

Lesson 10

God Is Merciful

We live in a world that is filled with suffering, misery, despair and futility. In our world, men are crying out, "Is there any one who cares?" I thank God that I can tell you without reservation that there is someone who cares. God cares because God is a God of mercy.

The Bible repeatedly declares that God is merciful.

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate (merciful) and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." (Exo. 34:6)

God's mercy actually flows out from the goodness of God.

"The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love."
(Psa. 33:5)

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love (mercy) endures forever." (Psa. 136:1)

God is good and He does good. The goodness of God is His benevolent and kind acts which He performs to all men to promote their welfare because they are creatures of the Almighty and made in His image. The goodness of God, then, is the source of mercy. Goodness differs from mercy in that goodness deals with God's kindness towards all men because they are the creation of God, but mercy deals with God's kindness and compassion toward men because they are sinners.

THE DEFINITION OF MERCY

God shows mercy because He is mercy in Himself. Mercy speaks of God's compassion or pity toward sinful men who are in misery and in need of divine help. Because God is merciful He is ready to relieve the misery of His fallen creatures. Mercy differs from grace in that grace has reference to sinful men as guilty, while mercy has reference to sinful men as miserable.

Divine mercy is not a temporary mood of God but an attribute of God's eternal being. We never have to wonder whether God will be merciful one day and not merciful the next. Forever His mercy stands, a boundless, overwhelming immensity of divine pity and compassion. This is why the Scriptures speak of God's mercy as ***"great"*** (1 Kings 3:6), ***"tender"*** (Luke 1:78)

and **“abundant”** (1 Pet. 1:3 KJV). God is the source of all mercy and apart from Him there is no mercy for any person. Because of this, He is called **“the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.”** (2 Cor. 1:3)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MERCY

Since God is the source of all mercy, then there are certain characteristics that are essential to divine mercy based on His other attributes.

God’s mercy is free. Mercy flows from God with no strings attached. No man deserves mercy because he is a polluted sinner. To speak of men deserving mercy is a contradiction, for mercy is free and no man deserves it. If God should show mercy to such as were worthy or deserving, He would show none at all, for no man deserves anything from God.

God’s mercy is infinite. God is an infinite fountain of mercy. The Bible tells us that God is **“plenteous in mercy”** (Psa. 86:5 KJV) and **“rich in mercy”** (Eph. 2:4). There simply is no end to the mercy of God.

God’s mercy is eternal. As long as He is God, He will be showing mercy, for His mercy endures forever.

“But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him . . .” (Psa. 103:17 KJV)

God’s mercy is sovereign. God’s mercy is given to whom God desires to give it because He is sovereign in all things.

“And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” (Exo. 33:19)

“For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” (Rom. 9:15)

“Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.” (Rom. 9:18)

God is not obligated to any man, and no man has any claim on the mercy of God. If any person receives mercy, it is by an act of God alone.

THE CREATED WORLD AND MERCY

Mercy, unlike grace, can be received by all mankind. Grace is related only to the elect of God, but mercy can be experienced by all God's creatures.

"The LORD is good to all; he has compassion (mercy) on all he has made." (Psa. 145:9)

This common mercy to all men is sometimes called general mercy. There is no saving value in general mercy but there is pity by God toward His creatures. God's general mercy is temporal in nature; that is to say, it is confined strictly to this present life. There will be no mercy for unredeemed men beyond the grave. God's general mercy involves one's existence and the providential care of God.

"And he (God) is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." (Acts 17:25)

"He (God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matt. 5:45)

God provides food, clothing, shelter, health and a limited comfort in times of crisis for those who are not children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

While the unsaved man has been given much mercy, he has no appreciation of God's general mercy, giving no credit to the Creator whatsoever. The natural man thinks that all his blessings in life are a result of his own hard work and ingenuity. He simply has no place for God in his experience. He rejects God's general mercy; therefore, there is no reason why he should receive God's particular mercy for salvation.

THE UNSAVED WORLD AND MERCY

For those who are without Christ and outside of God's plan of salvation, there is particular mercy from God that can bring them to salvation. This mercy is from God through Jesus. It is the great design of the Scriptures to represent God as merciful, for God delights in showing mercy to sinners.

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy." (Micah 7:18)

The true God is far more inclined to show mercy than to display His wrath.

Sinner, it is by the pure mercy of God that He has not taken your life and destroyed you in perdition. God's justice demands that He will judge you for all eternity because you are a sinner in rebellion to a holy God.

"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD , the LORD , the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (Exo. 34:6-7)

God's mercy withholds the speedy execution of His justice.

"Because of the LORD's great love (mercy) we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail." (Lamentations 3:22)

Your rebellion to God and His Son Jesus Christ continually provokes God to wrath, but why does He not strike you dead and cast you into hell? It is not because He cannot do it, for He is armed with omnipotence, but His mercy is withholding judgment. He is granting you mercy so you may repent and turn to the living God through Christ.

Perhaps you are saying, "I do not know whether God will forgive me if I trust Christ. How do I know if He will save me?" This is the devil's logic, for the Bible says that God is merciful and that He is ready to pardon any poor sinner who trusts Christ.

"But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate (merciful), slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them." (Neh. 9:17)

You say, "I do not know whether God will forgive me, for my sins are too great." God's arm is not short to save. (Isa. 59:1, 2) Are you any worse than the Apostle Paul before he was saved? Paul was guilty of self-righteousness, lying, pride and voted to put Christians to death, but he received mercy from God and was saved.

"Even though I (Paul) was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy." (1 Tim. 1:13)

Do not let the immensity of your sins discourage you, for God's mercy can pardon all sins, great and small. God's mercy flows from an infinite fountain. Take your cup of faith and drink of the waters of mercy. God shows particular mercy to sinners and this should encourage you to believe and find salvation.

“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” (Rev. 22:17)

Only unbelief keeps the stream of God’s mercy from flowing to you. Humble yourself and cry out to God, “Oh God, have mercy on me a poor sinner.”

THE SAVED WORLD AND MERCY

For those of us who have trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have been saved by the pure mercy of God.

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5)

God was merciful to us even when we were in our unsaved state, when we cared nothing about His mercy. As sinners, we were enemies of God, in unholy rebellion to God. We walked according to the philosophy of this world. We were captives of the devil himself and were children of disobedience. We, who deserved nothing but hell, have received mercy. Thank God that He is rich in mercy.

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Eph. 2:1-5)

Now that we are saved by God’s pure mercy, we are objects of mercy and not among the reprobate.

“What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?” (Rom. 9:22-24)

Christian, we have obtained mercy and entrance into heaven when we deserved nothing but God's wrath and eternal punishment. Oh, the mercy of God! Who can grasp it?

Because we are special objects of God's sovereign, particular saving mercy in Christ, what an incentive this is for us to live holy lives. God has shown us mercy that we might love Him and do His will. God not only saved us by His mercy but He wants us to experience His mercy every day as we serve our Christ through faith and obedience.

"They (the Lord's mercies) are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam. 3:23)

God's mercy is available to all who worship the true God through Christ.

"But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love (mercy) is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children." (Psa. 103:17)

Think of it! We who are objects of God's particular mercy can experience God's mercies in time and will experience His mercies through all eternity.

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, I want to warn you that there is no mercy for you beyond this life, for you will only encounter a wrathful God. You may receive God's general mercy in this life but His particular mercy that results in salvation is found only in Christ. To have health and wealth is a mercy, but to have Christ and salvation is the greatest mercy.

Hear me now. God is merciful and He takes pity on all sinners who come to Jesus Christ and drink freely of Him. Dip your cup of faith into the infinite fountain of God's mercy and be saved.

"For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." (Psa. 86:5 KJV)