

# Romans 9

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, again we stand before you, eager to hear what you would have to say to us, and what you would have to apply to our hearts.

We ask that you would guide my mouth, and that you would guide all of our ears, minds, and hearts. You are sovereign over all of these things.

For that we give you praise, and we throw ourselves on you in desperation, needing you to help us understand. All of this we pray in the Lord Jesus' name.

Amen. This morning we were contemplating God's sovereign nature.

We're thinking about different traits of God, different aspects of his character, his otherness. And so this morning and now, thinking about God's sovereignty, his right to rule over all aspects of his creation, from nations and kings, even down to individual lives and emotions.

[ 1 : 16 ] God's right to rule. Now, hopefully this morning, you all found, like I did, a tremendous comfort in this. Because it means that nothing, absolutely nothing, in the entire creation, which is everything except God, nothing in all creation can possibly separate us from God's love that he shows us in Christ.

Because God is more powerful, and is in fact in charge of everything. So this should be a tremendous comfort to us, even though it probably raises more questions than it does answers. It does raise questions. I'm sure some of you had them this morning. I'm sure you continued to contemplate them throughout the day. At least they would flit into your minds in between bites of food.

Painful things happen. All of us are aware of that. Things happen to us, things happen to our loved ones. Death, divorce, sin that betrays people who we trust, cancer.

Is God in control of these things? Salvation. That's sort of the note that we left on this morning and that we're going to focus a bit on today.

[ 2 : 39 ] Salvation. We have real friends, real family members, people that we love, that reject Christ. Why didn't God predestine them to be saved?

Maybe he has, but some of our loved ones have died still rejecting Christ, and we know that he did not choose them to be saved. That doesn't seem fair.

That seems to raise a lot of problems even, in our minds, questions. We must be careful not to fall into a popular way of thinking about God and evil in this world.

I just heard in a TV interview, the interviewer was asking a guy about Japan, about the tsunami, and the interviewer presented these two options to this pastor and said, so which is it?

And these are the two options he gave. God cares, but he's powerless to do anything about it, or God is powerful, but he doesn't care. Which is it?

[ 3 : 46 ] And that's what he presented to this pastor. Well, that's not a new point of view. This was made famous, perhaps, by Rabbi Kushner.

I think back in the 70s, he wrote a book called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, where this rabbi was attempting to wrestle with these issues of evil, God's sovereignty, what are we to make of this?

And he said that there are three ideas, and you can't hold all of them. He says, evil and suffering is real, God is all-powerful, and God is all-loving.

He says, but you can't agree with all of those. And he argues that evil and suffering are indeed real, and I wholeheartedly agree with that. Evil and suffering are terribly real.

But then the other two, he says, either God is powerful enough to do something, but doesn't care, or he cares, but he's not powerful enough to actually do anything.

[ 4 : 48 ] That was what Rabbi Kushner said, the same thing on this TV interview just not long ago, in fact. That's the way a lot of us think. Yes, is he all-powerful, or does he care?

Because there is pain in this world. Neither the interviewer nor Rabbi Kushner brought up the fourth idea, and that's this, that not only is evil and suffering real, but God does care, God is all-powerful, and yet God has a purpose for not stopping bad things from happening.

They don't seem to contemplate that God might have a purpose in this. And while he could fix it, and while he cares, he has a purpose. Well, that's the biblical perspective.

There's also another problem with Rabbi Kushner's view, and a lot of people's view, and that simply comes in the title of his book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. He didn't even wrestle with the whole idea of us being fallen, of us being sinful.

But that's not Jesus' perspective. Rabbi Kushner's is not Jesus' perspective. It's not Paul's perspective. It's not the Bible's perspective. And we're going to look now at a few passages under two headings to try to wrestle with God's sovereignty, in particular, over salvation.

[ 6 : 19 ] Remembering that we have very real friends and family who are not saved. And what does this mean for them? The two things that we're going to look at are, one that I mentioned this morning, is God's sovereign control over the most important choice I can possibly make.

The choice to follow Jesus. God's sovereign control over that. So we're going to look at that for a little bit, and that ties in really well with the kids' talk, if you remember that this morning.

I'll remind you if you don't. So that's the first thing, God's sovereign control over the most important choice we could ever make. But then the next is to simply point out that God is free to show either justice or mercy.

And we're going to turn to Romans 9 to contemplate that. God's sovereignty to show justice or mercy. So the first thing, is God really in control of salvation, of my choice to follow Christ?

Because I certainly chose to follow him. It's something we must do all the time. It's a real, a genuine choice. Is God in control of it? Two things that we need to keep in mind.

[ 7 : 37 ] Humans have to choose to follow Christ. We need to, and it is a real choice. That's the first thing. We must choose to follow Christ, to have life.

The second is that humans, all of us, before we came to follow Christ, are unable to choose Christ. We're unable to come to Christ.

How does that work? How can we be at the same time unable to come to Christ, and yet needing to choose to come to Christ? Let's look at a few statements of Jesus and of Paul to make this more of a reality for you, hopefully.

Jesus says, as was mentioned this morning for the kids, Jesus says, he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

No one is able to come to me. So that's a problem. If no one can come, then everybody's going to starve to death, thirst to death.

[ 8 : 42 ] Now it's true, this is in John 6, by the way, John 6, and I just read verses 35 and 44. It is true that Jesus' statement is, no one can come to me unless something happens.

But the thing that happens is not about humans, it's about God. The statement about humans is simply, no one is able to come to me. Jesus repeats this later in the same passage in John 6, verse 65.

When people walked away from him, because they couldn't take his teaching, it bothered them, and so they turned their backs on him, they rejected him. He wasn't surprised. In fact, he says, this is why I told you that no one is able to come to me.

He understands the sinfulness of people, that our hearts don't like him. Paul writes something very similar in Romans 8. So again, leading up to Romans 9 that we'll look at in a moment, Paul writes something similar.

Romans 8, verses 7 to 8. The sinful mind, that is the mind of the flesh, or in other words, the mind that does not have the divine spirit of Christ, so a non-Christian, the sinful mind is hostile to God.

[ 10 : 04 ] It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. It is not able to do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature, that is those in the flesh, cannot please God, are unable to be pleasing to God.

Paul has a very, you can't say depressing, but he doesn't have a very positive view of the ability of humans to come to Christ, or do anything pleasing to God, before they're Christians.

They're not able to. However, both Jesus and Paul can talk about people actually choosing to come to Christ for life.

But the reason they can do that is because of that unless that Jesus says. Jesus says, No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him or her.

Jesus repeats it again. This is why I told you, No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me grants it to them. Now, neither Jesus nor Paul think that God does that for everybody, though.

[ 11 : 23 ] God doesn't draw everybody to Jesus. Everybody, all of us, were at one point, or some still are, stuck in a situation of hostility to God because of our sinfulness.

We don't like God. We don't want his Son. And therefore, we cannot come to him. And God does not draw everybody to Jesus. Jesus makes that clear when he says, No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Jesus is very clear, not everybody will be raised up on the last day, but only those who trust him. So do you see what Jesus' perspective is? We're not able to come because of our sin.

But God draws some people, and Jesus promises, I will raise them up. If God draws them to me, and they therefore come, I will raise them up.

It's a promise. Paul talks about, as we already saw, the inability of people because of our hostility to God, in and of ourselves, our hostility.

[ 12 : 35 ] And yet, he talks about how faith is a gift. He says, Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given to you.

And it's fortunate for us, that God has given us faith, that God has drawn us to Christ, that God has enabled us to come to Christ.

And it's because God has done this for people, for those of us sitting here, hopefully, for believers, because God has drawn us out of our inability, into Jesus' arms, that Paul can express, despite suffering, he can express these statements of confidence.

It's because of God's sovereignty over our salvation, pulling us to Christ, that Paul can say, I'm confident of this, that he who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion, on the day of Jesus Christ.

But also, Paul can say, therefore, you continue to work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, because it is God, who is working in you, both to will, and to do, according to his good purpose.

[ 14 : 00 ] Both of those statements are in Philippians. Philippians 1.6, if you're writing these down, and Philippians 2.12-13. It is God who works in you, both in your will, and in your activity, according to his good purpose.

That is what Paul is confident of. We need to remember, that this is not simply, a theological point, though. I've been reminded of this, by my wife, who has a much more sober head than I do.

I get wrapped up in thoughts and ideas, as I'm sure some of you are aware, and she really has a way, of bringing me back to reality. And I wholeheartedly agree with her. This is not simply, a theological point.

This is very, very personal. Because it is real friends, and real family, that we have, that are not coming to Christ. which means that they, are in that situation, that we were in.

Unable to come to Jesus, because of their sin. But we still have the question, don't we? The question that burns.

[ 15 : 11 ] If God can draw somebody like me, who was also unable, to come to Jesus. If God can draw me, to himself, and therefore save me, why doesn't he do that, with everyone?

Why doesn't he predestine, everyone to be saved? In other words, how is it fair, that God doesn't save everyone? How is that fair, on God's part?

Now Paul, was seriously bothered, by loved ones, not coming to Christ. This was a genuine, struggle for him. As we read in Romans 9, and that's what we're going to turn to now.

This is our transition, into that second part. In Romans 9, so open your Bibles, if you would, to Romans 9. We're going to work through this passage, for a few moments. In this passage, Paul is really bothered, by the severity, of what awaits, those that he loves.

Because they're rejecting Jesus. And yet, it's in this very passage, from the depths of his heart, that he talks, in one of the most intense ways, about God's freedom, to choose, to elect, to predestine, God's freedom, his sovereignty, and salvation.

[16:31] So Romans 9, we see, God's sovereign freedom, to show justice, or mercy. So look, if you will, at Romans 9, in verse 2.

He says, I have great sorrow, and unceasing anguish, in my heart. For I wish, that I myself, were cursed, and cut off from Christ, for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

He goes on, to list, all of these benefits, that Israel has had, all throughout the Old Testament. Some amazing benefits. Even Christ, his physical descent, coming through the Jews. But then Paul, look at verse 6. Paul, all of a sudden, turns.

He's in anguish, over the fact, that his loved ones, are rejecting Christ. And then he says, in verse 6, but it is not as though, God's word has failed.

[17:37] What would make Paul say that? What's the issue, going on here? See, the problem is, that most Jews, of his day, and you can read about it, in Acts.

It's very clear. Most Jews, in his day, were rejecting, God's Christ. And those who were, rejecting Christ, Paul calls, anathema.

Some of you might be familiar, with that word. It's what, it's what it translates, cursed and cut off. That's the word, anathema. He says, I myself, I wish that I myself, were cursed and cut off, from Christ, for their sake.

The implication is, that he considers them, cursed and cut off, because they're rejecting Christ. They are anathema. But what does that mean, exactly? Paul says elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 16, 22, he says, if anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him, anathema.

Or again, he says, if anybody is preaching to you, a gospel, other than what you received, let him be, eternally condemned. Let him be anathema.

[18:46] Anathema. It's actually, an Old Testament word. It's a word that, was used, of the nations, the pagan nations, that God said, they are to be devoted, to destruction.

Jericho, if you think about them, that was the main city, that was called, anathema. That's what anathema is, devoted to destruction, because of their rebellion, and their sin.

Which is, shocking, that's what Paul says, the Jews. are under, right now, those who are rejecting Christ. They are like Jericho. They are devoted, to destruction, because they're rejecting Christ. But he's in real, turmoil here, over this. Not only because, he wants them to be saved, although that's very true. He says, just in chapter 10, he says that his heart's desire, and his prayer, to God, is for them, the Jews, that they might be saved.

He's desperate for this, not devoted to destruction. But the real problem, is that God, has made a lot of promises, in the Old Testament, to the Jews.

[19:54] And if the Jews now, most of them anyway, if the Jews now, are being devoted, to destruction, anathema, under God's curse, like Jericho was, what about all, of God's promises?

Is God's word failing, if the Jews, are being lost? That's Paul's concern. Actually, more than the salvation, of the Jews, God is concerned with, sorry, Paul is concerned, with God's trustworthiness. God's word has not failed. And then he begins, to explain why, he comes to that conclusion. And what he says, basically, is that God, since the beginning, has elected, has chosen, to bless, some, and not others.

That's how he began Israel, was by making choices. So, what does he say, in chapter 9, verse 7, no, I'm sorry, verse 6, it is not as though, God's word had failed.

For, not all, who are descended, from Israel, are Israel. Nor, because they are, Abraham's descendants, are they, Abraham's children. On the contrary, and he quotes, Genesis 21, it is through Isaac, that your offspring, will be reckoned.

[21:11] And Paul says, in verse 8, in other words, it is not the natural children, who are God's children. In other words, it's not genetic Jews, who have ever been, God's children.

It is the children, of the promise, who are regarded, as Abraham's offspring. You remember, Isaac, he already had a brother, Ishmael. And God, said, it's through Isaac, that the nations, will be blessed.

Not through Ishmael. God chose Isaac, not Ishmael. That's the point, that Paul's getting at here. But before we try, to speculate, on why God, might have chosen, Isaac and not Ishmael.

Whether it was because, Ishmael was born, through illegitimate means. Not through Abraham's wife, Sarah, but through, her maidservant, Hagar. Before we try, to speculate, on why God chose, Isaac and not Ishmael.

Paul moves on, and he explains better, in the next statement, which is in verse, nine. I'm sorry, verse 10.

[ 22 : 20 ] Not only that, not only that instance, but with Rebecca. Rebecca's children, had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born, or had done anything, good or bad, in order that God's purpose, in election, might continue, might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Again, do you see, Paul's main point, is still, God is making a choice. He has since the beginning.

He chose Jacob, not Esau. They were twins. Why? Why did he choose Jacob, not Esau? Not because of anything, that they had done, or would do, in the future.

Not because of anything, about them. But because, simply God's purpose, in election. That's why he chose Jacob, and not Esau. Now I'm sure, that some of you are bothered, by this statement. Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. I assume that's true. I have often been bothered, by that statement. Mainly because, we're told that God, is a God of love. Which he is.

[ 23 : 30 ] So what does that mean? Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. It probably makes, many of us uncomfortable, but probably not, for the right reason.

Turn, if you would, to Malachi, chapter one. We already read that earlier, so remember, it's right before Matthew. It helps to actually, look at the passage, that Paul quotes.

Malachi chapter one, page 960.

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. That comes in verse two and three. Excuse me. Listen to what God says, in Malachi. I have loved you, the Lord says to Israel.

But you ask, how have you loved us? Was not Esau, Jacob's brother? The Lord says, yet, I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.

[ 24 : 32 ] And I have turned, his mountains into a wasteland, and left, his inheritance, to the desert jackals. Now, this is an interesting passage.

It's a strange passage. The point, the point, the point of the passage, is not, that God hated Esau. Do you see, what's at question?

What's at the heart of this? God says to Israel, I've loved you. And they, they question him. They say, how have you loved us? And then he brings in, this point about Esau, to prove, that he has loved Jacob.

That's what he's trying, to do for them, to prove to them, that he has loved them. So, how does that work? How does his hate, for Esau, prove that he loves Jacob?

Since that is his point. Well, the point of Malachi, one to three, the whole first three chapters, is to really, if you could put it this way, to really stick it to Israel.

[ 25 : 33 ] To really humble Israel. That's the point. God says, do you want to know, that I love you? I have not treated you, like I treated Esau, your brother.

Though, you act, the same, if not worse, than he does. That's the point, of Malachi one to three. He highlights, God highlights, how he hates Esau.

It's not this type of hate, that we might think. Just some sort of, emotional dislike, for somebody's personality. You know, as if God is saying, oh, I really hate that Esau, he's not a likable guy.

That's not the type of hate, it is. He illustrates, in what way he hates him. And what he shows is, that he has destroyed, his land. I have turned his mountains, to a wasteland.

I've left his inheritance, to the desert jackals. That's justice though. That's what that is. He goes on, to illustrate, Edom's, or Esau's, arrogance.

[ 26 : 36 ] The nation of Edom, that came from Esau. They're arrogant people. They're evil, in a lot of ways, that the whole Old Testament, highlights. And he says, I've destroyed them, and I've taken away, the inheritance, that I've given them.

But that's justice. That's what they get, for their sin. That's what he means, by hate. Is, I gave them something, negative. It happens to be just, perfectly righteous, for their sin.

So the point of this, by illustrating that, Edom, is wicked, and I have taken away, his inheritance. I have destroyed him, for his wickedness.

But I've loved you, Jacob. But what he goes on, to show is that Jacob, Israel that is, is actually worse, than Edom. But he has not, stripped away, Israel's inheritance.

He has not, destroyed Israel. That's how he loves, Israel. Is, he has not treated them, with the justice, that he treated Edom. So when we read this verse, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated, it's very

real, to say, Jacob I loved, by having mercy on them.

[ 27 : 47 ] But Esau I hated, by showing justice, to them. We don't typically, use the word hate, that way, but that's how the passage, is using it. But do you see, the shock, of Malachi?

The shock, of that passage, is not, that God is just, to Edom. Not, that God hates, Esau. That's not a shock. That's justice. The shock, is that he doesn't, treat Israel that way.

Even though, they deserve it. It's God's love, that's the issue. Why have you loved us? That's what is, such a shock. And that's, Paul's perspective, in Romans 9.

You see, after he quotes that, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated, Paul then asks, what then shall we say? Is God unjust?

A lot of us, have probably had that question, with this passage, but we're probably thinking, wouldn't it be just, for God, to love Esau too? And therefore, treat them fairly.

[ 28 : 51 ] Isn't that just? Well, Paul asks, how is it just, for God to treat them, differently, but what does Paul say next? He says, it is just, because God says, to Moses, I will have mercy, on whomever I have mercy.

I will have compassion, on whomever I will have compassion. Do you see, the logic, of what Paul is thinking here? He's shocked, he's shocked, that God would love, Jacob, but, God is free, to show mercy, to whoever he wants to, even Jacob.

It shouldn't be a shock for us, that God would show justice, to Edom, or hatred even. The shock is, that he would show, love, and mercy, mercy, but that's God's sovereignty.

He's allowed, to show mercy, to whomever he wants, to show mercy. That verse, Exodus 33, 19, that verse, that he just quotes, about mercy, and compassion, comes in a very telling, context.

Exodus 33, you don't need to turn there, but think about, what has just happened, in Exodus 32.

[ 30 : 13 ] I'll tell you, because you're not opening, your Bibles, what has happened, is that Israel, has just betrayed God, by worshiping, a golden calf. He's in the, he's just saved them, out of Egypt.

He's in the midst, of giving them, laws to govern their lives, and they, they worship, a golden calf.

That's what happens, in Exodus 32. God is angry, and rightly so.

God is, threatening to destroy Israel. That's justice. But Moses pleads with him, don't destroy them, please show mercy, and God says, I will have mercy, on whomever I will have mercy, and I'll have compassion, on whomever I will have compassion.

See, that's the context, of what Paul's quoting here, is Israel, the people of God, have betrayed God, and yet, God is free, in his sovereignty, to show mercy, even to Israel.

So time and time again, in this passage, it's assumed, Paul assumes it, Malachi assumes it, Exodus assumes it, it's assumed, that we all, deserve justice, that all of us, deserve justice, yet God is sovereign, and while he does, give justice to some people, he doesn't have to, he's able to give, mercy, and compassion, to others.

[ 31 : 35 ] Why? Because he's able to, it's because he's God, he has that freedom. We usually think about, the doctrine of predestination, flipped on its head, upside down, backwards, we think, how can God, predestine people, to eternal hell?

But when the biblical perspective, is the opposite, it's we're going to hell, because we deserve that, that's just, and God does give justice, to many people.

But predestination, is what Paul calls, chosen by grace. This is, this is a delightful doctrine, we don't know why, he doesn't show it to all, but he doesn't have to, he's a just God.

The question is, why does he show it to me? Why did he show mercy to me? I don't deserve that.

That's the question, that predestination, should arouse in our minds, in our hearts.

Paul says, and I'm going to, draw some things to a close now. Paul says in verse 16, after he's, he's been quoting, these various verses, he summarizes in a basic point.

[ 32 : 46 ] He says, it does not therefore, salvation that is, it does not therefore depend, on man's desire, or effort, but on God's mercy.

The wording is actually, not quite desire, it's the word will. It does not depend, on the person willing, the person doing, the act of willing, or on a person, striving, running, showing effort.

It doesn't depend, on either of those. It depends on God, to show mercy. Paul does get more stark, even than this.

Paul says, some things just after, that are even harder, to swallow, and we're not going, to dwell on them, but they're very good, for me to read to you. He says, the scripture, also says, to Pharaoh, I raised you up, for this very purpose, that I might display, my power in you, and that my name, might

be proclaimed, in all the earth.

That's in the context, where God is hardening, Pharaoh's heart, for the purpose, of putting judgment, justice, on the Egyptians, and yet showing mercy, and salvation, to the Israelites.

[ 34 : 11 ] But then, Paul wraps that up, in a statement, in verse 18. Therefore, God has mercy, on whomever he wants, to have mercy, and he hardens, whomever he wants, to harden.

Now God's hardening, is in perfect line, with his justice. He is free to do this, to whomever he wants. It's the mercy, that's the shocking thing.

And then Paul asks, the question, but one of you, will say to me, why does God, still blame us, for who resists, his will? And all he says, at this point, is who are we?

Who are you, oh man, oh human, to talk back to God? Does not the potter, have a right, over his clay, to make whatever, he wants? That's tough to swallow, but that's God's sovereignty.

Now I'm going to mention, three applications, just very quickly list them, and then I'm going to read to you, a section of a poem, about God's election.

[ 35 : 23 ] And that will be the close, before we sing praises, to God again. Three applications, one is simply, when we study the Bible, when we do this, on our own and together, when we wrestle, with what God's word says, draw your mind, to what God is doing, to what God is like, to what God is promising, to what God is free to do.

I would challenge you, to let your mind, go to those things, while you read scripture, and you'll be amazed, at what it does for your faith. Second, is trusting God.

God, this is the point, of this morning also, was trusting God. This is even when, surroundings, look contrary to God, and they're confusing.

The thing that keeps, our souls anchored, solidly anchored, is God's sovereign character, his ability to do, whatever he wants, connected to, his willingness, to show mercy, and goodness, to undeserving people.

Trusting God, should flow from, God's sovereign character. The third thing is, like Paul, we need to be broken hearted, over those that we know, that are rejecting Jesus.

[ 36 : 46 ] The doctrine of predestination, should not alleviate, our burden, for people to be saved. Even pray to God, to show mercy, to these people, that we know, our siblings, our children, our parents, our friends, pray to God, because he is able, to show mercy.

Talk with your loved one, about the love of Jesus. This is what should flow, from this. This is what God is offering, this mercy. And constantly remember, constantly, we need to remember, that we, that the only reason, that we trust Christ, is because God, drew us, to trust Christ. Otherwise, we would have the same unbelief, that they do. It should bring humility. Now to, to close, these meditations, on God's word, and on God's character, let me read to you, there's a song, written, about God's election, that really captures, the grace, and the humility, and what we should be, thinking and longing for.

It's written about, us sitting at the feast, of the Lord Jesus. Sitting at his feast. This is called, How Sweet and Awesome is the Place. Written by Isaac Watts.

Isaac Watts says this, while all our hearts, and all our songs, join to admire the feast, each of us cry, with thankful tongues, Lord, why was I a guest?

[ 38 : 24 ] Why was I made, to hear your voice, and enter, while there's room, when thousands, make a wretched choice, and rather starve, than come? It was the same love, that spread the feast, that sweetly, drew us in.

Else, we had still refused, to taste, and perished, in our sin. Pity the nations, O our God, constrain the earth, to come, send thy victorious word abroad, and bring the strangers home.

We long to see, thy churches full, that all the chosen race, may with one voice, and heart and soul, sing, thy redeeming grace.

Let us pray now, and then we will sing, together, a psalm. That walk back, a psalm. God sly, this Toby,