

# Mercy

***“Who is a God like  
unto thee, that  
pardoneth iniquity,  
and passeth by the  
transgression of  
the remnant of his  
heritage? he  
retaineth not his  
anger for ever,  
because he  
delighteth in  
mercy.”***

***—Micah 7:18***

## **IT IS NOT OFTEN WE CAN**

say that the proclaimed tenets of the world's major religions are in agreement. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism constitute more than 91% of the world's religious adherence today. One important doctrine that all five of these groups have in common and espouse is the quality of mercy. Each of them teaches the importance

and value of mercy, advocating its cultivation among their followers. Additionally, in the case of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, they claim belief in a Supreme Being, who is also presented as one whose character attributes include mercy and compassion.

There is a clear irony, particularly at the present time, with regard to this common teaching of mercy among the religions of the world. Although claimed as an important and virtuous quality to be esteemed highly, in practice mercy is greatly lacking among mankind, and pervasively so. At the highest levels of the political, religious and social order of the present world, mercy is scarcely found. Likewise,

among mankind in general, regardless of status, wealth, background or age, mercy is absent much of the time. At best, it seems that when mercy is exercised toward others, it is limited to those who agree with the opinions and causes of the ones who manifest it. To any who might disagree, or have different ideas, any thought of mercy is quickly replaced by criticism, prejudice, intolerance, and even hatred.

Thus, we believe a consideration of the subject of mercy is very timely, as we view the spirit of hate and vengeance which is playing so important a role in shaping the plans and policies of today's world. In order to properly gain an understanding of this essential character quality, and then to put it into practice in daily life, we believe it is both necessary and beneficial to consider what the Bible has to say on this vital topic.

## **THE SOURCE OF MERCY**

The psalmist declares of God, "He hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death." (Ps. 102:19,20) In accordance with this statement of the Heavenly Father's merciful interest in the human family, Jesus when stating the reason for his coming to earth to suffer death as a ransom for man, says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John 3:16

One of the grandest qualities that man can exercise, and which will bring him corresponding

blessings, is that of mercy. Jesus laid great stress upon this quality of mercy, declaring that whatever may be our attainments otherwise, if we do not have mercy upon others, neither will God have mercy upon us. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) We do well to realize that if no mercy were shown us all would be lost. Likewise, we cannot retain our present relationship with God unless his spirit of mercy dwells within us.

The work of creation was a most extraordinary demonstration of God’s infinite wisdom and power. To undo the results of evil brought about by the great adversary, however, and to accomplish the restoration of the sinful, alienated race of mankind back into his favor, has required the exercise on God’s part of the additional attributes of justice and love. In this sense, God’s plan for man’s ultimate recovery is a far greater work than that of creation. Yet, in all these grand works of the Heavenly Father, we are assured that he “fainteth not, neither is weary.”—Isa. 40:28

## **THE SON’S MERCY**

God’s “only begotten Son” shared the same character qualities as the great Creator, and desired to be used in the outworking of his Father’s redemptive plan toward man. The Son of God laid aside his prehuman existence and glory, humbled himself, and became a man—“not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Phil. 2:5-8; Matt. 20:28, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) It required an uncompromising love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity to resist every temptation to deviate even in the slightest degree from this determined course.

Jesus' spirit of self-sacrifice and his willingness to surrender his rights and privileges never faltered. Even the supreme test of his loyalty and obedience in Gethsemane, where it is said that he cried unto "him that was able to save him from death, and was heard," found Jesus determined to do the Father's will. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered," even unto death.—Heb. 5:7,8

When he appeared before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, Jesus was looked upon as a fit object to be insulted, mocked, and physically abused. He was spat upon, smitten with rods, and struck with closed fists and open palms. Inventing a new diversion, they blindfolded Jesus, then hit him, and demanded that he tell who it was that did so. "And many other things blasphemously spake they against him," all of which were endured by the Master in silence.—Matt. 26:67,68; 27:30; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65

When Jesus answered nothing to these things and did not defend himself, he was turned over to the Romans who also mocked him. The soldiers arrayed him in a scarlet robe, made a crown of thorns for his head, and placed a reed in his right hand. They amused themselves and the spectators by bowing to him in mock homage and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matt. 27:27-29) He meekly and uncomplainingly endured. What depths of wickedness the depraved human heart can descend to and glory in! Nevertheless, it was this very world and all of its people, the just and unjust, which Jesus had come to save, by giving himself a "ransom for all."—I Tim. 2:5,6

## JESUS STILL MERCIFUL

On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. He was exalted to the Father's right hand, "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (I Pet. 3:22) He is now the Lord of the dead and the living, and all judgment has been committed to him by the Father. (Rom. 14:9; John 5:22) In view of his rejection, one might wonder if Jesus has in any way altered his original purpose to "seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) Such is most assuredly not the case. Unlike the imperfect human disposition, the faithful Son, like the Father, is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever," and that even "if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." (Heb. 13:8; II Tim. 2:13) Thus, after his resurrection, the risen Lord gave a glorious testimony to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, saying to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."—Luke 24:46,47

"All power ... in heaven and in earth" has been given to our risen Lord, which will, in due time, be marvelously manifested in that he will call from the grave all that are there imprisoned. (Matt. 28:18; Isa. 61:1) However, more than this boundless power and limitless knowledge will be required in "reconciling the world unto himself." (II Cor. 5:19) To a sinful world, steeped in darkness, and enemies through wicked works, there must be extended great mercy and compassion, inexhaustible gentleness, forbearance, patience and longsuffering, in

order to bring them back up the highway of holiness to perfection and fellowship with God.—Isa. 35:8-10

Jesus, like the Heavenly Father, “delighteth in mercy,” as stated in our opening text. As a “merciful and faithful high priest,” he is “touched with a feeling of our infirmities.” (Heb. 2:17; 4:15) He is abundantly able to respond to the faintest call for help, to read the inmost secrets of every heart, and to extend a love which never fails. He will “save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.”—Heb. 7:25; Rom. 10:13

In many things we are all faulty, and our Lord’s mercy is required and is extended to us. Likewise, in the coming age when the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth “as the waters cover the sea,” mercy will also be extended to all mankind. (Isa. 11:9) After so costly a redemption, God desires “all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth,” and is not “willing that any should perish.” (I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9) Mercy and long-suffering will be manifested until sin and the sinner are demonstrated to be inseparably and willfully connected.

## **CO-JUDGES MUST BE MERCIFUL**

The Apostle Paul tells us that the faithful followers of Christ of the present age will be co-judges with him of the world in the coming thousand-year judgment day. (I Cor. 6:2; Acts 17:31) Let us not think, however, that our Lord, so loving and merciful, would delegate this great work to those who are less loving, less compassionate, less gentle and forbearing than he. We may be sure that this is not the case. All those to whom the judging of the world

is to be committed in Messiah's kingdom will be such as have yielded themselves to be taught of God, and to be led by his Holy Spirit. They are those who by being "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," have grown up "into him in all things, ... even Christ," so that they can bear mercifully with the world, seeing that they were also once "compassed with infirmity."—Eph. 4:15; 6:10; Heb. 5:2

The godlike quality of mercy, in which our Master assures us all his followers must abound, is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* in the following ways: "Compassion or forbearance shown to an offender or to one subject to another's power;" "lenient or compassionate treatment;" "compassionate treatment of those in distress;" and "an act of divine favor or compassion." Closely associated with mercy, compassion is defined as: "Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it."

## **MERCY IN ACTION**

Human compassion, mercy and sympathy are fragments remaining from the perfect disposition of man before the fall, and today are but faint and limited reflections of the divine character. The mercy, however, that exercises itself regardless of human approval, irrespective of reward, is a righteous motive, and is the outward expression of a heart in which the love of God has been poured through the power of the Holy Spirit. This mighty power lays hold upon the sentiments, the words, the affections, and rightly fostered, will permeate every channel of life. It will extend to all one's fellow creatures, especially to those

in any degree demonstrating their desire for righteousness. It will prompt prayer even for enemies and the desire for their blessing.

Only those who discern their own need of mercy are in the right mental attitude to be merciful toward others. Strangely, however, those who are in the greatest need of mercy themselves, often appear to be the least ready to exercise it toward others. Some are so deficient in this important quality that they practice unsympathetic faultfinding and criticism of others, overlooking their good qualities. By this attitude, they ruin their own happiness, and that of others. Prayer, rather than resentment, is the better reaction to the faults and mistakes of others that we cannot remedy. Anything akin to anger, envy, hatred, malice, strife, is antagonistic to mercy. (Eph. 4:31) Indeed, the loss of mercy will permit these evil dispositions to assert themselves and eventually cause disaster.

Rather than speak complainingly of others, we should seek to cover their faults unless it is necessary to speak of them to avoid injury to others. (I Pet. 4:8) On more than one occasion, Jesus quoted these important words of God through the prophet, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice." (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13; 12:7) This should have taught the Pharisees, to whom it was addressed, that sacrificial offerings were quite secondary to love, justice, mercy and compassion for their fellow men. They should rather have delighted in lending a helping hand in drawing others nearer to God, to come under his instruction and influence. The Pharisees' complacent and self-satisfied hearts, however, were displeasing to the Lord, and made them undeserving of his blessing.



## MERCY VERSUS JUSTICE

It is true that God is just, but it is also true that he is loving and kind. He is spoken of as “the Father of mercies,” “rich in mercy,” and as having “abundant mercy.” (II Cor. 1:3; Eph. 2:4; I Pet. 1:3) In the Psalms alone the word “mercy” is used 100 times in the *King James Version*, and 10 times God’s “tender mercies” are mentioned. Jacob humbly uttered in prayer to God, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.”—Gen. 32:10

In allowing chastenings and corrections upon us, it is not that the Heavenly Father wishes to retaliate upon his servants, who, in the course of their stewardship, have made mistakes, sometimes severe ones. Divine wisdom, justice and mercy may require severe experiences at times in order that we learn what might not be possible in any other way. “Mercy rejoiceth against judgment,” against its execution, and delights that it can be deferred. By contrast, “he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.” (James 2:13) It is quite proper to govern ourselves by the rules of justice. However, we should view and measure others by as large a degree of generosity, sympathy and forgiveness as possible.

While admitting all this, and seeking to practice it in at least a small way, many do not “love mercy.” (Mic. 6:8) Rather, they look for vengeance, and while leaving the final punishment to God, they are vexed by the apparent delay. Let us not be of this attitude, but “put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies.” “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” Let us show “mercy, with

cheerfulness,” and seek to be “full of mercy.” Only the wicked and deceitful “remember not to shew mercy.”—Col. 3:12; Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:8; James 3:17; Ps. 109:16

## **EXAMPLES OF MERCY**

Of our Heavenly Father, we read in Paul’s letter to Titus, that “the kindness and love of God, our Saviour toward man appeared, ... according to his mercy he saved us.” (Titus 3:4,5) Jesus wept over Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41-44) He was grieved, moved with compassion, and stirred with emotion that the Jewish people should bring upon themselves such great desolation as resulted from their rejection of him and his message.

Abraham, in “dust and ashes,” pleaded with God with much persistence for Sodom. (Gen. 18:26-32) Moses also, the man of God, was meek above all others. Though learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, and labored tirelessly for the people of Israel until his death without any desire for reward.—Num. 12:3; Heb. 11:24-27

When Israel provoked God with the golden calf, he informed Moses that he would destroy them, and make of Moses a great nation. What a test of ambition this was, if it were hidden in Moses’ heart. He tells us that he was afraid of the anger and displeasure of God, yet he fell down upon his face forty days and nights to plead for Israel. This touching intercession that went up from the heart of Moses to God has come down through the ages. “Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, ... Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee,

out of thy book which thou hast written.” (Exod. 32:31,32; Deut. 9:7-21) Again at Kadeshbarnea, God would have destroyed Israel, but Moses once more interceded, praying, “O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”—Deut. 9:26

Joseph was also a notable example of mercy and compassion. When Jacob sent his sons to Egypt the second time, Joseph made himself known to them, and wept so intensely that those in the house of Pharaoh heard. He said to his brethren, “Come near to me, I pray you. ... Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. ... Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, ... And there I will nourish thee; ... Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them.”—Gen. 45:1-15

Likewise, David, though anointed as a lad to kingship by Samuel, kept the matter to himself, not despising humble daily work. He was courageous, pious and modest before Saul. Though often in danger, persecuted and hunted by Saul, David never plotted, injured or talked indiscreetly, but trustfully awaited God’s due time. When the news of Saul’s death reached David, he “mourned, and wept, and fasted till even, for Saul, ... And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul: ... Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle!”—II Sam. 1:11-25

Paul wrote with great compassion and mercy concerning his fellow Israelites, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” “I say the truth in Christ, ... my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.” (Rom. 10:1; 9:1-3) In rebuking the Corinthians for their deflections, Paul says his letter had been written “with many tears.”—II Cor. 2:4

Stephen prayed, even as he was being stoned to death, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:60) Likewise many others down through the ages, having a good and honest heart, have faithfully served God and followed his example of mercy, compassion, sympathy and love. Even if they did not understand his purposes at the time, they were full of faith and “loved mercy,” because they saw evidences in their lives that this was something that God “delighteth in.”

How precious are these illustrations of God’s grace and his ability to fill the hearts of his people with his own blessed Spirit of compassion and mercy. Though the present world be moved by selfishness and hardness of heart, let us give great diligence to see that our mental attitude, our words, and our deeds, proceed from a heart fully devoted to and in harmony with “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” (II Cor. 1:3) Let us, too, continue to pray for God’s coming kingdom, in which all mankind will learn to “praise the beauty of holiness,” and to say, “Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.”—II Chron. 20:21 ■