

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment!

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Imagine standing before a judge, knowing your future rests in his hands. And you wait for the verdict, hoping for fairness and mercy. But what if the sentence depends not on justice, but on favoritism, wealth, influence, or public opinion?

Most people have experienced some form of injustice in their lives. Perhaps you worked hard, or harder than someone else, and received less recognition. Or perhaps you were judged unfairly, misunderstood, or treated unfairly. Or perhaps you have seen criminals go free while honest people suffer the consequences of someone else's wrongdoing.

We live in a world that desperately cries out for justice, yet when justice is demanded, we often plead for mercy, do we not? What we want is fairness when others wrong us, but we seek compassion when we are at fault.

This tension between justice and mercy lies at the heart of human relationships and at the heart of God's character. The Scriptures reveal that God is perfectly just, yet abundantly merciful. He never overlooks sin, yet He delights in showing compassion. And as James writes, "Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Today we will examine what true justice looks like, why mercy must accompany it, and how God's mercy toward us should transform the way we treat others without expecting anything in return.

We live in a world that is not only inequitable but also harsh in its judgments. The decisions of corrupt judges usually lead to needless suffering. Some judges in the United States, Canada, the UK, and other countries fine and or imprison people for criticizing violent Muslims or

violent illegals, yet overlook hate speech and violence against peaceful Christians, even when such speech calls for our destruction and removal from society.

Isaiah 59, verse 8 says, and this is describing corrupt Judah, Israel, and by extension the world:

Isaiah 59:8 The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

So increasingly, Christians around the world are cast as villains in a culture that once cherished religious freedom. And when we uphold Scripture, we are branded as bigots. In some areas gathering to worship marks us as threats. Our beliefs are dismissed as outdated or even harmful. In some cases, we are even excluded from public spaces entirely. And this trend is driven by a cultural shift that now views biblical Christianity as offensive. Taking Scripture seriously makes us a problem for this sinful society. And although it looks like things are just shifting back toward being favorable to Christians, it is only for a time and only as long as we have a leader that is making any effort at all to change that. This exemplifies Christian discrimination, which is now both legal and socially accepted. We have shifted from freedom of religion to freedom *from* Christian religion. And this shift has significant consequences for all of humanity.

Please turn with me to Zechariah 7, verse 8. Human nature tends to be partial and unfair, leading to harsh judgments against those it dislikes. The Word of God makes no exceptions. True justice must be merciful and compassionate.

Zechariah 7:8-11 Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.' But they [that is, society] refused to heed, shrugging their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear."

So here we see that God commands everyone to practice true justice with mercy and compassion. Judgment must be tempered with mercy for true justice to prevail.

In its literal sense, justice means "to strictly render that which is due, whether rewarding or punishing, and to do so impartially." But the world is known for its injustices, for its unfairness, and this has flowed from families into societies around the world. Children are not taught to be just and merciful.

Now sometimes it helps to look at a word's antonym to grasp its true meaning. Let us take a moment to analyze the opposite of justice, namely injustice. We will look at two common injustices in families and in the workplace.

Injustice number one: unequal compensation for the same efforts. Injustice occurs when people do not receive what is rightly due to them, whether through underpayment or unfair favoritism. A stingy employer commits injustice by demanding full effort from a worker while paying only a bare minimum rather than fair compensation. The biblical principle in Deuteronomy 25:4 teaches that those who labor deserve an appropriate reward for their work, and the apostle Paul quoted the principle in I Corinthians 9:9, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Injustice can also occur in the opposite direction, when someone receives more compensation, honor, or privileges than others who have performed the same work. Such unequal treatment, often caused by favoritism or discrimination, is a form of partiality condemned in Scripture.

Now this principle applies not only in the workplace but also in the home. For example, a parent who consistently favors one child with special privileges or rewards while treating others less favorably creates an atmosphere of unfairness. And thus unequal compensation or rewards for equal effort is a common form of injustice.

The second injustice I would like to give to you sounds similar to the last one, but is worded differently in the sense of an opposite direction. And that is, equal compensation for differing efforts. Now justice requires that

rewards be proportional to effort and responsibility, not simply equal for everyone. Treating everyone the same regardless of contribution can be unfair when individuals have invested different levels of work, sacrifice, and commitment. For example, a hardworking daughter who saves money to buy a car while her spendthrift sister is given one by her parents. Also in youth sports where all the participants receive identical participation rewards regardless of performance. Equal rewards undermine personal responsibility, reduce incentive, and obscure the connection between effort and reward.

Now excessive attempts to eliminate disappointment can prevent people from learning more important life lessons about consequences and perseverance, and appreciating the value of others' success. Equal compensation for unequal effort may discourage diligence and create a sense of injustice among those who have worked harder. This principle differs from charity, which provides temporary assistance to those in need, and from inheritance, which is a gift rather than compensation for services rendered.

In Matthew 20:1-16, the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard illustrates mercy toward willing laborers rather than rewards for idleness. Rewarding different levels of effort equally can be unjust because justice generally requires compensation to reflect the work, the sacrifice, and responsibility involved. Please keep in mind this sermon is about justice and mercy and compassion. And so we are looking at it from a point of how do we become just as God is just, and justice carries out punishments according to what is due.

For example, suppose an employee has failed to follow instructions and as a result has caused significant difficulty for others. He assembled equipment incorrectly or failed to complete an important job. Or suppose a child is guilty of misconduct or has injured another child. In any case, how should the parent bring justice to bear?

First, he should make sure that the person involved understood the instructions or expectations, otherwise the employer or parent could make an unfair judgment. Second, he should find out all the facts involved, although this may not be easy. Often those who give details are so biased by their own viewpoint that the story they tell is highly colored so it may be said in a moment of heightened emotion, such as hurt, disappointment, or hope. And

third, after a person has learned all the true facts (this is talking about the judge, so to speak, or the parent), if this is possible, he should free himself from any partiality or prejudice toward the guilty person, otherwise it will likely render an unfair judgment. He must also ensure that he has not expected way too much of the employee or child. The employee or the child should not be required to do excessively more than what is reasonably expected of an average person or child, or in the case of a child in this situation, parents should not expect performance way beyond their child's age appropriate capabilities.

To make a fair judgment about the offense and determine an appropriate punishment, a person must take at least four steps just to simplify this.

1. Be sure the guilty person understood what was expected of him.
2. Discover all facts as best that you possibly can.
3. Free yourself from partiality or prejudice.
4. Be sure he has not expected more than was fair, that is, the judge or the parent. And then you are prepared to make a fair judgment on the offense and determine just punishment.

Whatever the punishment, justice requires fair compensation for the wrongdoing. If a child steals something, even if it has little monetary value, he should be required to return or replace the item and be punished for violating the eighth commandment. And when administering harsh punishment or a strict reprimand, it is always best to promptly show love or kindness to the offender, to the child afterwards. If it is a child, he should understand that you are not a foe or enemy intending harm, but someone motivated by love and concern for his well-being and growth. This principle also holds true when interacting with employees.

Now some men can be too firm and unrelenting in their punishment. We saw that a lot more back in the old Worldwide days when it was the iron fist. You know, Jesus was returning with a rod of iron and so everybody thought they should roll their kids that way. Well, we survived.

Anyway, if it is a child, he should understand that you, as the judge, are not a foe or enemy intending harm, but someone motivated by love and concern for his well-being and growth, and this principle also holds true in interacting with employees. Some men can be too firm and unrelenting in their punishment, especially toward children, and this is often due to uncontrolled anger which can cause a man to temporarily lose his judgment and become excessively harsh. To prevent this, we must cultivate humility that acknowledges human weakness. This will appropriately soften our spirit, and we will carry out punishment for the offender's benefit rather than as an escape from our anger.

The permissive attitude of so many today tends towards softness in discipline rather than firmness. And this is evident in the workplace where the employer may think he is too busy to deal with his employees justly. And because of love or tenderness, a parent may be too lenient with their child. Such emotions tend to obscure a child's mistakes, and when a child is involved in a conflict with other children, the child is also almost always seen as innocent in his parents' eyes. Or if such a parent acknowledges his child's offense, he may overlook it or let him off with a minor punishment.

Now this softness can permanently harm a child and leave him unprepared for the challenging life ahead in which society will treat him both justly and unjustly, especially in less favorable circumstances. It is the child's right to be punished justly for his offenses by someone who loves him. And we see a result of what this nation has done in society in the way that it has made justice lacking in any punishment at all, and so we have children who need safe spaces, and now they are adults and they need safe spaces. They cringe at every challenge that comes their way and they are incapable of actually surviving themselves. It is very sad.

Some may justify softness by calling it mercy because they do not understand this principle. They may feel obligated to be overly lenient in their punishment, if not to forego it altogether. This may be appropriate if the mistake was made in innocence or if the offender was sincerely repentant, acknowledges the mistake, and asks for forgiveness.

So there is a lot involved in carrying out justice. You have to consider all of those different angles to it.

But this is not the usual case. Usually there is a justification for action, a defense, and a tendency to blame others. And if the offender does not demonstrate a sufficiently humble and repentant attitude, justice must hold him accountable. Mercy should not rob justice. There are many offenses for which one must make amends, even in the face of sincere repentance.

Now mercy embraces both forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and the needy. Conflict between brethren can easily become such an offense that it causes them to falter in their spiritual life. And this is why Jesus Christ is precise in explaining how we should forgive others.

Jesus illustrated the principle of forgiveness and mercy toward a fellow human being by using the example of God's forgiveness toward His human creation in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant as recorded by Matthew. Let us take a look at that. I know we looked at it not too long ago briefly, but let us take a look at that in Matthew 18. Jesus commends a forgiving attitude and condemns an unmerciful one. In verses 21-35, Jesus illustrates the answer to Peter's question:

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

The central thrust of Jesus' Parable of the Unmerciful Servant is to call people to show mercy to others as God has shown mercy and has shown them mercy. So forgiveness is a matter of conduct and mercy. The Jews taught that a man was to forgive others three times, but not the fourth. Peter more than doubled that number and asked whether forgiveness should be extended to that extent.

We should not limit our forgiveness to any fixed number, as we see here. Whenever a brother injures us and asks for forgiveness, we must forgive him. It is his duty to seek forgiveness. If he does, it is our duty to affirm that we forgive him and to treat him accordingly. Now, if he does not ask us to forgive him, we are still not at liberty to retaliate with revenge and malice. We must treat him kindly and mercifully. And although it is our Christian duty to forgive others, it is not always easy. In fact, it is downright difficult.

So let us take a closer look at this parable of the unforgiving, unmerciful servant in Matthew 18.

The rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offended them three times, as I mentioned, and Peter, trying to be generous, asked Jesus whether seven, the perfect number, was enough times to forgive someone. But Jesus answered "seventy times seven," and that is the number of eternity in a sense, meaning we should not even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are repentant no matter how many times they ask.

Now continuing on in verses 23 and 24,

Matthew 18:23-24 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

The phrase the kingdom of heaven in verse 23 refers to God's government, including His church, and God treats the members of His church as this king treated his servants. No matter how we look at it, the servant's debt was an enormous sum.

Matthew 18:25-26 "But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

We are called to emulate God's compassion. The servant with such a debt had few or no assets, so his master commanded that everything he had be sold, including his wife and children. In ancient customs, debtors, along with their wives and children, were permitted to be sold into servitude for periods sufficient to pay a debt. In this case, the servant fell before him, that is, the king, in what seemed a humble, earnest manner, entreating him to have patience with him. So the king had pity on him, and he saw his distressed condition and had compassion on him forgiving him the whole debt. God's forgiveness of repentant people is an act of mercy and compassion that we

are to emulate. We owe God more than we can ever repay, and His forgiveness has been greater than we can imagine.

Continuing on,

Matthew 18:27-30 "And then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into the prison till he should pay the debt.

Notice an underlying principle here. The king may have known that his servant was not truly repentant the first time, yet he still forgave him. And when someone comes to us seeking forgiveness, we cannot always read a person's heart so we may not know whether they are sincere or not. But when someone asks for forgiveness, we must grant it to him, even if he is not sincere. We have done our part and we must leave judgment of his attitude to God.

The receipt of forgiveness will not always produce good fruit in the forgiven person. And the heartlessness of the forgiven person, as well as his utter disregard for his obligation to emulate his king's gracious example, constitutes sins.

Now the offenses we commit against each other are very small and insignificant compared with the offenses we have committed against God. Since God has forgiven us so much, we must forgive each other, not only the small offenses, but *all* offenses. The hard-hearted servant forgot that grace given places the recipient under an obligation to show at least as much grace. Even though the servant received forgiveness, it did not guarantee that he would be a better person.

Continuing on in verses 31 to 35 of Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:31-35 "So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. And then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

So from this parable we learn several easy principles.

1. Our sins are great.
2. God abundantly forgives.
3. The offenses committed against us by our brethren are relatively minor to the ones that we have committed against God.
4. We should forgive abundantly as our Master does.
5. If we do not, God will be justly angry with us and punish us.

Ultimately, our receipt of God's mercy and compassion depends on how we treat others. We have nothing to pay our debt, therefore, God's forgiveness of our sins is nothing less than a great, tremendous gift. And that gift rests on the foundation of Christ's finished work, and it is on Jesus Christ that God can cancel our spiritually bankrupt debt.

Now James closely reflects the doctrine of mercy in his epistle, and we find very clear images of mercy in what he wrote. Caring for the fatherless and helping the widow shows mercy.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Another is: merciful actions include respecting the poor, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. We can do that in various ways. Those are the principles involved.

Please turn with me to James 2. James shows the fundamental incompatibility between having faith in Christ and showing partiality toward people. Partiality must not appear in the life of faith. There is no place for prejudice in a faithful life. Partiality combines a group of terms signifying to accept and/or judge according to bias; preference. And refers to favoritism based on social status in this case. James 2, we are going to read verses 1 through 4 to begin.

James 2:1-4 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, and fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

So why is it wrong to show favoritism to the wealthy? The reasons are obvious, but here are eight simple reasons.

1. It is inconsistent with Christ's teachings.
2. It results from evil thoughts.
3. It belittles people made in God's image.
4. It is a byproduct of selfish motives.

5. It goes against the biblical definition of love.
6. It shows a lack of mercy to those less prosperous.
7. It is hypocritical.
8. It is a sin.

So that was inconsistent; evil thoughts; belittles people; selfish motives; against love; the lack of mercy; hypocritical; and sin.

James 2:5-9 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

When Jesus speaks of the poor, He refers not only to those without money, but also to those whose simple values are despised by many in our affluent society. Perhaps they prefer serving to managing; human relations to financial security; and peace to power. Maybe that is what they prefer. This does not mean that the poor will automatically be in God's Kingdom and the rich will miss out. Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness making it easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation. One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, it is bitterness. We must treat all people as we would want to be treated ourselves. So we should not ignore the rich because doing so would be withholding love. But we must not favor them for what they do for us while ignoring the poor who can offer us little in return.

Continuing on in James 2, we will read verses 10 through 13.

James 2:10-13 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 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. So speak and so do as those who would be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

So from a duty standpoint, the consideration of our being judged by the Word of God should prod us to be more merciful in our duty toward and in our interactions with the poor, the less advantaged, and the weak.

And notice three important things here in verse 13.

1. The judgment rendered to unrepentant sinners at the end will be a sentence of no mercy.
2. Those who show no mercy now will find none on the great Day of Judgment.
3. But on the other hand, there will be those who will become the epitome of the triumph of mercy.

And those in whom there is mercy will rejoice against judgment because they will have received mercy rather than judgment. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Those who do not practice works of love and mercy toward the needy will receive no mercy from God, and He says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Therefore, the unmerciful are cursed and receive no mercy.

So James's statement, mercy triumphs over judgment, can be understood in several ways. I will give you five more points. (This is a sermon full of points. For whatever reason, it came out that way.)

1. The merciful man triumphs over judgment, meaning he is not afraid of it because he has acted in accordance with the law of liberty, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

2. You shall be exalted by mercy rather than by judgment.
3. For God exalts mercy above judgment.
4. A merciful man rejoices in opportunities to show mercy rather than in strictly enforcing justice.
5. On the great day of judgment, though justice might condemn everyone according to the rigor of the law, God will cause mercy to triumph over judgment by bringing to His glory those who for His sake fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and ministered to the sick.

Turn with me to Matthew 6, verse 14. The priority is those in the household of God who fall into these general categories. Only God in His mercy can forgive our sins. We cannot earn forgiveness by forgiving others, but it does fulfill a condition of our covenant with God to have mercy. When we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, it shows we do not understand or appreciate God's mercy toward us.

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses."

So Jesus gives a disturbing warning about forgiveness. If we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us. Why? Are we not saved? Because when we do not forgive others, we deny our shared ground as sinners in need of God's forgiveness.

Please turn over to Ephesians 4:31. God's forgiveness of sin is not the direct result of our forgiving others, but rather our recognizing what forgiveness means. It is easy to ask God for forgiveness, but it is difficult to extend it to others in comparison.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Whenever we ask God to forgive us our sins, we should ask ourselves, "Have I forgiven the people who have wronged me?"

Biblical references to people showing mercy are statistically insignificant compared with the abundance of biblical passages that ascribe merciful behavior to God. He is our example and He is who we are to fashion our lives after. Mercy is one of God's most generous attributes, and His merciful actions are among the actions in which biblical writers most noticeably rejoice.

Please turn to Exodus 34, verse 6. While God's mercy includes all His benevolent actions toward creation, references to His mercy mainly focus on two areas. His acts of providence which sustain His vulnerable creatures and His forgiveness of sins. His acts of providence and His forgiveness of sins. And this is a way of saying that God's provision for people's physical needs is a merciful act, as is provision for our spiritual welfare. As Psalm 103:8 (ESV) says, "God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [and faithfulness]." We see a similar passage here:

Exodus 34:6-7 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation."

So God's mercy is balanced and does not mean He overlooks or cancels the penalty of sin of the unbelieving world.

Now turn over to Ephesians 2, verse 4. Again, as Paul explains, God can be described as rich in mercy, out of great love with which He loved us, making us alive together with Christ.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy [that is in the Greek *eleos*], because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

The apostle Paul makes an interesting comparison here between the coarse rebellion of human beings and the rejection of God and God's gracious acceptance of the members of His church made possible by our being in Christ. We know God cannot approve of sin if He is to remain righteous. Nevertheless, He is not unsympathetic toward those He created. He loves us and has made our reconciliation with Himself possible. Had He decided to destroy His disobedient children, He would have been entirely justified, and nothing could have prevented this tragedy. Instead, love leads to mercy, and because of God's compassion for the helpless, He offers them relief.

The same Greek word *eleos*, which in Classical Greek is translated as mercy, can be used of human beings. But in the New Testament, it has a special reference to what God does in Christ. There is an inexhaustible abundance of such mercy in God as we just read in verses 4 and 5. Now this aspect of God's character is expressed in the description Father of mercies.

II Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

Please turn with me to Romans 9:14. Mercy comes according to God's will. Among Paul's several images of mercy we find an emphasis on God's freedom to dispense it to whom He wills. And here in Romans 9, we are going to read verses 14 and 15. This is under the category of Israel's Rejection and God's Justice.

Romans 9:14-15 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

It is God who makes the ultimate decision according to His own will, not our will. Mercy is the aspect of God's love that prompts Him to help the miserable, just as grace is the aspect of His love that prompts Him to forgive the guilty. Those who are miserable may be so either because they have broken God's law or because of circumstances beyond their control. God shows mercy to those who have broken His law though His mercy is selective, indicating it is not deserved. God's mercy toward the miserable

extends beyond the punishment withheld. Withheld punishment may suspend a person's due, but it does not grant him salvation.

God also shows mercy by actively helping those who are miserable because of circumstances beyond their control, and we see this aspect of mercy especially in the life of Jesus Christ. Now healing the blind and the lepers, these acts of healing stem from His attitude of compassion and mercy and even more from His desire to glorify God. Our motivation for showing mercy to others should be to glorify God, not ourselves.

Continuing on in Romans 9,

Romans 9:16-18 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

So God's mercy does not depend on our desire or effort, but on His compassion, His decision to grant it to us. Now Paul quotes from Exodus 9: 16, where God foretells that Pharaoh would be used to proclaim God's power. He uses this to show that salvation is God's proper work, not men's. God's judgment on Pharaoh's sin was to harden his heart, thereby confirming his disobedience and ensuring that the consequences of his rebellion would be his own punishment.

Now please turn to Hebrews 2, verse 17. In Hebrews, Christ is the merciful and faithful High Priest who became like His brothers in every way.

Hebrews 2:17-18 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

So knowing that Christ suffered and faced temptation helps us face our trials. He understands our struggles because He Himself faced them as a human

being, and we can trust Him to help us endure suffering and overcome temptation. When we face trials, we must go to Jesus for strength and patience, and He understands our needs and can help.

Mercy is the act of withholding justice when that justice is disciplinary. Because of our sinfulness, we deserve death and complete separation from God, but God provided atonement for sin and through it shows us mercy. That is, He does not deliver the true Christian to the natural consequences of final death for His sin.

Romans 12, verse 6, if you will flip over there, please. Jesus became sin on our behalf, bore the punishment due to us, and delivered us from eternal death, and God is saving us by His mercy. And as members of His church, we can practice mercy as a gift.

Romans 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith [prophecy or preach or teach]; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

I found that an interesting add-on to showing mercy. We are not to just do it as an act of suffering service. We are to do it with cheerfulness, happy to do it and enjoying helping somebody else and to ease their pain or whatever the case may be in their suffering.

Paul tells us here that there is a time when mercy must be shown, and it must be shown with gracious kindness. It is possible to forgive with a patronizing attitude in which the very act of forgiveness becomes an insult. It is also possible to forgive while expressing criticism and contempt. There is a way to forgive a person that pushes him further into the gutter, and another way to forgive him that lifts him out of the mud. If we are critical rather than compassionate, we will be criticized as well. However, if we treat others generously, graciously, and compassionately, these qualities will return to us in full measure. True forgiveness is always grounded in love, never in superiority.

The most important fact in the Bible about mercy is that it is almost entirely God's domain. However, there are also references to human acts of mercy. Mercy is a function of Jesus' disciples, not of the specific situation that elicits it. The reward is not mercy shown by others, but by God. And this does not mean that our mercy is the basis of God's mercy, but rather it is an occasional means that God uses. God does not always extend His mercy to us through others, though He sometimes does so.

One of Jesus' well-known beatitudes emphasizes that showing mercy is a hallmark of godly behavior and is accompanied by the promise that those who are merciful will receive God's mercy.

Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Blessed are the merciful refers to those deeply moved by others' suffering and eager to ease it, and this is regarded as a sign of true virtue and it is believed that showing mercy will lead to receiving it in return. Such acts should be performed with the intention of glorifying God, obeying His commandments, and seeking His honor, remembering that we are helping His children. And when done with this mindset, God sees them as acts of virtue offered to Him, and He will reward us.

In Colossians 3, verse 14, the apostle Paul calls love "the bond of perfection." This should strongly encourage us to be merciful to our brethren, even to those who offend us, and we should do so not only because God is merciful to others, but also because He is merciful to us. And even though we have been and still are at times unthankful, it is because of His mercy that we are not doomed. He is patient with us; He is longsuffering with us.

Matthew 9:35-36 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

In Greek, the term for compassion literally means to be moved in one's bowels. It is not a bowel movement, it is to be moved in one's bowels (I could not resist that), referring to the gut feeling we have about someone or something. If we were expressing it in English, we might say His heart went out to the people or they broke His heart. So we can then view each story of exorcism, healing, and forgiveness by Jesus as a small part of divine mercy. God's mercy extends to the afflicted, the needy, the poor, and the sinners.

The primary facets of God's mercy are evident in the work of Jesus who forgives, delivers, and restores. The restoration promised by the prophets is at hand and unfolding quietly and mysteriously within God's church. Mercy is both feeling compassion and acting on it. In other words, *mercy is compassion in action*. It is a virtue that inspires us to show compassion for others and motivates us to help people in need. It is not enough that acts of mercy arise from human desire. They must be performed for the glory of God and with a genuinely meek and humble motive to be acceptable to Him.

Our best biblical picture of it is Jesus' parable, "The Good Samaritan's Integrity." Luke 10:33-37 tell us that the Samaritan had compassion and then acted decisively as a benefactor toward the wounded traveler on the roadside. This action shows the Samaritan as showing mercy to the wounded man and crossing the vast abyss of hostility between Samaritans and Jews who hated one another. Thus, the mercy he demonstrated stemmed from his right attitude of loving his neighbor.

The Hebrew word *hesed* is often translated as mercy, but it is also rendered as lovingkindness and goodness. Mercy appears 150 times in English translations of the Bible, and compassion appears 50 times. Regardless of the Hebrew and Greek, the passages in the Bible where mercy and compassion occur share a common definition. And here is the common definition between mercy and compassion: Mercy is aid rendered to someone who is miserable or needy, especially someone who is either in debt or without a claim to favorable treatment.

In a broader sense, showing mercy means helping someone in need who cannot help themselves.

Please turn with me to Luke 6. We have seen that we are commanded to be merciful, that is, to behave in such a way as to emulate God Himself. Jesus commanded in Luke 6:36, "Therefore, be merciful just as your Father also is merciful." This helps explain Matthew 5:48, where Jesus says, "You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Being merciful is part of a spiritual perfection or completeness. But the Pharisees believed perfection meant following only the letter of the law. And considering the inspired written Word of God as a whole, we are told to imitate our heavenly Father in all His attributes. Therefore, those who are merciful as God is merciful, even toward the evil and the unthankful, are living as God lives. We must be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. Christ sets the standard by commanding us to love our enemies.

Back a few verses from verse 36, go back to verse 27. We will read verses 27 through 31, which is parallel to Matthew 5:38-48.

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

That is a very tall order and command for us to keep, and very hard because of the amount of human nature that still resides in us.

The Jews despised the Romans because the Romans oppressed them, yet Jesus told them to love their enemies. Such words turned many away from Christ. But Jesus was not talking about *affection* for enemies. He was talking about an act of the will. You cannot fall into this kind of love. It takes conscious effort. Loving your enemies or loving our enemies means acting in their best interests. And we can pray for them and seek ways to help them.

Jesus loves humanity even though humanity is in rebellion against God. He urges us to follow His example by loving our enemies, grant them the same respect and rights we desire for ourselves. It is hard to respect many of our leaders, is it not? But we are to honor them as our leaders. And by honoring we show respect to the office.

Continuing in Luke 6, we are going to read verses 32 to 35,

Luke 6:32-35 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And 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. But 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."

So the money we give others should be treated as a gift, not a high interest loan that benefits us more than them. Give it as though you are giving to God.

Love means action, and one way to put love into practice is to take the initiative to meet specific needs, and this is easy with people we trust. But love means doing so even for those who dislike us or intend to hurt us.

Luke 6:36-37 "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

In verse 36, the word merciful means showing and having compassion. When verse 36 is read in context with verses 27 to 35, the word refers to gifts and deeds. For example, to be a doer of merciful deeds. Verse 36 linked with verse 37 implies kindness and forbearance in judgment. So merciful here includes being compassionate.

We eagerly give up those things necessary for those with whom we sympathize. Jesus as God is always eager to provide all necessary help and

support to those who are miserable. So also we, as His followers who share the same Spirit, are eager to contribute as much as possible to relieve or remove the miseries of distressed people.

A merciful and compassionate person overlooks wrongs done to him. He dutifully provides the offender with relief. He does not allow repeated ingratitude to deter him from doing good, even to the unfaithful and the unholy. The reason for this is that mercy is an expression of love. It is a form of love determined by the state or condition of those it is directed toward. Their state is one of suffering and need, yet they may be unworthy or undeserving.

Mercy is naturally the expression of love toward those who are in no position to repay the kind and compassionate act of love done for their relief. God is the Father of mercies, as I mentioned earlier, and His compassion extends to all He has made. It is because of His mercy that we are saved. Jesus was often moved with compassion, and He encourages us, even commands us to be merciful, as our Father is merciful, and we are to put on heartfelt compassion which will receive abundant blessings and mercy.

Now as we conclude, let us return to the words of Jesus Christ.

Luke 6:35-36 "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. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Those words reveal the very heart of God. The natural human response is to ask, "What will I get in return?" We want appreciation for kindness. We want gratitude for our sacrifices, recognition for our service, and repayment for our generosity. Yet Christ calls us to a higher standard. He calls us to love when love is not returned, to forgive when forgiveness is not appreciated, to serve when no one notices, and to give when there is no possibility of repayment. Why? Because that is exactly how God treats us.

How many times has God blessed us when we could offer Him nothing in return? How many prayers has He answered? How many sins has He forgiven? How many burdens has He lifted? How many mercies has He

extended to us despite our weaknesses and failures? God's mercy is not a transaction. It is an expression of His love. And when we show mercy to the suffering, kindness to the undeserving, forgiveness to those who have hurt us, and compassion to those who cannot repay us, we reflect the very character of our heavenly Father. We become living witnesses to His mercy that has been poured out on us.

The world says, give only if you receive, and Christ says, give hoping for nothing in return. The world says, love those who love you, and Christ says, love your enemies. The world says, judge according to appearances. Christ says, be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

Our reward is not found in the gratitude of men. It is not found in recognition, applause, or repayment. Our reward is found in pleasing God and becoming more like Jesus Christ.

So let us leave here determined to show mercy without keeping score, to give without expecting repayment, to forgive without demanding compensation, and love without conditions. For when we do, we reveal the heart of our Father, we honor our Savior, and we demonstrate to a hurting world that God's way is higher than man's.

And one day, when we stand before Christ, we will discover that every act of mercy, every sacrifice made in love, and every kindness offered while hoping for nothing in return was seen by God and treasured by Him. What a wonderful blessing it is to know that our Father delights in mercy and that in His Kingdom, mercy triumphs over judgment!