

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:8-13)

As I mentioned in an earlier message, it seems often to be a habit of us Christians to adopt a particular verse of scripture as a favorite, and we sometimes call it our "life verse". I actually have several such verses. But one that has been very special to me from my earliest years is Micah 6:8. It tells us that . . .

8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?
(Micah 6:8)

Over the many years that I have treasured those words, I've often pondered their meaning, and especially the impact that God intends for them to have within my heart and soul as I encounter the many, often difficult, circumstances of my daily life.

The verse is only a few words, but though few, their meaning and their intent are vast beyond measure, especially when considering how God would have us to apply them in the context of our scripture passage even today.

Here first, God tells me in verse 8 of our text, that it is Good" for me to fulfill the "Royal Law", by "loving my neighbor as myself" without "showing any form of wrongful partiality". And then secondly, He tells me that I must not be judgmental towards my neighbor, but instead, that I must always be compassionate and merciful.

Recall also, the words that I just read to us from Micah 6. There, God is not giving me an option, or a suggestion about my behavior, but rather, those words are a "requirement" of me.

8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?
(Micah 6:8)

And note also that the requirement comes from God's authority. Yes, we are often held accountable by our neighbor for the way that we treat or mistreat him or her. But that doesn't compare to the consequences we might incur from disobeying a command from God Himself. Verse 13 of our text,

13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.
(James 2:13)

So then, what is the requirement that God has for you and me. Firstly, we are to always "do justly"! And not merely in a general overall way of treating a person fairly. But our "just" treatment is to be in every minute detail of our relationship with them.

And, this word "do" actually infers a vigorous intent. I must be fully "forthcoming" in my efforts, so much so that he or she will clearly know and appreciate that they are receiving my "very best" and "just" and "right" efforts to provide them everything that they rightfully and justly deserve.

And as I do that in obedience to God, I am to take personal "joy" in my giving and showing "mercy" to him or her, no matter what the cost is to me, because "mercy" has an element of "love" within it. And I am to "do justly and love mercy" with the humblest of heart, knowing that God is taking special notice of my efforts, and that He knows every thought and intent of our heart.

Folks, these precious words truly are an excellent reminder of how you and I are to "behave", as we navigate our way through all the many, often difficult, obstacles of our day.

But also, may I give us another reminder of what God has to say about this matter in a much fuller and expanded instruction given to us in Romans 12. Turn there with me and listen carefully, because these words are sweet instructions of love. Beginning in verse 9, God tells us to,

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12

rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:9-18)

Aren't those delightful words of kindness and compassion and love. And folks, all of this is God's plan for you and me, His beloved children, as we "rub elbows" with people all throughout our day. And again, this is not, at all, an easy thing to do, especially considering all the remnants of the sin nature that remain embedded within each of our souls. None of these "good" and "right" responses come natural to us.

Our not being judgmental, but instead showing kindness and mercy towards other people, even in the midst of their worst of behaviors, is truly an attribute of the Holy Spirit. And it is only as the Holy Spirit abides within you and me that "Godly" behaviors, such as these, are able to show themselves.

But folks, we must always remember that even though the Holy Spirit does abide within us, empowering us in our efforts, such "Godly" behavior on our part will seldom be spontaneous. We ourselves must exercise our "willful obedience". We must "will to do God's will". Only then will we not get caught up in "returning evil for evil". Only then will we be able to humbly show kindness towards those who are not kind towards us.

And that is especially so for and with the people within our churches. From the first moment we became "born again" believers, you and I became an integral part of a very special "body" of people that these scriptures call the "Body of Christ". And as we've learned from studying the words of 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we are now each a unique functioning part of His Body upon which all of the rest of the "body" depends, at every moment, our portion lifting up and supporting all the other parts of the body.

And when we consider our importance to the rest of the body, it's no wonder that God commands us to "love" them as we would love ourselves. As part of the "Body of Christ", if we fail in our duties to love and support the other parts of the body, they suffer and are not able to carry out the tasks that God has designed them to do.

And folks, “love” must always be the constant foundation and guide for our behavior. There is no room for petty jealousies or envy or strife. Listen to how God words that in 1 Corinthians 12.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12:21-26)

As we can easily see from these descriptions, some of the “parts” of the “body of Christ” are less appealing and less desirable than the other parts. And as we gaze around the sanctuary or around any gathering of our Christian brethren, we must be careful lest we think ourselves to be more appealing and more desirable than those other members of the “body”. If we do that, we may ourselves, become one of those less desirable and less appealing ones. Such behavior is often the effect of this sin of “partiality”, and we dare not get caught up in it.

Yes, people are people, and some really are easier to love than others. Some are even very difficult to love. But there is a much greater purpose at stake in the function of the “Body of Christ” than our personal comfort within relationships.

Simply put, this plan that God is working out through us, especially in the evangelization and in the discipleship of the world, is “bigger” than your and my “personal preferences” for people, their personalities, and for their potential benefit to us.

And God has here given us specific guidance as to how we are to conduct ourselves in our relationships with those other people. He tells us,

12 . . . Speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:12-13)

These words folks are very revealing. You'll note that in this passage, God has given us two laws. First, the "Royal Law", which is to "Love your neighbor as yourself". And now here in verse 12, He speaks of the "Law of liberty", both having to do with the manner in which we conduct ourselves in our relationships with our Christian brethren.

And it's noteworthy to remember that when God quotes a "law" to us, He fully intends for us to regard it as a "law", and to obey its requirements. Here, the "Law of liberty" speaks about the "gospel" and the manner in which the gospel has set us "free" from our former bondage to the behaviors of "sin and self". And God's intent in these words is to remind us that He has also set each of our Christian brethren free from their former bondage to sin. And it is our duty to God to show our brethren the same mercy and grace that God has shown them whenever they exhibit remnants of their old sinful self.

And also, to remember that although we might not easily see it, we also will often exhibit some of those same remnants of our "old self". And we would want our Christians brethren to be just as merciful and generous to us in our lapses. And here, God is giving us this warning that on that "Day of Judgment", we will each be judged by this "law of liberty".

The requirement then of you and me is to speak and to act today, knowing that shortly we will be judged by God's "Law of liberty". We must conduct ourselves and our behaviors according to the terms of the gospel and become "doers" of the duties prescribed in the gospel. Our temperament and our conversation must always be in accord with the gospel, because it will be the "rule of the gospel" by which we will be judged.

And folks, just knowing this should compel us all the more to be merciful in our thoughts and in our treatment of other people. As these words tell us,

12 . . . Speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:12-13)

From these words folks, we can easily see that God is very, very serious about what we think about other people, the way we behave towards them, the way we treat them. And in these words, God is telling us that if we have no compassion and no mercy towards people now, then He will not have mercy on us when we stand before Him in judgment.

The Commentator, Matthew Henry describes it vividly, saying, “The doom which will be passed upon impenitent sinners will be judgment without mercy; there will be no mixtures or reliefs in the cup of wrath and of trembling, the dregs of which they must drink. Those who show no mercy shall find no mercy in the great day of judgment. All the children of men, in the last day, will be either vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. It concerns all to consider among which they shall be found; and let us remember that “blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”.

These words of warning from Matthew Henry make it so very plain and we dare not ignore his counsel.

So then, as for us, for you and me, how will we respond to these truths that God has set before us in this passage today. Yes, it does, at first glance, seem at least “odd” to our senses that our simply showing wrongful favoritism towards one person over another, in the manner spoken about here, would receive the same judgment and punishments of hell that a person who commits adultery or who kills some innocent person will receive.

But again, as I said to us in our last message, with God, and now with us who have His righteous presence within us, the “degree of sin” is not the question. It is rather the actual presence of sin, in any form and at any level that determines our verdict. You and I might not like that strict a standard. But folks, God cannot change His holiness and His character just to suit your or my sensibilities and rationale.

God is holy, absolutely holy. And He cannot abide in the presence of any form of sin. If He allows Himself to do that, then He Himself will become unholy. And He can never do that, and we should not ask that of Him.

So then, our response can only be one thing, and that is, we must join Him in His holiness. As He instructs us, “Be ye holy as I am holy”.

And we must not fret as we recognize that we cannot, of our own efforts, be holy. Because in His great love and compassion for us, God has made every provision that we need. The holiness that He requires of you and me is holiness that He Himself will put into us, that He will impute into our souls. And all we have to do is receive it and act upon it. What a marvelous plan God has mercifully put into place for us!

As to our part and our response to God's gracious love toward us, a favorite writer of mine, Oswald Chambers, tells us what we are to do with this "imputed" righteousness that God has put within our souls at salvation. He tells us that we are now to "work out" that which God has "worked in" to us, there referring to the words of Philippians 2 where we are told to

12 . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

We have received our blessed salvation from God, but we cannot simply leave it in its "infant condition". We are, by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to immediately begin to "work out" the salvation that Jesus has "worked into our souls".

And here in Philippians 2, is guidance that is similar to the guidance given to us in our scripture text for today. Here, in Philippians 2, we read,

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life. (Philippians 2:14-16)

Folks, the precepts and the admonishments given to us in our text of James 2, is ever being repeated and reinforced, throughout this bible, precept upon precept. In our salvation, we are now an essential part of the "Body of Christ", and we need to be willing to "step forward" and take on the special purpose, and role, and task that God has assigned to us. Our diligent participation is absolutely necessary to the effective functioning of the "Body of Christ".

And we are fully able to do it because God has given us His divine power to enable us! 2 Peter 1,

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Through the “Divine Power” that the Holy Spirit works in us, we really can and must begin to do our part within the “Body of Christ”. And as our text tells us,

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:8-13)

A question before we close . . . How will we know if this imputed righteousness of Christ is really taking place within our souls? It is as simple as these words imply. Our hearts and our responses will begin to change, and “mercy will begin to triumph over judgment”. We will find ourselves wanting to stop being the way we once were and instead, wanting to show genuine mercy and love to others. Praise be to God!

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