be a Gospel tract, it is so much more. Essentially a missionary book, it outlines the mission of God to bless all the peoples of the world through Christ. It explains how God’s promise to Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ’s death and resurrection. Here in Romans, Paul lays out the plan of God and how it encompasses not only the Jewish people but also the Gentiles who believe in the Good News of Jesus.

Through Abraham and his line, God blesses the world. This blessing of Abraham did not come through his own effort or ability, but God and His mercy. God’s plan to bless the world is dependent on His mercy to save those He chooses. It is not dependent on our ethnic status or good works. Here in [Romans 9](#), Paul addresses those Jews who do not want to accept believing Gentiles and what it means to be the elect of God—to be a recipient of His immeasurable mercy.



At-A-Glance

1. God’s Mercy, Not Human Ethnicity ([Romans 9:6–9](#))

2. God’s Mercy, Not Human Effort (vv. 10–13)

3. God’s Mercy, Not Human Understanding (vv. 14–18)



In Depth

1. God's Mercy, Not Human Ethnicity ([Romans 9:6–9](#))



Because the Gentile believers in Rome were struggling both with acceptance from their fellow Jewish believers and with thinking they had somehow supplanted the Jews as God's people, Paul reminds everyone in the Roman church that all are God's people due to God's mercy alone. On the one hand, some of the Gentiles thought that they had replaced the Jews as God's people since not all Jews believed in Jesus. On the other hand, some of the Jews thought that it was necessary to be born into God's people to be a part of the promise.

Paul strongly rejects both these claims. He goes on to state that Abraham had more than one son, but only one was an heir of the promise of God—Isaac. His birth was a miracle because Abraham and Sarah were past ninety years old. He was born through the promise of God. The other sons of Abraham were connected to him biologically, but God had given Isaac through supernatural means. The children of Isaac would be counted as the heirs of Abraham and thus the chosen people of God.

Paul concludes that it was God's mercy and not physical ancestry that makes one a child of Abraham. It is this understanding that enables us to praise God, as we do not deserve His salvation. It is only because of His mercy that we are counted as His children. Those who believe in Christ are children of promise just like Isaac.

2. God's Mercy, Not Human Effort (vv. 10–13)

Paul continues his argument with the example of Jacob and Esau. Although Esau was the oldest, God favored Jacob. God's favor was given to Jacob before either of the children were born, before he could do anything good or bad. Jacob's life is full of sin and failure. It wasn't his human effort that made him a recipient of God's favor, but God's mercy.

A further reference is given to Jacob being loved by God and Esau being hated. This statement is shocking at face value. Not only did God choose Jacob over Esau, but He loved Jacob and hated Esau. Esau had done nothing in the womb to merit this hatred, nor Jacob to merit this favor. It strongly supports Paul's argument that God's mercy is not about our works, but God's purpose as He is free to choose whomever He wants to receive His favor.

3. God's Mercy, Not Human Understanding (vv. 14–18)

God's mercy on some and judgment on others may lead one to believe that He is unfair. Paul responds to this by saying "God forbid." God is not beholden to our standards of righteousness; we are not His judges. He will distribute His mercy and compassion as He wills, not by our choice or efforts.

As an example Paul sets up Pharaoh as a case study. God kept Pharaoh alive and well to accomplish His purpose, which was to showcase His mighty hand. The Scripture clearly testifies to God being superior over Pharaoh. The news about the greatness of Israel's God was reported throughout the entire world; every kingdom marveled and trembled at Him ([Joshua 2:9–11](#); [1 Samuel 4:8](#)). He used Pharaoh's hardened heart to extend compassion toward Israel and display His power, now extended to all those whom God had chosen, including the Gentiles.



Search the Scriptures



1. Why is it impossible to obtain salvation by thinking or working as hard as one can ([Romans 9:16](#))?
2. How did Pharaoh showcase God's power to the rest of the world (v. 17)?
3. What is the difference between a heart that received God's mercy and a hard heart?



Discuss the Meaning

Those who accept Christ as Savior now live in God's family and abide under His merciful hand. Those who deny Christ and refuse to accept His payment for their sin now live under God's wrath. What are the underlying reasons for people hardening their heart to God's mercy?

Lesson in Our Society

Many people believe that they are God's chosen people based on their wealth or status in society. Others believe that their good works and charitable donations make them targets of God's blessings. Contrary to these opinions, it is God who chooses to distribute His mercy on those whom He wills. If this is the case, then we cannot dismiss the unbelievers in our lives as outside of the scope of God's mercy. It is God who decides and not us.

Make It Happen

A hard heart can slowly form in our lives without even realizing it. Consider how open you are to believing God's Word, which can indicate whether our hearts are hardened to God ([Hebrews 3:8–12](#)). You could be beginning to develop a hard heart toward God and His mercy. Pray that the Lord would develop in you a soft heart for His mercy in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

Romans 9:6–18

In [Romans 9:1-5](#), Paul addresses his fellow Jews who resist joining his evangelization of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul constantly faced criticism and rejection from some of his fellow Jews, and Paul himself had persecuted those who believed in Christ until his vision on the road to Damascus. Once he answered his call to be an apostle to the Gentiles, he struggled with those Jews who thought that Gentile believers had to conform to the whole Mosaic Law (see especially Galatians). Here in Romans he addresses those Jewish believers in Christ who are unwilling to do what God has ultimately called the Jews to do through Christ—bring God's promise to the Gentiles. Here in vv. 6-18 Paul reminds both the Gentiles and the Jews that all are a part of God's people because of God's promise and mercy alone, retelling the story of Jacob and Esau as a reminder that heritage is not the assurance for being God's people. Instead, God's mercy and faith in God's mercy are what make both Jews and Gentiles members of God's people.

6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

Beginning from verse 6, Paul contends that God had not abandoned His purpose in electing the nation Israel, strongly denying that God's Word—His promise to bless Israel as the descendants of Abraham ([Genesis 12:1–2](#))—had failed. Paul then makes a distinction between the physical descendants of Abraham and the children of promise, arguing that their identities must not be confused. In other words, not everyone descended from the patriarch Israel (i.e., Jacob) belonged to Israel, the people of God, nor because they have descended from Abraham are they

necessarily his children (cf. [Romans 2:28–29](#)). On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for [Abraham]” ([Genesis 21:12, NRSV](#)), meaning that the children born in fulfillment of the promise will be regarded as Abraham’s true descendants. The promise to Abraham was that Sarah would have a son ([Genesis 18:10, 14](#))—Isaac, not Ishmael, was the child of promise. As God chose Isaac over Ishmael, so also does He now choose to bless any who place their faith in Christ and become the true children of Abraham.

Thus, according to Paul, spiritual kinship, not ethnic origin, determined who was a true Israelite. Similarly, today the blessings of salvation extend only to those who are right with God through genuine faith in Jesus Christ. The visible church includes many who belong to “Ishmael,” but salvation belongs only to “Israelites” who belong to the “line” of Isaac. God has not turned His back on the nation Israel; He has simply clarified what it means to be a true child of Abraham.

10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; 11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

At this point, a Jewish antagonist might have questioned Paul’s argument, saying Ishmael was not a true son of Abraham; his mother was Hagar, Sarah’s maidservant. So Paul strengthens his case by bringing in the account of the two sons of Rebekah. In this case, legitimacy was not questioned; Jacob and Esau had the same parents and were in fact twins. Even before they were born, Rebekah was told that the older would serve the younger ([Genesis 25:23](#)). In His sovereignty, God determined that was how it would be. This story confirms that our path depends not on what we do, but God’s calling. Neither national heritage nor personal merit has anything to do with the sovereign freedom of God in assigning priority. This accords with the testimony of Scripture: “I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau” (from [Malachi 1:2–3](#)). This should not be interpreted to mean that God actually hated Esau; the strong contrast is a Jewish idiom that heightens the comparison by stating it in absolute terms.

Many try to use these verses to say that salvation does not involve personal consent or action. Paul was not arguing for salvation that disregards consent, nor double predestination. Rather he was arguing that those Jews who thought that they were superior to Gentiles due to heritage needed to rethink their relationship to God and the Law. It is the spirit of the Law that matters to God, and that spirit is based on a promise on the part of God and faith on the part of Abraham.

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Paul then anticipated another objection: If God chose with sovereign freedom, then wasn’t He guilty of injustice? Could we think God was unfair to Esau in choosing Jacob? The Greek text makes clear that Paul expected a negative response: “God forbid” God is not unjust in His actions. The point is that His favors are not determined by anyone or anything but Himself.

Although God elects with sovereign freedom, that does not mean that humans do not play a role in their acceptance or rejection. Later in the chapter Paul argues that through Christ the Gentiles can now be a part of the promise through faith, while Jews who live by works of the Law without faith risk stumbling because it is faith, not works, and God’s mercy that make both Jews and Gentiles a part of the promise (vv. 30–32). Thus, God calls for faith on our part.

Paul uses the case of pharaoh to demonstrate that God withholds mercy and hardens hearts however He chooses

(cf. [Exodus 7:3, 14:17](#)). Pharaoh, who opposed God's people, was raised to the position of king of Egypt so that God might display in him the evidence of His power (cf. [Exodus 9:13–16](#)). Although Pharaoh's rise to a position of authority undoubtedly had a secular interpretation, God was at work in his career to display His power by bringing Pharaoh to his knees so that God's character in delivering the Children of Israel might be known throughout the world. God shows mercy or hardens people's hearts as He chooses. He is sovereign in all that He does.



God's freedom to do with His will can conflict with a modern philosophy of relativism and personal autonomy. The Christian, however, must build their theology not on personal perceptions but on the biblical revelation of God's character and purpose. The modern reader can have a hard time understanding God's unalterable nature and the absolute justice of His actions, but many resources are available for us to study Scripture in its historical context. Scripture's meaning will never change, but applying it correctly depends on the reader's understanding. We can't fault God for showing mercy to some while hardening others, because He does not conform to our fallible and arbitrary concept of justice.

Say It Correctly

Hardeneth. **HAR**-di-nith.
Sovereignty. **SOV**-rin-tee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Reproach and Mercy
([Deuteronomy 3:22–29](#))



TUESDAY

Sovereign Mercy
([2 Samuel 7:20b–29](#))



WEDNESDAY

Awesome Mercy
([Psalm 68:20, 24–26, 32–35](#))



THURSDAY

Hopeful Mercy
([1 Peter 1:3–9](#))



FRIDAY

Wise Mercy
([James 3:13–18](#))



SATURDAY

Patient Mercy
([James 5:7–12](#))



SUNDAY

Living Under God's Mercy
(Romans 9:6–18)

