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“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) Throughout Scripture, we read that God is merciful. So, to be godly, we must be merciful too.

In their essence, mercy and grace are like two sides of a coin. Grace is giving (or receiving) that which is good that we do not deserve. For example, Scripture teaches that salvation is by grace alone (we do not deserve it, and cannot earn it). On the other hand, mercy is not receiving the punishment that we do deserve. Our Lord is rich in mercy toward us (*Ephesians 2:4*), with the most vivid demonstration being that Christ took our punishment on the cross at Calvary.

Before we look closer at what Christ is saying in this verse, let’s consider what He is not saying. He is not saying, ‘if you show mercy to others, you will receive mercy from others.’ The cross certainly demonstrated the fallacy of expecting such. Christ was the most merciful man who ever lived, yet he did not receive mercy at the hands of men.

Christ is also not saying, ‘if you show mercy to others, you will earn mercy from God.’ God’s mercy toward us is not merited or earned. God never owes us anything, but because He is faithful and just, we can always take Him at His word.

God approves of our attitude when we show mercy to others, knowing that we have received and continue to receive mercy from Him. Being channels of God’s mercy to others is evidence that we have received His mercy and are thankful.

There are many biblical examples of this. Abraham showed mercy by rescuing Lot from Sodom, after Lot had disrespected him and made terrible decisions leading to his consequences. Joseph showed mercy to his brothers, even after they hated him and sold him into slavery. David continued to show mercy to Saul, respecting God’s anointed king, even when Saul repeatedly tried to kill him.

In each case, like the meek we have discussed, these who showed mercy did so from a position of power and strength. The natural response would have been to let the other party suffer, to ‘reap what they had sowed’ and get what they deserved... just as God could have justified the same with us.

The Bible mentions mercy hundreds of times, throughout the Old Testament and the New. David (and others) praised the Lord, saying “His mercy endures forever” (*2Chronicles 7:6, 20:21, Ezra 3:11*). *Psalms 23* reminds the believer that “surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life”.

At least a third of the 150 Psalms speak of God’s mercy, which is a central focus of several of them. Many Proverbs teach about practicing mercy. *Lamentations 3:22-23* tells us that “it is because of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed... great is Thy faithfulness.”

Micah 6:8 says God has shown man what is good, and He requires us to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” We would then expect that the Lord Jesus Christ would teach and practice mercy, command His followers to do likewise, and He did. When we show mercy, we are practicing one of the attributes of God.

The Roman world of the Lord’s time on earth did not love mercy at all. They referred to it as ‘a disease of the soul’. Our world today is not too different spiritually. Wealth, power, and sensuality are valued greatly in our competitive society. Mercy is devalued and often seen as weak.

There is a progression in the Beatitudes. They begin with having the right attitude toward ourselves (poor in spirit). Then we have a right attitude toward our sin (we mourn it). Next we have a right attitude toward God’s Word (meekness, as we have power under control). These lead to the fourth, as by faith we receive the righteousness of God. Then, having received His righteousness, we begin to be less like the world, and more like God (merciful).

To be clear, God’s mercy is very different than the humanistic approach to mercy. It does not deny or neglect sin by just ‘sweeping it under the rug’. Christ never did that. When He forgave the woman at the well, He clearly told her to go forward and leave behind her life of sin.

Counterfeit mercy that denies truth and righteousness is not godly mercy, and does not lead to peace. Some want to create their own brand of mercy rather than be channels of God’s mercy. Some will show ‘mercy’ because they don’t want their own sin to be exposed. Others may do so to boost their own ego or seem more spiritual. But whereas this worldly show of mercy feeds the ego, true mercy humbles the person and gives God the glory.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the true neighbor was the foreigner who showed mercy. He did so even at a cost to himself, both monetarily and exposing himself to danger. We also demonstrate mercy when we forgive others. Again, Christ is the greatest example: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (*Luke 23:34*)

Matthew 5

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

The Beatitudes

2 And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you on My account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Memory Verse for the Week

"Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate!"
(Amos 5:15)