

As We Have Received Mercy, Let Us Be Merciful

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

A. In a michtam Psalm of David, he calls Jehovah "My God of Mercy." (59:10, 17)

I. WHAT IS MERCY?

A. Mercy and grace are not the same thing, even though often found together

1. Grace is undeserved or unmerited favor
 - a. Grace is God's provision when a person does not deserve it
 - b. Grace is God's blessing for those who cannot earn it
 - c. Grace is giving something positive when there is no reason to expect it

2. Mercy is somewhat different

- a. While it does result in positive blessings from God,
- b. It is the negative perspective of God's actions toward us
- c. Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve
- d. Mercy is God withholding from us what we have earned

B. Mercy is the necessary balance to righteousness

1. God is righteous, but if He were only righteousness, He would be hard, demanding, and impossible for man to approach
2. People who are nothing but "righteous" are hard, cold, and often so judgmental that there is no room for anything near them but perfection
3. Mercy mitigates righteousness with compassion and understanding
4. Righteousness is based on truth, and mercy never contradicts the truth; it balances the absolute requirements of justice by acknowledging human conditions and limitations
5. Mercy is the "thou shalt not," tempered by the voice of Calvary saying "Father, forgive them."

C. "Mercy among the virtues is like the moon among the stars -- not so sparkling and vivid as many, but dispensing a calm radiance that hallows the whole. It is the bow that rests upon the bosom of the cloud when the storm is past. It is the light that hovers above the judgment seat" (Edwin Hubbell Chapin; The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations).

D. Mercy is an important biblical concept.

1. The word appears 269 times in the Old and New Testaments.
2. In the New Testament, "mercy" is found in the apostolic greetings.
3. "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (1Tim. 1:2).
4. Grace speaks of God's "unmerited favor" toward sinners. Peace belongs to those who enjoy fellowship with God. But what is mercy?

E. Webster defines mercy as "1. A refraining from harming or punishing offenders, enemies, persons in one's power, etc.; kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; forbearance and compassion; 2. imprisonment rather than the death penalty imposed on those found guilty of capital crimes; 3. a disposition to forgive, pity, or be kind; 4. the power to

forgive or to be kind; clemency (to throw oneself on the 'mercy' of the court); 5. kind or compassionate treatment; relief of suffering; 6. a fortunate thing; thing to be grateful for; blessing."

1. Mercy defines God's attitude toward man. It is an expression of his love for humanity. It includes pity, compassion, gentleness and forbearance.
2. No one term can adequately convey the idea of mercy, for all these thoughts are intertwined.
3. "Tracing the concept of mercy in the English Bible is complicated by the fact that 'mercy,' 'merciful,' and 'have mercy upon' are translations of several different Hebrew and Greek roots, which are also variously rendered in other occurrences by other synonyms, such as 'kindness,' 'grace', and 'favor'" (Vines).
4. Hebrew word is *hesed*. It appears over 250 times in the Old Testament. Usually translated "mercy," but at times it is also rendered "kindness," "loving kindness," and "goodness."
 - a. It denotes God's steadfast love, tenderly demonstrated by his covenant faithfulness with his chosen people.
5. Greek words are *eleos* "the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it."
 - a. And *oiktirmos*: "pity and compassion for the ills of others."
6. Trench writes, "Grace is related to sin while mercy is related to the misery that sin brings. Divine grace removes our guilt, while divine mercy removes our misery." (Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*)
7. Mercy is an expression of God's love toward those in need - 2Cor. 1:3.
8. "Although man is unworthy and undeserving, yet God shows forbearance and mercy. He helps the helpless; he succors the afflicted; he lifts up the distressed. To sinners who are miserable, wretched and guilty, he offers solace and pardon." (Mark Mayberry)

II. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT MERCY?

- A. Mercy is an essential part of the character and nature of God
 1. Deut. 7:9; 1Chron. 16:34; Joel 2:13
- B. Mercy empowers God to be sensitive to man's distress - Psalm 4:1, 9:13
 1. Remove mercy, and the only thing that remains is the righteous requirements of Law
 2. Without mercy, grace cannot exist, because grace **MUST** be preceded by mercy, without exception!
- C. Mercy enables God to defer punishment for sin
 1. Psalm 25:7, 51:1; Luke 18:9-14; Titus 3:4-5
 2. Mercy has more power than the righteous requirements of Law, because mercy can overrule Law
- D. Mercy is the answer to man's hopeless condition - Psalm 56:1-2; Heb. 4:16
- E. Mercy exemplified - Gen. 19:16; Matt. 15:22, 17:15; Luke 10:36-37

III. MERCY IS A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD

- A. Mercy is an essential characteristic of God's nature
 - 1. The mercy of the Lord is great - Psalm 145:8
 - 2. The mercy of the Lord is abundant - Psalm 86:5, 15
 - 3. The earth is full of God's mercy - Psalm 119:64
 - 4. His mercy reaches to the heavens - Psalm 36:5
 - 5. It endures forever - Psalm 118:1-4
- B. Mercy is an essential part of God's forgiveness
 - 1. Micah 7:18-19; 1Tim. 1:13-16
- C. What does God's mercy do for us?
 - 1. Supports us in times of distress - Psalm 4:1
 - 2. Supports us in trouble - Psalm 59:16
 - 3. Supports us in weakness - Psalm 6:2
 - 4. Supports us when desolate and afflicted - Psalm 25:16
 - 5. Supports us when consumed with grief and trouble - Psalm 31:9
 - 6. Supports us when we face contempt and ridicule - Psalm 123:3-4
 - 7. Supports us when our foot slips - Psalm 94:18
 - 8. It forms the basis of God's willingness to answer prayer - Psalm 27:7
 - 9. It leads to pardon - Psalm 51:1-2
 - 10. It delivers us from destruction - Psalm 86:13
 - 11. It is the foundation of our hope of salvation - Psalm 130:7
 - 12. It helps us to trust in God - Psalm 52:8
- D. God's mercy finds its best expression through Jesus
 - 1. Eph. 2:1-7; Titus. 3:3-7; 1Peter 1:3; Heb. 2:17, 4:15-16

IV. CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRACTICE MERCY

- A. Matt. 5:7 - "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."
- B. Mercy demands a level of faith and maturity that not everyone achieves.
 - 1. Only God is all-seeing and all-wise to dispense grace and mercy to humankind - Heb. 4:16
 - 2. We are not God and cannot know enough about others to determine who should receive grace and mercy
 - 3. Gandalf's advice to Frodo who said Gollum deserved death for his evil. The success of the entire quest depended on him heeding this advice. "Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends." (J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring)
 - 4. Our part is to be merciful, not to make judgments about who deserves mercy. Do you deserve mercy; have you earned grace? Then do not be quick to decide that others should not receive mercy from you.
 - 5. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." - Matt. 5:7
 - 6. The inverse is implicitly true: "Cursed are the unmerciful, for they shall not obtain mercy."
 - a. James 2:13; Psalms 116:1-2
- C. We are changed by our exercise of mercy.

1. "The willingness to forgive is a sign of spiritual and emotional maturity. It is one of the great virtues to which we all should aspire. Imagine a world filled with individuals willing both to apologize and to accept an apology. Is there any problem that could not be solved among people who possessed the humility and largeness of spirit and mercy to do both when needed?" (Gordon B. Hinckley, Standing for Something: 10 Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes)
 2. "I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice." (Abraham Lincoln)
 3. "What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!" (Frodo) "Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity." (Gandalf) (J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring)
- D. We are made mature in the faith by our exercise of mercy
1. The Beatitudes teach us about how faith grows
 2. To begin to grow, we must accept becoming: poor in spirit, able to mourn, and meek at heart
 3. To accelerate growth, we must hunger and thirst after righteousness, pursue peace and purity, and endure persecution
 4. To arrive at maturity, we must extend mercy to others. It is at that point, the person of faith reflects the image of God in his own life
 5. A mature faith does not merely provide for the spiritual health of the one who is faithful, but it radiates outward to inspire faith in others

V. GOD REQUIRES THAT WE PRACTICE MERCY

- A. Mercy is an essential requirement for Christians
1. Micah 6:8; Luke 6:36; Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:12-13
 2. Alexander Pope: "Teach me to feel another's woe, To hide the fault I see; That mercy I to others show, That mercy show to me."
 3. Those showing mercy must do it in a spirit of cheerfulness - Rom. 12:8
 4. Remember that it is possible to "forgive" someone in such a way that makes our "forgiveness" an insult.
 - a. When called upon to show mercy and forgiveness, let us never forget that we also are sinners.
 - b. As George Whitefield watched a criminal walking to the gallows, he said, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."
 5. "There is a way of forgiving that pushes a man further down into the gutter; and there is a way of forgiving that lifts him up out of the mire. True mercy and forgiveness are based, not on a spirit of arrogant superiority, but on loving humility. (William Barclay, Romans)
- B. Human mercy is best illustrated by the example of the Good Samaritan
1. Luke 10:25-37 - Who is the neighbor to whom I must show mercy?
 2. Divine mercy is held in store for those who are merciful - Matt. 5:7

3. "A merciful man imitates God and disappoints Satan; a merciless man imitates Satan and disappoints God. How wrong it is for us to trust in God's mercy but show none ourselves! Who will not show mercy unto others, how can he ever hope to have mercy? How can he hope for mercy if he renders none? Those who are unmerciful make themselves incapable of receiving mercy." (Edmund Spenser)
 4. Those who refuse to forgive the trespasses of others will find their own sins unforgiven - Matt. 6:15, 18:23-35.
 5. The tormented rich man cried out to Abraham for mercy, yet received none because he had not been merciful toward poor Lazarus
 - a. Luke 16:19-25
 6. Those who refuse to show mercy in the here and now will face the cold justice of God in eternity - James 2:13
- C. Matt. 9:10-13, 23:23-24
- D. Mercy regulates the following:
1. The level of compassion and pity we feel for others
 2. Our ability to respond to the needs and cries for help of others
 3. The harshness with which we judge the motives and actions of others
 4. Our ability to show kindness and gentleness to others
 5. Our reduced desire for punishment or revenge on the sins of others against us
 6. Our ability to stand for the truth and promote righteousness without discouraging or destroying people in the process
 7. Mercy demands a level of faith that not everyone is willing to develop or able to practice. Forgiveness is linked to forgetfulness; just like God
- E. Has God been merciful to us?
1. Do we realize the great sacrifice given for us?
 2. Do we realize the awful wrath of God that we have avoided because of His mercy?
 3. Can we see that without mercy, there would be no way for us to stand before God?
- F. How can someone who loves the mercy given him be unwilling to extend mercy to others? - Matt. 18:21-34

Conclusion:

- A. Do we realize the wrath of God against you is averted by His mercy?
1. Do we see that without mercy, there would be no way to stand before God with hope in the Judgment? - Matt. 18:33
- B. Praise God for His mercy!
- "The greatest attribute of heaven is mercy;
 And 'tis the crown of justice, and the glory,
 Where it may kill with right,
 Instead it saves with pity."
 (John Fletcher)