

Christ's Beatitudes

The Blessed Merciful

Demonstration of Mercy

By nature man is uncaring (Rom. 3:16), and even if kindness is shown, it can come from a self-centered and hateful heart that has never been changed by the grace of God. The Lord Jesus says, however, that a Christian is someone who is merciful.

What is mercy? It is compassion for the needy which leads to practical help to relieve their misery. It is the heart and hand of compassion. Thomas Watson: "It is a melting disposition whereby we lay to heart the misery of others and are ready on all occasions to be instruments for their good" (cf. Luke 10:33-35). "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). Other examples: Blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52), David who asked for God's pity and pardon (Ps. 51).

What does mercy do? *Mercy helps* (Lk 10:33ff); *Mercy forgives* (Matt. 18:21-35). *Mercy cares* (Rom. 10:1; Jd 22-23). It is what God does. He helps, cares and forgives (Mic 7:18; Eph 2:4; Js. 5:11).

Motivation for mercy

Even unconverted people sometimes show commendable mercy to those in need (Acts 28:2). Illustrations abound of people intervening to help others who are in desperate situations. We can admire such bravery, courage and sacrificial efforts of others. Why do they do it? People may be motivated for all sorts of reasons but still not have the heart of compassion and mercy that the people of God have. Plus, while great care and concern is shown to provide people with food, clothing, housing, healing, comfort, but no concern is shown to the souls.

The good-natured, generous man of the world pities and relieves the temporal wants of his fellow-creatures; but he thinks not of their spiritual state, their everlasting prospects. He feels tender compassion for naked, starving, diseased bodies... but he feels no pity for souls perishing in ignorance of God and under the condemning sentence of His holy law... though there is something monstrously absurd in men's being so exceedingly concerned about the removal of the sufferings of a few years, and altogether careless about the prevention of the intolerable miseries of eternity. (John Brown).

"Mercy that ignores the spiritual need is not the full-orbed mercy shown by Jesus."

Thomas Watson: "When we see others sleeping the sleep of death and the fire of God's wrath ready to burn about their ears, and we are silent, is not this to be accessory to their death?"

Richard Baxter: "If you have the hearts of Christians and of men, let them year towards your poor ignorant, ungodly neighbours. Alas, there is but a step between them and death and hell..."

Have you hearts of rock, that you cannot pity men in such a case as this?... Do you not care who is damned, so long as you are saved?"

What then is the Christian's motivation for showing mercy to others? Not because of a reward or to make an impression, or out of guilt. God's people are motivated to show mercy by the mercy they have been shown of God. He has been merciful to them in His common mercy, but especially His saving mercy (1 Tim. 1:13; Rom. 8:32). Jeremiah Burroughs: "nothing fills the soul of mercy than the consideration that our sins are pardoned and that we have received the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That fills the soul with bowels of mercy" (1 Jn. 4:19).

Reception of mercy

"They shall obtain mercy." It seems to say that people who show mercy will receive it as a reward, that is by merit. But mercy cannot be merited. If it could, Christ would have had to say: "blessed are the merciful for they obtain justice." But He says they will be mercied.

Mercy in time. "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul" (Prov. 11:17). Matthew Henry: "We are friends or enemies to ourselves." (Cf. Prov. 11:24; 28:27; Lk 6:38). And how much better it is to forgive than to hold a grudge. "A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves us the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, and the waste of spirits."

Mercy in eternity (Jd. 21; 2 Tim. 1:18).