

# Responding to God According to His Word

by John Piper

---

*This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding that Bible stories exist not just for enjoyment but to lead us to know, trust, and enjoy God. It delves into the cycle of failure and mercy in the Old Testament, highlighting the need for a resolution to the tension between God's righteousness and mercy. The solution is found in Jesus Christ, who through His sacrifice, establishes a new covenant that brings sinlessness and reconciles God's righteousness with His mercy.*

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 36:26, Romans 3:25, 2 Timothy 2:13, 1 John 3:2, Psalm 103:10, Romans 3:20, Hebrews 10:14, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Understanding God's Mercy", "The New Covenant in Christ"

---

## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding that Bible stories exist not just for enjoyment but to lead us to know, trust, and enjoy God. It delves into the cycle of failure and mercy in the Old Testament, highlighting the need for a resolution to the tension between God's righteousness and mercy. The solution is found in Jesus Christ, who through His sacrifice, establishes a new covenant that brings sinlessness and reconciles God's righteousness with His mercy.

---

## Transcript

One of the main points of Nehemiah 9 and 10, to which I invite you to turn in your Bibles, I hope you will. One of the main points of these two chapters, indeed, one of the main points of the whole Bible, is that God does not exist for the sake of our enjoyment of Bible stories, but Bible stories exist for the sake of our enjoyment of God. And the reason I begin with that and say it that way is not only because it stands out amazingly in chapter nine to be the case, but also because we live in a day where there is enormous fascination with story, and narrative, and tracing themes through the Bible, according to its story line, as we say.

And I simply want to wave a flag that says there is a point to the story, there's a point to the narrative, and the point is a person. Bible stories are no more ends in themselves than the universe is an end in itself, or history is an end in itself. There's a point to the universe, there's a point to history.

The heavens are telling the glory of God. That's what the universe is about, the glory of God. Heavens, the universe is telling that.

And history is what it is in order to show that God is who he is. That's what history is for. God writes his story, he acts his story in order to make known who he is.

So look at verse 10 in chapter nine. The Levites are praying, they're the ones speaking through this whole chapter virtually, and they say to God in verse 10, you performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, and all his servants, and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers, and you made a name for yourself as it is to this day. So what was God doing when he brought 10 plagues upon Egypt, when he split the Red Sea, and when he delivered the people of Israel from bondage? What was he doing when he acted this story that would be told 10,000 times? What was he doing? And the answer is at the end of verse 10, make sure you see it.

You were making a name for yourself. That was the point of the story. And then notice these key words at the end of the verse, the very end.

You were making a name for yourself as it is to this day. What day? Nehemiah's day, 400, give or take, BC. You were making a name for yourself when? Exodus, 1400 BC.

You were making a name for yourself 1,000 years ago as it is to this day. You were making a name for yourself so we'd know you 1,000 years later. That's what you were doing.

So there's stories in the Bible, and they're all about God making a name for himself so that he might be known and trusted and enjoyed. That's what the stories are for. So what's the point of history? God is making a name for himself that will last 1,000 years or two or three or four.

That's why I'm preaching this sermon. I want for my sermon to have the same aim as the story has. And the story was to make a name for himself, to make a name for himself so that 1,000 years later, 2,000, you might know his name, know his character, know his way and trust him and enjoy him.

That's what this sermon is for. And I know that in this room there are many of you who know him and enjoy him deeply, and I rejoice. And I also assume that there are many who know him marginally, who know about him, who know some of his rules, who know some of the ways Christians do things.

And if somebody asks you, do you know him? Like a king and a savior and a friend, you would stumble, you would choke on the words, knowing and enjoying him. And I would like that to change. I would like this conference and this message to be a means in the hands of the Holy Spirit for you to know him and to enjoy him more after the conference than you did before and for the rest of your life.

So Bible stories exist that we might know and trust and enjoy God for who he really is. That's what the revelation of God in the stories is for. Let's be more specific now if that's the big picture of where we're going.

After the Feast of Booths, as Nancy talked about, there was a lot of joy there, right? The joy of the Lord is your strength. Now it's time to weep, strange. It got postponed, the weeping got postponed.

And now it's time to put sackcloth on and dust on and cry to God. What are they crying about? Let's go to chapter nine, verse 36 and 37. Here's the situation.

Behold, they're still talking to God. We are slaves this day in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. Behold, we are slaves.

And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please. And we are in great distress.

That was the situation that precipitated the fasting and the sackcloth and the crying out to God in Nehemiah nine and the covenant that they would renew in chapter 10. They sum it up in these words at the end of verse 37. We are in great distress.

So I'm assuming in a room like this that you came here, many of you, in conditions of your family or church or relationships or soul or body which you would describe as saying in your most honest moments, I am in great distress. And you're fitting the fun of Orlando in between the small spaces between the sorrows of your life. That's what's happened.

So what I would plead with you to do is listen with all your might to how these people dealt with God in their distress because it will have a huge effect on how you do it as well. And if you're not in distress here, you will be. There is no one who lives in this world with any measure of love for people who is not brought into distress regularly.

So how do they seek help in their distress? Let's go to verse five, chapter nine. Then the Levites, now those are the assistants of the priests, Jeshua, Cadmiel, Bani, Ashabaniah, Sherabiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah said, and from there, from that point, starting with verse six to the end of verse 37, the Levites are praying. This chapter is a prayer.

They're praying to the end of verse 37 and they're crying out to you, oh God. The word you, in reference to God, occurs 30 times in these verses. What did they do? What did they say? How did they deal with God in great distress? And that's what we want to know.

How did they do that? Before we ask further, let's get more specific about the distress because this will clarify your situation because there's some of you right now who are perhaps arguing with yourself, if not with me, what you're about to say is not going to apply to me because you don't understand how I got where I am. So let's just see whether that's true or not. Back to verse 37.

They're not just in distress. They are in a distress that they deserve to be in because of their sin. And they are in a distress that God Himself put them in.

So let's look at verse 37 to see that. The land, its rich yield that we're supposed to inherit as a promise. This land goes to the kings whom you set over us.

Slave masters. You put them over us, God, because of our sins. In other words, the great distress that we are in, we deserve to be in, and not only do we deserve to be in, it's judgment sent from you.

So now we get clarity for you on this. Some of you might be tempted to say, the rest of you in here, you can call upon God in your distress, but not me, because I sinned my way into the mess I'm in. And number two, God put me here as a discipline or a punishment.

So the rest of you can go on about your merry way following this preacher and learn how to call upon God in your distress because it just came upon you. It didn't just come upon me. I brought it on me.

That's their situation. So if you're in that category, you dare not talk like that. Don't talk to God like that.

Do not say to God, this text is not addressing my need because I sinned my way into the mess I'm in and you brought it on me. That's irrelevant. That's the point of this text.

These people are in a distress they deserve to be in. God put them in. None of you may escape the good news of this text.

You have no right to tell God he can't give you good news. Oh, how many people I have dealt with over the years who tried to tell God they are beyond goodness. And I get upset with them because they are belittling the cross, diminishing the blood, crying down the mercy, exalting themselves in their self-pity.

I won't have it neither in this room nor in the counseling chamber. Don't tell God that he can't give you good news because you've sinned your way into your misery. And God himself brought you under his discipline.

That's exactly their situation. So we're in this together and we want desperately to know so how do you approach God now? How do you talk to God in that situation? Because that's what they're doing and I want to learn as best I can how they do it. So what do they do? It's astonishing what they do.

They pray back to God the entire history of the Old Testament. This is the longest, maybe the right word is, this is the fullest retelling of the Old Testament in the Old Testament. So Jim Hamilton says in his new commentary.

This is the fullest retelling of the Old Testament in a short space in the Old Testament. And it's a prayer. So they're telling God what God did for 1,000 years.

More than 1,000. That's a remarkable way to approach God in a deserved, God-ordained distress. So verses six to 31, they're telling the story of the Old Testament.

Why would they do that? Here's why. God does not exist so that we can enjoy Bible stories. Bible stories exist so that we can enjoy God.

And they desperately, desperately need to know is our God the kind of God in whom there's any possibility of enjoyment in our great distress, well-deserved, given by God? Any hope at all that there's a God in heaven that would give us hope that He could be enjoyed in this? That's what they need to know. And they know where to find the answer in the story. Because that's what the stories are for.

To reveal God. And they desperately need to know what kind of God do we have? Is it over for us? Or is He the kind of God that perhaps there might be some hope in a deserved, God-given distress? That's why they're retelling the stories back to God. Let's walk through it.

Verses six to 15, the Levites celebrate the power of God, the righteousness of God, and the covenant-keeping salvation of God. Verse six, you are, all caps, the Lord. And you know what that refers to.

Yahweh, you are, that's His personal name. It's like you are James. Well, it's not James, it's Yahweh.

You are Yahweh, and you know where the name came from. Exodus chapter three, verse 14. Tell them I am sent you.

I am who I am. And the name Yahweh built on I am who I am, which means every time you see big L-O-R-D, this is God saying, I am God, and I have no competitors, and I depend on nobody and nothing. I had no beginning.

I will have no end. Deal with me, because that is reality. That's God.

Every time He says, you'll know I'm the Lord, so they begin, you are Yahweh. It's a good place to begin. You are absolute God.

There's no negotiation going on here at all. You don't negotiate with God. He is absolute reality.

We are defined. He is definer. We are dependent.

He is totally independent. Our being comes into being. His being has always been, as inconceivable as that is, and how glorious.

So we just begin here. This is a place of reverence, and humility, and lowliness. You begin, you're dealing with this God in your great distress.

You are Yahweh, the great and only and absolute God. Verse 6 in the middle. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them, and you preserve them all.

So you made everything. You uphold everything. Therefore, the hosts, I like the translation, armies, the armies of heaven, worship you.

You are exalted. Verse 5, exalted above all, all blessing and praise. So that's where you begin.

In dealing with God, just lift Him up. Now remember, these are people who are totally guilty, under distress, given by God. So you lift up your soul in your guilt.

You lift up your soul in your distress. And you lift up your soul under the mighty hand of God. And you say, you are God.

It's a great place to begin. It just occurs to me that you're all women, and that I could quote here Hannah. I could quote here Mary.

So don't feel like, yeah, women don't talk like that. Oh yes, they do. You may not, but you should.

Verse 7, this God made a covenant with Abram. Brum, not Braham, yet. Called Abram, changed his name, promised him a land.

Verse 7 there. What land? Verse 36 again. Behold, we are slaves this day in the land that you gave to our fathers.

This is the irony. You gave Him the land. You promised Him the land.

Here we sit in it and we're slaves. That's not what you meant, is it? That's not what he meant. So here's the issue.

Is this great, powerful, Creator, Sustainer, Covenant Maker God that's been revealed so far in this prayer, is He the kind of God who could rescue you, would rescue you from your well-deserved distress in which He has put you? And you have broken the covenant so often, you wonder, will He? So all we've seen so far is He's really big, really strong, really great, and He made a covenant with Abraham. That's what we've seen. And here's something they know crystal clear about this God.

This is an unimpeachable conviction that they have about God, namely verse 8. He is righteous. You have kept your promise, literally. You have made your word stand because you are righteous.

So underneath all of God's promise-keeping, word-establishing is something about Him that makes that happen. And it's called righteousness here. I think it's just about the most important word in this chapter.

It occurs twice. You'll see it again. Because it's foundational.

It's under everything. What is it? What does it mean for God to be righteous? It doesn't mean covenant faithfulness. Almost every scholar I read today says that.

I don't buy that. It's why He's covenant faithful. It's underneath covenant faithfulness.

It's the root of covenant-keeping. It isn't covenant-keeping. Covenant-keeping is a fruit of righteousness, not equal to righteousness.

What is righteousness? Well, it's doing what's right. What's right for God to do? He has no book. He wrote the book.

And He wrote the book out of His righteousness. He doesn't learn His righteousness from His book. The book got what it is from His righteousness.

Well, what is His righteousness then if there is no standard for Him to conform to? What meaning does it have to call Him right in any of His actions? That's a huge question. And there's an answer. If you are God and there is no Supreme Court above you and no Constitution above you and no ethics books above you and no parents above you and you are the absolute, what's right is to act consistently with your infinite value.

In other words, all your acts, all your thoughts, all your feelings as an infinite God is to act in such a way as to be consistent with the beauty of your glory and the infinite value of your person. So to be righteous for God is to always be doing things that accord with the value of His name. Or another way to say it would be His unwavering upholding of the worth of His name and His glory.

That's right. What could be more right than for God to value the infinitely valuable? It would be wrong not to value infinitely the infinitely valuable, namely God. So there is a standard for His rightness and it is Himself, His infinite beauty and His infinite worth.

And so when He acts in righteousness, He acts to uphold His worth, His beauty, His name, His glory. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2.13, He will never deny Himself. Now here's the question.

If they know that, does that encourage it? Will that spell deliverance for a guilty people or will it spell judgment? So the Levites press on in their prayerful narrative. They're repraying the history of Israel. In the deliverance from Egypt, which they come to now, and in the wilderness wandering, the righteousness of God seems to spell triumph and care.

He made a name for Himself. Verse 10, we've seen that? Verse 10, He made a name for Himself. That is, He acted in absolute righteousness as He did everything He did in Egypt.

He was upholding the worth of His name. If you ask, what are you doing in splitting the sea? What are you doing in plague after plague after plague after plague? He said, I'm making a name for myself because it's right for God to make a name for Himself because His name is infinitely valuable and God does what's infinitely valuable. All of His acts conform to the infinite value of His character.

So He knew what He was doing. He was being right. He was being righteous.

He was making a name for Himself. And so He led them through a divided sea. Verse nine, no, that's verse 11.

The sea divided. Verse 12, He led them miraculously day and night with the pillars of cloud and day and night, fire. Verse 13, He spoke with them at Mount Sinai, gave them good rules and true laws and right statutes.

See that in verse 13. Verse 15, He gave them bread from heaven and water from the rock and He sent them onto the promised land. And so far, so good.

It looks like the righteousness of God is moving Him to rescue His people and they're not a very good people all through the wilderness wandering, but He's being faithful to His word. So far, so good. But verses 16 to 31 are bleak.

In one sense and bright with hope in another. And both are crucial for these folks who are in a bleak situation to see. Six expressions in verses 16 to 31, six expressions of the rebellion of Israel and six expressions of God's response to that rebellion.

This is what you will remember if you ever read this, leisurely, you will come away from this amazing rhythm of rebellion, response, rebellion, response, rebellion, response, rebellion, response, rebellion, response, rebellion, response, six times. Now, why is that? If you were praying as a Jewish person in 400 BC, would you, out of all the things you could deal with in your prayer to God, would you choose to spend the vast majority of your time narrating your own sin and the sins of your fathers? Why did they do that? Well, the answer's easy. Look at verse 33, last phrase of verse 33.

We have acted wickedly. Not they, not the forefathers. We have acted wickedly.

We brought this great distress upon ourselves. You are righteous to bring this on us because we have acted wickedly. Why would you wanna tell a story that's irrelevant to that? You wouldn't.

You desperately need to know how has he related to wickedness in the past? That's your issue. That's why you tell the story the way you tell it. So let's look at these six pairs because they are the heart of the prayer.

So I'm gonna give you six pairs of rebellion and response. I was trying to think what you might put in your margin because I frankly think this little symbol ought to go in your margin, like maybe the R, put an R by what I show you for rebellion and maybe put M for mercy when I show you God's response because even though it's not always direct, it is always mercy in this story. So here we go.

Pair number one, verses 16 and 17. Israel's rebellion, verse 16. They and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments.

God's response, second half of verse 17, but you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and did not forsake them. That's pair number one. Pair number two, verses 18 to 25.

First, Israel's rebellion, verse 18. They had made for themselves a golden calf and said, this is your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And they committed great blasphemies.

God's response, verse 19. Yet you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. And then the rest of verses 20 to 25, which I won't read, but his sustaining grace through the wilderness.

Pair number three, verses 26 to 27. First, Israel's rebellion, verse 26. They were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets who had warned them in order to turn them back to you.

And they committed great blasphemies. And here's his response in verse 27. Therefore, you gave them no mercy.

You put them into the hand of their enemies who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering, they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven. And according to your great mercies, you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies.

So it wasn't so simple that time. When they sinned, he punished them with enemies. And then they cried out and he saved them from his own punishment, which they deserved.

And you can see now why this is being rehearsed the way it's being rehearsed. Pair number four, all of it in verse 28. First half of verse 28, the rebellion.

But after they had rest, they did evil again before you. God's response, verse 28, second half of the verse. And you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they had dominion over them.

Yet, when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven many times you delivered them according to your mercies. So again, judgment, cry, mercy. Number five, verses 29, middle of the verse to verse 30.

First the rebellion, verse 29. They acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments but sinned against your rules. God's response, verse 30, many years you bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets.

And finally, pair number six, verses 30 at the end, through 31, first the rebellion, verse 30. They, yet they would not give ear. Response, verse 30 at the end.

Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them for you are a gracious and a merciful God. Now, how did the Levites, the Israelites respond to the retelling of that history, that story which exists so that you might enjoy God? How did they respond to it? And the answer is they did two things.

They cried out again, just like they had cried out numerous times, they cried out again in their distress, deserved by God, they cried out for help and they reestablished the covenant and said we'll do better.

Verse 32, here's the cry. Now therefore our God, the great, the mighty, the awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love, please, I'm adding that, please, I feel it, please let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us.

In other words, look with pity upon us. You've done it so many times. Look with pity upon us.

And then verse 38, because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing. In chapter 10, which I'm not gonna deal with except to sum it up like this, is that covenant. It has two parts.

The first part, we enter, this is verse 29, we enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law. So we've blown it over and over and over and over again and you've been merciful time and again. Now we enter into a curse and an oath to walk in your law.

We're reenacting, reestablishing the covenant. And then verse 32, we also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third of the shekel for the service of the house of God. And then every verse from there to the end of the chapter contains the term house of God or house of the Lord.

So I'm summing it up like this. Chapter 10, it's a long list of names of who signed the covenant. And then a statement that the covenant consists in, we're gonna do better now with law keeping and we're committed to the house of God.

We're gonna upkeep this house and we're gonna be faithful in it, do all the appropriate sacrifices. That's the covenant, chapter 10. And then at the end of nine, the cry, have mercy upon us, oh God.

So what's the lesson for us in our distress, our deserved God-sent distresses? Should we do this? Retell the story of a God who has time without number, it seems like, had mercy on a rebellious people, take heart, cry for relief in our present deserved God-sent distress and resolve to do better. Gonna be at the house of God, gonna keep the law of God, call down an earth, a curse and an oath upon yourself if you don't. There are two problems with that way of getting a lesson.

From this chapter, these two chapters. One problem is the odds are not very good after a thousand years of failure. They must have felt this.

I feel so sad, right? Don't you just feel sad for them? They just told a story that says it's not gonna work. I'm sure Don will have more to say about that. It's not gonna work.

It's sad, it's a sad book. The Old Testament's a sad book. It's not gonna work.

I mean, you just told a story of a thousand years. Failure, do better, mercy. Failure, mercy, failure, mercy.

And now you're just gonna... Number seven, not gonna work. That's the first problem with it is it just feels so hopeless. I mean, you might think, yeah, but he's merciful.

But I mean, come on. Another thousand years of down, up, down, up, down, up, down, up. That's redemptive history.

That's the consummation. That's what we have to look forward to. I'm not interested.

I just, it's just gotta get better. I just, I'm so sick of sin in me and in the world. If that's all it is, is we just keep this going.

Let's keep this going. Then I'll say, well, no thanks. Here's the second problem.

Verse 33, here's the second time the word righteousness is used. So important. Verse 33, chapter nine.

Yet you, in spite of all this stuff, because of all this stuff, you have been righteous in all that has come upon us. Hardship has come upon us and distress and slavery in our own land has come upon us and you are right. This is right.

It's right. It's right that we'd be in this mess. Right.

You're righteous to bring us here. You have upheld your glory by dealing with us this way. And that's right.

You are vindicating your righteousness in punishing us this way. We have no complaints against your holiness or purity. You have done us no wrong.

You are right. Now take a deep breath when you say that because they did say that and ask of its implications for their future. Maybe you think, I would think, maybe God is now going to say to you after 1,000 years, I'm done being your patsy.

I will not be mocked like this again. Your fickle claims to allegiance. I am slow to anger.

Oh, 1,000 years slow, but 1,000 years slow is a good demonstration. I am done with you. I have passed over your trampling of my glory time without number and my mercy is over.

That will happen to people. That's what hell means. I'm not making this up.

God does this. His patient runs out. That's the meaning of hell.

My righteousness is vindicated now in your judgment. I'm finished. So if that came into my heart as the prayer finished from the Levites, what would I say? Oh, he's been merciful for 1,000 years.

Surely, surely he'll keep on going, right? Well, maybe. He doesn't have to. He's right in your judgment and he'd be right to leave you in your judgment.

He can raise up from stones children to Abraham if he needs to keep his Abrahamic covenant. Doesn't need you. This is not encouraging either, right? The pattern is discouraging and the fact that the tension between God's mercy and righteousness that exists in the Old Testament right up to the end is disorienting.

It's imbalancing. It throws you off. Which is gonna hold sway here? And that is the way the Old Testament ends, isn't it? With those two problems unresolved.

God, here's why they are two problems. God at the end of the Old Testament has not yet acted to make an end of sin. He has not yet acted to do anything decisive so that his people could say, we are done or we know we will be done with sinning.

That's not yet done yet. And he hasn't acted in such a way as to make plain that his righteousness is vindicated in mercy, not against mercy. Those two things haven't been done at the end of the Old Testament.

And if they're not done, we are in one horrible, endless cycle of failure. Forever. Unless God says, I'm done, which he does say eventually, except for Christ.

So let's ask, did the Messiah finish the story in a way that those two problems are solved? And that's exactly why he came. The story needed an end. We all know this, you've been hearing it.

The story of the Old Testament is horrible if it ends with Malachi. Fail, fail, fail, fail. And they knew in their heart of hearts, the blood of bulls and goats does not take away sin.

Oh, they knew. When they said we're gonna be faithful to the house of God, they knew in their heart of hearts what goes on there in the tabernacle is not the solution. Something's gotta happen.

Something's gotta give, and the prophetic word has been plain. What has to happen? We need a savior. We need a redeemer.

We need the end of the story, or there's just no hope. Righteousness will mean our destruction, and the cycle will go on forever in failure. So very briefly, Jesus came to solve those two problems.

Number one, this is so familiar. Here we are at the Last Supper. He lifts up the cup like this, right? And he says, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

What did he mean? Well, the new covenant goes like this. This is Ezekiel 36. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes.

That's the new covenant. Not an external law from the outside pressing you toward obedience, but an internal spirit from the inside working obedience, sealing you for the day of redemption and guaranteeing that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ. What a new world we live in.

Therefore, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that one day I will never sin again. I want that almost more than I want anything. And the thing I want more is to see him.

When you see him, you will be like him for you will see him as he is. So I know that has to come first. That's what I want to come first.

I want to behold my savior, and I want that billions to burn everything out of this rotten soul, which has gone up and down and up and down and up and down, endless apologies and endless failures. It's coming. The day where we will sin no more is coming.

And now we know that we know why he bought it. This cup, my blood is the new covenant. I bought your sinlessness.

I bought the hope that now as you receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes in, seals you for the day of redemption so that you can fight sin and know that at the end of the fight, triumph and never sin again forever. So that problem is solved. He bought it with his new covenant blood shedding.

What about the other problem? Oh, this is perhaps as close as you can get to the heart of the Bible. David Wells' new book, *God in the Whirlwind* about the holy love of God. Just so right, so good.

So here's the second problem. You got mercy over and over again in the Old Testament. You got, you are righteous in our punishment.

How's it gonna work? What's gonna hold sway in the long run? Will it run out? Will the mercy run out and the righteousness be vindicated in hell or in my being thrown out into outer darkness? And the Old Testament doesn't solve that problem. The Old Testament does not provide a basis for righteousness in mercy. But oh, Jesus does.

And it is the, I think, most important paragraph in the Bible. Namely, Romans chapter three, verses 20 to 27. I'll just read verse 25.

Listen to how incredibly suited God's way in Christ is for that problem. Romans 3, 25. God put Christ forward as a propitiation, that means a removal of God's wrath, a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.

And here it comes. This, this putting Him forward on the cross, this was to show God's righteousness because He, in His divine forbearance, passed over former sins. Oh, yes, He did.

Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times, many of them narrated in Nehemiah nine. Failure, mercy, failure, mercy, failure, mercy, failure, mercy, failure, mercy. And every time He passed over that adulterous, idolatrous, stiff-necked, blind, hard-hearted sinfulness, which trampled His glory in the dirt, He looked unrighteous.

And Paul knew it. I'll read it again. This cross was to show God's righteousness.

Why did it need showing this horrible way, this infinitely horrible way? Why did it need such a demonstration? Because in His divine forbearance, He had passed over former sins and thus looked like He didn't esteem His name, which is unrighteous, but He did. Oh, He did. Every moment of mercy was blood-bought in the Old Testament by Jesus Christ.

Every time God said to a murderous adulterer like David, the Lord has taken away your sin. I'm sure Uriah's mother and Bathsheba's father wanted to scream their lungs out at the injustice of such a statement. You will just forgive his sin.

It's my daughter he raped, my son he killed, and you're just gonna say your sin has been taken away? You are a wicked king and God a wicked judge. Unless a thousand years later, God would slay the most valuable being in the universe, to show how much He hates sin and loves the glory that was trampled by David. If He might do that, if He might send His Son to bear all the wrath that should have gone there, then in the mercy to David, there was righteousness.

Now here you are, in your distress, deserved. God sent. And you look at the pattern of failure, mercy, failure, mercy, and you cross your fingers and you say, well, hope the pattern continues for me.

Not encouraging. Or you look at the righteousness of God. All of this has come upon you and God is righteous in your judgment.

And you say, well, since He's righteous and since He's merciful, maybe in my case, the punitive righteousness will hold sway and I'm gone. At the end of Nehemiah and at the end of the Old Testament, I don't have much for you, but I do now. Because now I can say on the authority of God's word and the

basis of Jesus' death and resurrection, that that cycle has been broken.

And even though in this life we still stumble, we have new resources in the risen Christ to fight our sin. And at my age, sinlessness is very close and sweet to think about. Oh, that day when free from sin.

And you never again in all your life need to fret that there is a contradiction between God's righteousness and His mercy. Because He has vindicated His righteousness in the passing over of all your sins as you are in Christ. And Satan may whisper to you, God can't let that go.

God cannot let that go that way you belittled Him for the last 30 years by ignoring Him so. He can't let that go. He would look like he doesn't value his own glory.

And now you know exactly what to say back to Satan. Oh, he values his glory because he sent his son to bear the penalty of what I deserved in defaming His glory so that now as I cling to this Jesus, He has vindicated in His righteousness by showing me mercy because the cross bought the mercy and vindicated the righteousness. There is no tension anymore like there was then between the righteousness of God and the mercy of God.

So I close by inviting you to receive the Lord in this conference who's coming to all of you. He's coming. He's coming in your distress, your deserved distress.

He's coming to you in your God sent misery. You may not say back to Him, you can't come to me this way because I deserve to be where I am. And you sent it so you can't come in merciful righteousness to me to end the cycle of misery in my life and give me a hope of endless sinlessness.

You may not say that because God Almighty has shown the failures and then the Redeemer and He invites you, let me come, let me come to you. So Father, I pray that no woman or any man listening would resist your sweet mercy. That none would throw up their own guilt as though that were relevant at a moment like this.

None would throw up 30, 40, 50 years of Israelite failure. None would throw back in your face that your righteousness could never, ever get near to them in their unholiness, that none of that would be brought because Christ so fully broke the cycle of failure and so fully vindicated your righteousness so that mercy could flow and He could be both just and the justifier of her who simply has faith in Him. In His name I pray, amen.

---

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/M6EnxqZJ-bk.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/responding-to-god-according-to-his-word/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**