

Sermon for September 20, 2026 – The 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 11:32-36 EHV

Theme: **Glorify God for His Unquestionable Mercy**

- 1) His decisions reflect His infinite wisdom.
- 2) He owes nobody.

³²For God imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all. ³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how untraceable his ways! ³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his adviser?” ³⁵“Or who has first given to God that he will be repaid?” ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Luther once said: “The question ‘why’ is the [foremost] anguish of the saints.” What did Luther mean by this statement? That the devil torments Christians with the question “why,” pulling them away from trust in God’s unquestionable mercy. He does this to all of us, including men of great faith, like the Apostle Paul.

A few chapters before our sermon text, Paul wondered how his fellow countrymen, specially chosen and blessed by God, could fall away from Him in unbelief. To address that concern, the Spirit gave him insight into how the LORD used their rejection to bring the Gospel to Gentile nations that never knew Him. God wanted to use the Gentiles’ acceptance to make the Jews jealous, so they too would return to Him in repentance. Pondering these things moved the apostle to praise God for His mercy.

The temptations that tormented Paul can also vex us. Why do “good” people seem to reject God’s mercy, while others, who lived godless lives, turn to Him in the eleventh hour before their death?

Instead of trying to figure out the logic, Paul invites us to simply **glorify God for His unquestionable mercy**. 1) His decisions reflect His infinite wisdom. 2) He owes nobody.

Part One: His decisions reflect His infinite wisdom.

Our text for this morning follows some of the most difficult chapters in Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he addresses the problem of why the Jews don’t believe, even though they were God’s chosen people. In these chapters, he writes about God’s eternal election, Jewish rejection, Gentile acceptance of the Gospel, and how God worked in all these things to accomplish His will of bringing the Gospel to both the Jew and Gentile alike.

In summary, Paul states: *³²For God imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all.*

No matter who a person is or what good they have done, no one can earn God's mercy. The LORD must freely give it. Moreover, no one will seek God's mercy unless they understand their need for it. This is true not only for the criminal but for the charitable as well. For this reason, God's Law imprisons all in disobedience, making it impossible for anyone to earn God's favour, so that, through Jesus, He may show mercy to all.

Therefore, God used the sin of Jewish rejection to show mercy to the Gentiles, which, in turn, called the Jews to repent of their self-righteous pride so He could have mercy on them once again.

God's plan of even bending human sin and pride to serve His mercy led the apostle Paul to exclaim:

³³*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.*

Yes, God's wisdom and knowledge exceed all comprehension. He sees and knows everything that exists. Everything that could ever exist lies open before Him as well — not worked out by calculation, but known eternally and all at once, because He is God. In this knowledge, He wisely works His will so that everything, regardless of whether it is good or bad, must serve His purpose to show mercy to all. This led Paul to exclaim:

How unsearchable are his judgments and how untraceable his ways!

Because God has such supreme wisdom and knowledge, His decisions are always right. Not only do we lack the knowledge and wisdom to question God's judgments, but we lack the perfect impartiality, righteousness, and love God has as well. Our actions are sinful and selfish; God's ways are always loving because, as the Scriptures say, "*God is love*".ⁱ It also says *that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*ⁱⁱ And we know this is true. Why? Because, as the Bible says, "*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he changes his mind. Does he say something, and then not carry it out? Does he speak, and then not bring it about?*"ⁱⁱⁱ

Because God's wisdom and ways far exceed anything we can comprehend, He doesn't want us to try to figure out why He does what He does. He simply wants us to trust His unquestionable mercy, which He fully reveals in Jesus.

Just think, God loved you so much that He sent His Son to become like you so He could save you. How? By living a life of perfect obedience to His law in your place. He asked His Son to pay for your sins in full on the cross, not sparing Him from the horror of being forsaken by His Father. He did this so you would never have to face such hell. Do you know how the Son responded to His Father's desire? He said, "Yes, Father, I will do what you ask, for I share your desire for their salvation. I will earn the righteousness they all failed to earn. I will pay for their sins in full through my cross. I will bear for them the punishment that will bring them peace. By my wounds, they will be healed."^{iv}

Yes, brothers and sisters in Christ, God's grace toward you is unquestionable. Even though you are undeserving, God sent His own Son to die for you. If He did that, is there anything He won't

do for you?^v Do you have any basis to question what He allows or doesn't allow in your life, or the lives of others? The apostle Paul writes:

³⁴*“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his adviser?”*

The sad truth about this verse is that we often fall into the trap of thinking that we know better. We try to advise God to see things our way – even going so far as to demand things from Him instead of submitting everything to His gracious will. While the LORD invites our bold prayers to ask for anything, He insists we come before Him in faith – trusting in His wisdom, power, and grace to give us what we need, when we need it. He wants our prayers to exhibit the same mercy towards others that He has for us.

Sadly, our sinful natures do not want to submit to God's revealed will in Scripture. It confuses bold prayer with making insubordinate demands. And when God doesn't give us what we ask, we become angry with Him. But this is sinful and wrong. How so? Because making such demands usurps God's authority. It questions His unquestionable mercy.

Recognizing this about ourselves should lead us to repent. And when we do, He forgives us for Christ's sake – pointing us back to the greatest of all decisions He rendered for us through Jesus' death on the cross. It is finished: all sin has been paid for in full. It is finished. All humanity is reconciled to God as proved by Jesus rising from the dead! It is finished.

However, even though Jesus fully accomplished your redemption through His cross, it won't do you any good unless you receive it in faith. And even that is a gift of God's mercy, created by the Holy Spirit through the waters of Baptism and the proclamation of His Holy Word. Such faith is never earned but only received.

Part Two: He owes nobody.

Understand, therefore, that even though God graciously reconciled you to Himself in Christ, He doesn't owe you anything. He doesn't owe you a better life, better health, or a greater share of heaven. Regardless of whether you've laboured your whole life as a Christian, or became one shortly before you died, every blessing God gives you is undeserved. It is given by grace.

³⁵*“Or who has first given to God that he will be repaid?”*

Again, our sinful nature likes to think we can “buy” God's blessings. “Maybe if I give a little more money on the offering plate, He will answer my prayers favourably.” “Maybe if I act a little more selfless, God will grant my desire.” Worst of all is the classic “movie” prayer: “Lord, if you do this for me, I promise I will never ask for anything again.” Such a prayer goes against everything God desires regarding our relationship with Him!

How foolish such thinking is! How sinful. Why?

³⁶*For from him and through him and to him are all things.*

Every loonie in your bank account, every nail in your house, and gadget you have plugged into the wall – it all belongs to God, not you. Your body, career, family, physical, emotional, and spiritual health – the LORD gave it all. Everything you have and are was entrusted to you by God so you can glorify Him!

Our sinful nature, however, does not want to acknowledge this truth. It tempts us to think: “I worked for those things and deserve them.” You may have worked hard, but you would have nothing if the LORD had not allowed you to receive them. He could have easily let all your hard work be in vain. But He didn’t. Why? Because He chose to be merciful to you.

Think about what this means: the God who owes you nothing gave you His Son. He gave you everlasting salvation!

Yes, everything God does, He does solely for His mercy’s sake. When it comes to our status before God, we can be nothing but beggars of His mercy, not earners. Only He is rich. We are poor. Only He is wise. We are foolish. Only He can guide history in such a way as to give His grace and favour to whomever He chooses. Praise and thank the LORD that He chose to give it to you.

To him be the glory forever

Yes, to God be the glory for all the mercy He has expressed to us in life. To God be the glory for all the grace He has expressed to you in Christ. In love, He chose you in His Son before the creation of the world to be His own, sending Jesus to save you. In love, He gathered you to Himself through the proclamation of His Word, adopting you as His own child through Holy Baptism. In love, He poured out His Spirit on you to accomplish His purposes through your various vocations in life as child, parent, friend, and worker for the benefit of others, and to the glory of His name.

May all these wonderful truths move you to glorify God for His unquestionable mercy. All His decisions reflect His infinite wisdom, as He offers everyone a mercy no one can earn. *To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

ⁱ 1 John 4:8 EHV

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:28 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Numbers 23:19 EHV

^{iv} Cf. Isaiah 53:5 and poetically expressed in both Luther’s “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” and Gerhardt’s “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth”

^v Cf. Romans 8:32