

The Mercies Of God

For our study of these scriptures today, we will again return to these very difficult words of instruction given to us by the Lord Jesus here in Luke chapter 6, difficult because these instructions are so very contrary to our usual manner of thinking and response. And today we will give careful consideration to what the Lord Jesus intends when He speaks about the precious gift of “mercy”.

It seems often, that we preachers will give quick and easy-to-remember answers to some of the deepest of theological questions. And while some of those quick and easy-to-remember answers can be helpful, we really must always remember to follow up with more complete and more comprehensive explanations.

And that is especially so with questions like, “What does God mean when He uses the word ‘mercy’” and “What does God mean when He uses the word ‘grace’”. And “What is the difference between “mercy” and “grace”, and how are you and I supposed to apply the concepts of “mercy” and “grace” within the circumstances of our own daily lives?

One of those quick and easy-to-remember answers that I have heard given to the definition of “mercy” and of “grace” is that “Grace is our receiving something that we don’t deserve, while mercy is our not receiving something that we do deserve.”

While these meanings are very similar, they do also have a discernable difference. Again, “Grace is our receiving something, a blessing, that we don’t deserve, while mercy is our not receiving something, punishment, even condemnation, that we do deserve.”

And yes, that short quote is accurate, but it falls far short of a good biblical explanation.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 6 and read along with me beginning in verse 35. Here, Jesus tells us to

³⁵ . . . love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (and)

³⁷“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:35-37)

To say that the concept of “mercy” is strange to our natural mindset, truly is an understatement. We might not think so, because we experience moments of compassion, especially towards those that we love and who love us back.

But “mercy”, “real mercy” is not simply the feeling of compassion. It is that, yes, but it is so much, much more. The concept of “mercy” seems to be best defined as the extending of unmerited forgiveness and forbearance to an offender by someone who has been truly violated by them, and has the authority to condemn them, but instead extends mercy. By that definition, “mercy” is an unmerited gift that the offender does not deserve.

And a similar kind of mercy can be given by you and me, but our gift of mercy is often arbitrary and subjective. But that is not so with God. God is able to forgive and to show mercy to even the vilest of offenders, but you and I will never be able to comprehend “why”. His mercy is so gracious that it is completely incomprehensible to our human thinking.

One of the reasons that God's mercy is so incomprehensible is that it includes an element that you and I will never be able to be a part of. When God's mercy is shown, there has been an offense, one that cannot be forgiven by you or me. And as God extends mercy to that person, He also pays the full debt of sin owed for that offense, as He did by sending His own beloved Son to die on the cross and pay the penalty for that sin, something that you and I could never be able to do.

And may I remind us again that it is not just the corrupt world who can't comprehend such mercies. It really is a problem within the hearts of the most devoted of Christian believers, even yours and mine.

Yes, you and I who are saved have been born again into a whole new way of thinking. And yes, the mind of Christ lives within us by His Spirit. But still, even with so great a salvation residing within us, we struggle to grasp even the smallest measure of understanding of God's mercy and grace.

There are still too many of the old thoughts, old attitudes, old temperaments of our old fleshly nature yet remaining within us and they cloud our ability to see the true goodness of God as he works within us and among us.

And to make matters even more difficult, the evil one is ever and always nestling at our shoulder, whispering lies into our ear, telling us to continue in our old ways of holding tightly to our claim to our right to our self, continually urging us on to return evil when evil is put upon us.

But thankfully, God's merciful hand is more powerful than our old nature and more powerful than the continual onslaught of the evil one. And by God's Spirit whom He has breathed into our souls, He is able to sanctify us and change us into completely "new creatures", sons of God who are able to deny the ways of the old flesh, able to think new thoughts, have new attitudes and able to reject the temperament that once possessed and controlled us.

The contrast between some of the old ways of the flesh and the new ways of the Holy Spirit is drawn for us in these words of this passage. Here, Jesus gives us simple rational thoughts so that we can begin to see the difference between who we once were and who we now ought to be. Listen, beginning in verse 32, ³² ". . . if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. (Luke 6:32-35)

As newly adopted sons of the Most High God, we have been changed. We are no longer the people we used to be. Before we became Sons of God, we had no choice in our actions and behaviors. We were completely controlled by our fleshly needs and desires, doing and responding according to our own best interest. We were those "sinners" that Jesus spoke about here, but now that is no longer so.

And no, that is not a prideful statement; that is a simple biblical truth. The word "sinner" here speaks of someone who is unsaved. In our salvation, the power and the control of our old sin nature were completely and utterly defeated, so

utterly defeated that we now have a choice in the way that we respond to the encounters of life.

And no, that does not mean that we will at some point cease to be tempted. The tempter will never cease to tempt us to return to our old nature. But now, his opportunities have changed. Now, he can no longer actually take control over us. The only power that the tempter can have in our life is the power that we willingly allow him to have . . . and no more.

A truly amazing change has been wrought in us folks. And while that change may not as yet show all of the goodness that it is capable of showing, it is there, nonetheless. We simply need to be more intentional in our efforts to take hold of it.

And note carefully that that is the way we must do it, by intentionally taking hold of God's Spiritual power and presence within us and not simply by trying to develop good habits. Good behavior and good habits will follow only as we take hold of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in us. God tells us that in Zechariah chapter 4, where He says that it is

⁶ . . . Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.
(Zechariah 4:6)

When and as, we listen to the urging of God's Spirit in us, we will begin to act and respond in ways that were once impossible for us. Listen!

²⁷"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. ³¹And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. (Luke 6:27-31)

Let me say this again! When you and I have the Spirit of Christ abiding within our souls, we truly do become different. We are changed by the salvation He brings to us.

But let me stop here for a moment and ask a "gospel question". These truths that I have been giving here today are true only for those who have fully given their lives over to Christ. And I am compelled by God's Spirit to confront each of

us again with the question, "have we, have you, have I, truly repented of our sins and truly received Christ into our hearts"? "Have I taken all of the steps necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to live within me?"

As I have said on other occasions, I am fully convinced that there are many churches across our world today that are packed with people who want to be Christians, but have failed to take that final step of complete surrender. And that is the only condition that God accepts, full surrender. If a person holds back anything at all, then salvation might not be complete.

So, the question must be asked, have you, have I fully surrendered our lives into the saving hands of Christ? May I ask us to pause for a moment and pray about this? Bow and pray with me for a moment!

"Lord Jesus, you know each of our hearts. You know my heart intimately. And I do, right now, surrender my heart, all over again into your loving hands. And I accept and I receive your loving salvation and the presence of your Holy Spirit into my life. Amen!"

Now, let me go back and repeat the words of this truth again, that a really amazing change has been wrought within each of us who have received God's merciful salvation. Our part now is to simply surrender to His special power and abiding presence within us. It is then, and only then, that our conscious behavior will begin to show forth the same mercies that are present within Christ Jesus.

In these words, we are being urged to look beyond the moment of difficulty, to look beyond the face of the person who is mistreating us, and instead, to look for the special workings of God. Who knows what He might wrought out of some suffering that you or I might endure!

And let me take a moment to emphasize again this special truth that Jesus is making here, one that we spoke about at length in last week's message, but so very important. Here in verse 35, He tells us that we are "sons of the Most High". What that means is that we now have a greater responsibility on our shoulders than we had before our salvation. Sons must take on and be about the work of their Father.

Recall that when Jesus was only a twelve-year-old boy, those were the very words that He spoke to Mary and Joseph when they found Him in the temple, speaking with and listening to the priests. In Luke chapter 2 we read,

⁴⁹ . . . He (Jesus) said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49)

All of the things that you and I used to be about have now been changed. We cannot simply accept Christ as our Savior and then get on about our usual business. Our business, our purpose in life has been changed. We can never go back to the old ways, the old habits, the old attitudes, the old temperaments. They are no longer ours, we are different people, and we must be about different things.

Whether we consciously realize it or not, we now have a completely new perspective within our thought processes. We can now look beyond the surface, on into the depths of the mysteries of God.

Let me give you a very up-close and personal example, one that is so prevalent in today's times. We mentioned in an earlier message, and it is so appropriate to this matter of mercy and grace that we are studying here today.

As we know, in today's culture and also within some of our own families, marriages are suffering and breaking apart at alarming rates. And what is supposed to take place in those troubled marriages when one of them, the husband or the wife, has unknowingly married an unbeliever or perhaps, after they are married, one of them becomes a believer, but the other does not, what are they to do?

Here in these scriptures, God has a special instruction about the way that we should respond. It is a response that is filled with compassion and mercy and grace, and not at all the kind of response that we once would have had before the Spirit of Christ came to abide within us.

Listen to these words given in 1 Corinthians 7, and note carefully the "mercy" that God has put into an otherwise very difficult circumstance of life. Here, beginning in verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 7, God tells us,

¹² . . . If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband, who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce

him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1Corinthians 7:12-16)

Within these words is a clear call for husbands and wives to step beyond their usual angry and bitter responses of the heart and to instead live quietly as gentle witnesses of Christ. No bargaining, as so many of the modern-day counselors suggest, none of the usual, "you give up this and I will give up that", it is instead a kind of love that is only possible for someone who is in Christ, a kind of love that has "mercy" at the center of its responses, a kind of love that simply and continually gives, and asks nothing back.

And the desired result is not just that the marriage might stay together. No, the desired result reaches on into eternity. Here, God is clearly speaking about the salvation of an unsaved soul. Verse 14,

¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. (1Corinthians 7:14)

And in verse 16,

¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?
(1Corinthians 7:16)

And to make these matters even more important, God tells us that by doing this, the children can also be saved. Listen again!

¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. (1Corinthians 7:14)

I confess that I do not fully understand these words, but they clearly tell us that the children of unsaved parents are "unclean", a reference to the lack of salvation within their souls. But as both husband and wife come to believe in Christ, the holiness of the parents covers over the children, a very special promise and gift of grace from God.

This folks, is just one more reason for us to be faithful in our resolve to join with the Lord Jesus in the way that He shows mercy and in the way that He wants to rearrange our life and our lifestyle. The changes that He will make in us will not only save our marriages, those same changes can save our children. What a blessed promise and hope!

This is one of the mysteries of the mercies of God that He allows us to enjoy. No, we don't know exactly how He works His will within the souls of men and women to bring them to salvation. But here He is saying, "Test Me and see! Who knows what I might do within what looks like an irreconcilable family situation?" Those words again . . .

¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?
(1 Corinthians 7:16)

Folks, God is good and He does only good things. And He is merciful and kind to us even when we are at our worst. Those words again in verses 35 and 36 of our passage,

He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36)

My question for each of us as we close is, "Must we always be content with crumbs that fall from the Master's table? Is it not time for us to pull up a chair and begin to dine with Him as one of His sons and daughters would do?"

In the salvation that Christ brings into our souls, we truly do become "sons and daughters of God". And as His sons and daughters, we now have new personalities and new behaviors. And we need to reach on forward and to become the new person that God has made each of us to be. Listen!

³⁵ . . . love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36)

Let's Pray.

