



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

Mercy Me

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

When I was a boy, I played a game with some of my friends called “Mercy.” It’s kind of like “Thumb Wars” but with lots of pain. It is played by clapping hands with a friend, and then, through gripping, twisting and turning their hand, inflicting as much pain as possible while avoiding or ignoring the pain they inflict on you. The first one to say “Mercy” is the loser.

That’s the way most people view mercy. To receive it you have to ask for it, and if you ask for it, you’re a loser. We think that only the weak and powerless need mercy.

But Jesus approaches mercy from a completely different perspective. In Matthew 5:7, He implies that we all need mercy, but that we don’t receive it by asking for it; we receive mercy by giving it.

Jesus doesn’t spend any time explaining why we need mercy. He assumes that His disciples know why from the rest of Scripture. We need mercy because we are sinful (Luke 18:13; Rom 11:32; Titus 3:5). Without mercy, none of us would receive eternal life. Of course, mercy does not save us; grace does. But grace extends to us out of God’s mercy. Mercy is when God does not give us something bad that we do deserve (immediate punishment and death for our sin). Grace is God giving us something good we do not deserve (eternal life and heaven). Mercy extends relief; grace provides pardon. Mercy cures, heals and helps; grace cleanses and restores.¹

But none of this is what Jesus is talking about here. He is talking to His disciples who have already received mercy and grace from God for their eternal life. Most of them have already believed in Jesus for eternal life. Like the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is providing instructions on how to live as one of His followers.

And the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 provide a progression of steps for one to follow who would be like Christ. We must be so desperate for the things of God (5:3), that we mourn over our sin (5:4) to the point of meekly replacing it for the sake of God’s ways (5:5). We then fill the void left behind with the righteousness of God (5:6). Only when we are filled with the righteousness of God are we able to show the mercy of God to others (5:7). “Truly, the more righteous a man is, the more merciful he will be. The more sinful a man is, the more harsh and critical he will be.”²

We show mercy to others, not only as a reflection of God’s righteousness in us, but also so that we **obtain mercy** from God. Though we have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we still need daily grace and mercy for our frequent sinful attitudes and actions, and most importantly of all, we need mercy when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

All believers will stand before Christ on that day, to receive reward for the things done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10). The Judgment Seat of Christ does not determine our eternal destiny but our eternal reward. And those who showed more mercy to others during this life, will receive more mercy from Jesus Christ when we all stand before Him.

So be careful how critical, harsh and judgmental you are. Those who lack mercy now toward others, will someday discover—either in this life, or before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:9-11; Jas. 2:13)—that they have reached the limits of God’s mercy toward them. Let us not stretch the mercy of God. It is like a rubber band. If you try to put it around too much, it will break. Based upon God’s mercy toward you, be merciful to others, so that His mercy will continue.

So don’t wait for people to cry out for mercy. Be merciful toward them, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful to you—freely and unsought for.

¹ John Stott, *BST: Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove; IVP, 1978), 47.

² Jon Courson, *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary: NT* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 26.