

Why God Planned It All As He Did—Romans 9:22-23—6/4/2023

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Before we start our next book study, this summer I'm attempting to answer questions you submitted in the spring.

Today's message is another in that effort with a question I find asking with increasing frequency.

Why did God plan for & allow evil?

Genesis 3 recounts how evil entered the world by the devil, but God created the devil & had to permit him to become evil.

So how do we make sense of a good God planning & allowing evil?

When something tragic happens, it often raises questions on the purpose of pain & why a good God allows tragedy & evil.

You hear some answers from professing Christians that downplay God's role as if He was surprised or allowed it but did not plan it.

But such attempts to get God off the hook do not answer the problem of evil & they also give NO comfort amidst chaos.

It seems people are often scared to say that God really is in charge & that happens when we talk about Hell too.

Was Hell God's Plan B, as if His original plan failed and He had to figure out what to do with demons and rebels?

Or was Hell—and even sin—a part of God's original plan?

In some mysterious way, did God create a perfect world with no evil that He knew and planned would birth & include evil?

Kids—have you ever wondered why God allows bad things?

Does God care about all that & have a greater purpose in it?

If you've studied the Bible, you know God's goal is to show His own glory & that's why He created people as Isaiah 43:7 says.

1st Corinthians 10:31 says that's also our purpose as "*you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*"

And when we say God's glory, we should think of His goodness & beauty & all His desirable perfections rightly understood.

Showing His glory is like an artist showing skills in a painting or musical piece or an athlete showing skills in a competition.

It's only right to show all the best and not hold back at all.

And when we see all the best, we are moved to give honor.

So God rightly does what He does for His own glory.

That's why God planned everything the way He did.

When we ask why God allowed sin and why He saves some and not others, the final answer is that God did it that way for His own glory.

So the short answer to the question in my title—why God planned it all as He did—is that God works for His own glory.

God's glory is the ultimate why behind everything we experience & it is loving & gracious for God to share His glory for others to enjoy.

But what does that look like for God to be glorified in creation even with the presence of sin in the world?

When I get such questions, theological categories & many verses are helpful, but I typically turn to Romans 9 for the answer in one context & so turn to Romans 9 & let's see why God planned it all as He did.

Romans 9:22 gives a fearful answer & verse 23 is a happier answer & yet the contrast of the two is part of God's purpose.

I could say so much about Romans 9, but let's just read it to see the context—follow along in Romans 9:1-24. [READ]

Verses 22-23 refer to God's providential or decreed will as the wanting or wishing or willing refers to His purpose & plan.

That planned will is distinct from God's commanded or revealed or prescribed will, which is what He tells us to do.

If you wonder whether to steal, you know God's prescribed will is the 8th of the 10 commandments—do not steal.

And Ephesians 4:28 says us to steal no longer but rather work to provide so that you can also give.

But everyone does not always obey God's will of command.

So when Scripture says God's plan will be accomplished & His decree established & His purposes fulfilled, that is not His will of command.

That is God's decreed or planned or secret will because we do not know it before it happens, but we know that God knew & planned what will happen in life & history.

Romans 9 focuses on that plan that includes God choosing whom He wishes for salvation & hardening whom He wishes.

It is not right to be hard-hearted against God, but God planned for Pharaoh & others to be hardened yet did not make them sin.

That is God's will that He planned to happen even though He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked as Ezekiel 18:23 & 33:11 say.

God's plan that wicked people die & are not saved does not contradict His commands that reveal His good & wise ways.

We trust God can plan & act in ways beyond our comprehension.

Romans 9:22-23 clearly refers to that planned will of God—this is His plan & why He made it all the way He made it.

Verse 22 is phrased as a question in English translations because the "if" part of the sentence has no "then" part.

Grammatically, the protasis has no apodosis; & so this is not a question as much as a statement that has no answer.

But since it follows the questioning of verses 20-21, it makes sense to phrase it as a question that implies that you can't answer it.

What if this is God's real plan for why He created—then who are we to argue with Him and judge it as unacceptable?

That follows verses 20-21 about not arguing back against God.

Read Romans 9:18-21 again to recall the context. [READ]

If you have not studied this chapter, this may be a lot to swallow.

But I encourage you to soak this in & go back & listen to messages on Romans 9 & study more of what is taught here.

And just read the Bible here and see what it says.

Verse 18 says that God does what He wants—whether that is showing mercy or hardening—and He is right to do so.

Verses 14-18 explain how it is right & good for God to act like God & to uphold His absolutely free, sovereign rule over the universe.

That answers whether God is right to choose some & leave others in their sin to be punished because verses 6-12 states that God chose Isaac and Jacob and not Ishmael and Esau.

The point there is that God always saves by His grace and not by works or by any human heritage or birthright or initiative.

That's how this chapter upholds God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel nationally & to individuals personally.

All that leads up to verses 20-21 where it is clear & without doubt that God has the right & authority to be God as the Creator & Potter.

Kids—verses 20-21 are like playing with play-dough or clay & it never argues with being made into a pancake or a ball.

In a far greater way, we as God's creatures should never argue against God our Creator & His right to do as He wishes.

So verses 22-23 are phrased as a question to carry on that sense that we as creatures cannot criticize God if this is God's plan.

Rather than try to stand over God in criticism, we should bow in faith to learn from Him & worship Him for what He's doing.

But in God's kindness, He did answer why He planned it all as He did & I pray we'll profit by digging into a bit of that today.

We'll see 2 answers to why God planned everything as He did that can help us appreciate & honor His wisdom & goodness.

We find the 1st purpose in verse 22—do you see what God willed or wanted to do?—read verse 22 again. [READ]

First, God willed or planned to demonstrate His wrath to all creation & then secondly, God willed or planned to make His power known.

Then the last part of verse explains how He fulfilled those.

So we might sum up a 1st point like this—#1, God planned to show His wrath & power to all creation.

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Verse 22 does not state to whom His wrath is demonstrated or to whom His power is made known, but verse 23 clearly limits the riches of His glory as made known only to vessels of mercy.

So even though everyone does not receive God's wrath, God planned to for everything in creation to know of it.

That's important because we honor a judge who does right & God's display of wrath proves He always does right.

If you consider some horrible crime against your child or spouse or parent or friend, you know you would want justice.

If someone steals your stuff, you want it back—you want justice.

It is right to expect evil to be punished & stopped & it would be wrong to let it pass without penalty.

So we know we value God not overlooking crimes or changing His standards for some people or not caring if it gets too bad.

We value God being rightly & perfectly angry against every sin as our Maker & Lawgiver who loves all that is good.

So God planned for His final judgment to proclaim & exalt His perfect, righteous justice as part of His glory being displayed.

And when we hear the word “wrath”, we need to hear it as a term of justice not as an irrational, temper tantrum.

You may fear the wrath of a boss or bully or uncaring, unpredictable manipulator or angry mob, but that is not like the wrath of God.

God's wrath is His righteous justice against clear evil against Him as the perfectly good Ruler.

So in order to display the fullness of His love & goodness as supremely good, He must also punish all bad as supremely bad.

That's what His wrath does as the word "*demonstrate*" means to show & point out & display & put forth & make it manifest.

Of course, God always shared perfect goodness & justice within the 3 Persons of the Trinity, but He chose to share His glory more widely.

He chose to do so out of His love that gives what is good & right also His display of His power.

Since every other power is derived as a power that God grants, then it would not be loving never to reveal that God's power is the greatest.

It would not be loving of God to allow people to worship the sun or earth or other people because all such things are created and sustained only by God's own greater power.

So those created things can never fully satisfy the needs of others.

And that's why it was loving of God to display His power as the second part of His stated will of decree in verse 22 says.

He willed 2 things—to show wrath and to make His power known.

Everyone sees the power of God on display in creation as Romans 1:18-20 says that His divine power is clearly seen so that all humans are without excuse.

But Romans 9 is talking about more than His power in creation.

Read Romans 9:17 to recall God's plan for Pharaoh. [READ]

God's purpose for Pharaoh being the greatest ruler in the world was to make God's His greater power known over Pharaoh.

So when verse 22 says God makes known His power over vessels of wrath, that connects with His power over Pharaoh.

We must see this purpose of God as displaying His power not merely in creation, but also in conquering evil.

If you wonder why God planned evil in His creation, Romans 9:22 answers with His plan to show His goodness & supremacy & faithfulness in His display of righteous wrath & power.

This purpose of God should give us great comfort.

When I look at the world my children are facing with eroding freedoms & ever-degrading immorality & injustice, I am so glad my God is greater & I know His goodness will prevail.

I am so comforted knowing that whatever power may arise on earth, God is greater and He has planned for that lesser power to look awesomely dreadful so He can show Himself greater.

God has the explicit purpose of making His power known in & through vessels He raises up that oppose Him.

God lets them get big & ominous so He can bring them crashing down.

And for all who refuse to honor Him—even if He does not make them eat grass like a cow like He had Nebuchadnezzar do—He will finally condemn their evil in Hell.

God will finally make His power known over the most exalted powers of existence in the heavens & on earth in His final judgment.

That final judgment will not only be final victory—it will also be final righteousness and justice.

It will be right because God alone deserves preeminence and because it is right for all to see the reality that God is God.

And God planned it that way—that’s point #1—God planned to show His wrath & power to all creation.

I pray that makes you tremble before God as it does me because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Since Jesus sent the Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment, it is a work of God’s Spirit if we feel that conviction.

It is a grace to see God as this majestic King and righteous Judge if we run to be in His favor rather than rebel against His rule.

And we should run to Him because He says He shows mercy & says that trusting Jesus is the way to receive His mercy.

So listen—if you do not turn from sin to faith in Jesus, you will not receive His mercy and you will face His wrath instead.

The only two kinds of people in the world are those two kinds of vessels listed here—the 2 categories are mercy or wrath.

You are a vessel of God’s mercy or a vessel of God’s wrath.

We may not fully grasp how God is like the Potter & we are clay, but we know He works in a way that gives us choices that we are responsible for & so we should submit to & seek Him.

We should want to respond to all He says so that we can enjoy the good purposes He has in creation.

And I should clarify for you here that the NASB of this verse is not the best translation of it.

Literally the word “*willing*” or “*wanting*” or “*desiring*” is a participle & the NAS translators made it concessive by adding the term “*although*” as if God wanted to do this & yet He showed patience.

And I think that misses the point.

The point is that God planned to show His wrath & power & as part of accomplishing those goals, He had to show patience with rebels.

God’s patient enduring of vessels of wrath is in concert, not contrast, with His desire to show His wrath and power.

So it is better to understand verse 22 as saying, “BECAUSE God willed” rather than “although He willed”.

Because God had this plan & desire to show His wrath and power, thus He endured with much patience vessels of wrath.

If you have an LSB or ESV or NKJV or KJV or NIV, you won’t find that word “although” in your translation and that’s good.

Because God had this plan to show His goodness in His wrath & power, He patiently tolerated the existence of enemies.

God carried the burden of allowing evil to exist and allowing unrepentant rebels to continue to ignore & dishonor Him.

God steadfastly persevered through being wickedly shunned and horribly mistreated and shamefully dishonored.

When I hear such words, I think of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ patiently enduring the evils against Him.

Though He deserved to be worshipped, He was whipped.

Though He should have been praised, He was pierced.

That is what Jesus endured as God the Son in order to bear the sin of many and accomplish atonement.

But verse 22 is talking about God patiently enduring sinners who will finally be punished in Hell & not what Jesus endured on earth.

This is all God endured by allowing sinners to exist in all time.

So we need to understand God's patient endurance as a truly amazing part of what is being described.

You see—God could have immediately punished every single sinner the very millisecond sin happened but He did not.

One reason He did not is because He wanted to work through people like Pharaoh for extended periods of time.

And even His patience with Pharaoh and all who end up in Hell further shows His love to give them opportunity to repent.

Even as God awaits final punishment on them, He shows His grace in extending them more chances each day.

I know that may raise questions about the complexities of God offering a real opportunity to repent, but it's what God says.

God's plans may seem mysterious—like how His patient offer of mercy for all fits with His plan to only give mercy to some.

But we cannot explain away clear teaching like verse 22 saying He patiently endured vessels of wrath for the greater purposes of showing His wrath and making His power known.

And we should always recall that God also showed patience because He planned to forgive some sinners and show them mercy instead.

Against the backdrop of righteousness & justice & supremacy & sovereignty comes the spotlight of another purpose of God.

Another reason God planned it all as He did is the purpose mentioned in verse 23 and that is the more prominent purpose.

Read verse 23 to see this most prominent purpose of God that explains why He did things the way He did them. [READ]

God did it for His own glory most strikingly in His display of mercy.

It's like God created darkness so He could shine light into it.

God displayed His wrath & power so that He could most fully and accurately display His mercy.

Only against the backdrop of God's wrath do His dealings with vessels of mercy stand rightly and shine most brightly.

So a 2nd purpose of why God did it how He did it is this—#2, God planned to show the riches of His glory to vessels of mercy.

Purpose #2 why God did all things how He did it is that God planned to show the riches of His glory to vessels of mercy.

This 2nd purpose is set apart grammatically as a whole purpose clause whereas the two verbs in verse 22 are merely infinitives of purpose.

That is one of many differences between God's work with vessels of mercy & vessels of wrath.

Since mercy is God withholding what we deserve & giving what we need & cannot earn, mercy is best seen against a backdrop of justice.

God shows mercy to sinners who deserve His just & righteous wrath by removing the wrath and giving blessing instead.

That wrath is removed by the death of Jesus Christ as the substitute who paid sin's punishment for all who trust Him.

And Jesus proved that payment was secure by rising again.

For those God shows mercy, He also gives the perfect righteousness of Christ to make us worthy to receive the inheritance Christ deserves.

Verse 23 describes that inheritance as the riches of His glory.

God is infinitely wealthy in glory, which is the weight of goodness, the absolute standard of all things truly desirable and valuable.

God planned to make known not merely a small part, but the riches & abundance of His glory to vessels of mercy.

If you have received His mercy, He planned to lavish on you the plenitude of His perfections and wealth of His worthiness.

God wanted to do that, not because He needed someone to share with because the 3 Persons of the Trinity were perfectly content and happy to share their glory among themselves.

God did not choose to display His glory because anyone outside of Himself could give anything good back that was not first from God.

It was not because anyone was worthy to receive God's glory.

This was His display of the beauty of pure, lavish, overflowing mercy on those that verse 23 says He prepared beforehand for glory.

Because of the fall into sin, we were not born ready for glory.

But God planned redemption through Christ & chose whom He would save & mapped our lives to actively prepare us for glory.

God did not send Jesus to die for sinners & merely hope some people would trust Him & get themselves ready for His glory.

No. In God's plan of grace, His preparation of us began before time.

Even though we would not come into existence until our birth, God made preparations before anything existed.

As passages like Ephesians 1 state, He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world & His predestining grace is proven in time.

That should give humility and hope.

If God is the one who acts to make His people fit and ready for glory, then there is no room for pride or self-congratulation.

And there is also no room for despair so long as an unbeliever has breath because God is able to do what seems impossible.

So this doctrine should produce both deep gratitude and fervent prayer.

It should also produce amazement at how God acts differently with vessels of mercy than He does with vessels of wrath.

When we read verse 23, we notice that God is actively at work as the one clearly responsible for getting vessels of mercy ready for glory.

Yet in verse 22 we find a passive preparing, not an active verb.

Verse 22 says that God actively endured with much patience vessels of wrath—but those vessels are passively prepared for destruction.

Yet God is active in saving in verse 23—He is clearly the subject who actively prepares vessels of mercy for glory.

But the only thing He clearly does with vessels of wrath is endure them with much patience.

Great care is taken to say God is sovereign but He's not sinful.

Just as God prepared Pharaoh's heart to be hard but He did not create sin in it, so God prepares vessels of wrath but He does not create the sin that leads to their wrath.

To carefully explain this then, notice how the end of verse 22 does not state who does this preparation for destruction.

It does not even use the same word for preparation that is used in verse 23 for vessels of mercy & it does not emphasize anything before time.

God made a clear distinction between His active preparing of vessels of mercy for glory and His passive preparing of vessels of wrath for destruction.

God's work with the saved & unsaved is asymmetrical, not the same.

Getting a person to heaven requires God to actively work at all points from eternity past to eternity future.

But getting a person to hell does not require God to actively work in the same way because He can plan and allow sin in a different way.

Yet He planned both to show His glory in different ways—to show His wrath & power & to show His riches & mercy.

So why did God do things the ways He did?—it was all for His glory.

Why did He plan to allow evil & to punish evil?—for His glory

for the glory of His power & justice & mercy to be displayed.

This was the best way to display full spectrum of His attributes.

This was the only way to completely show the goodness & desirability & honor of attributes like justice & righteousness & supremacy & power & love & grace & kindness & mercy.

That's why God did it how He did it.

And it all pivots on the Person & work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's power & wrath could have rightly & gloriously been poured out on us for all the sins we have committed.

But if we turn from sin to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, then God's wrath for our sin was poured out on Jesus instead.

And God is glorified by accomplishing justice on Jesus & exalting His power by raising Jesus for others to receive mercy.

Isn't that amazing?

Since we see in Romans 9:22-23 that God's ultimate purposes are to display His wrath, power and mercy, then if we have been chosen for mercy, what else compares?

God will display His glory in you in one of these ways.

So when you hear His call to come for mercy in Jesus, then trust Him & you will never regret it.

And if you know God's mercy in Christ, then how fitting to praise Him today by remembering Him in the ceremony of communion.

If you do not know Christ, I urge you to watch this ceremony & seek God's mercy in Christ as pictured in His body & blood given in substitutionary sacrifice for sin for all who trust Him.

And if you do know Christ, then we welcome you to join us in remembering His death until He comes again.

Pray with me as we prepare to remember Jesus in a fitting way with amazement & praise at how He has shown mercy.

Pray silently in your seat & then I'll lead us in prayer.