



(7) The Mercy and Grace of God

God tenderly and effectively cares for us (Hab 3:2)

Why is it so hard to forgive others? Our unforgiving spirits seem to indicate that we have never made a mistake! But God is perfect. Why, then, is He so kind and forgiving? We are missing something big here.

1) The Need for God's Mercy

- Mercy does not come at the expense of justice or righteousness. "O LORD, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy" (Hab 3:2). God's mercy never overlooks sin but through the cross satisfies His wrath.
- God's compassion is seen in His magnanimous treatment of us by withholding the judgment that we deserve. "Nevertheless, in Thy great compassion Thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them, For Thou art a gracious and compassionate God" (Neh 9:31).
- God's mercy seat. The Old Testament ark of covenant demonstrated God's extreme patience. In the ark were the two tablets, the Ten Commandments, which revealed God's standards and our sins. God dwelled above that ark and though seeing the Israelites with their shortcomings, used the sprinkled blood on the ark to hide their sins with the blood of animals (Heb 10:4) until His Son's blood was shed on the cross (1 Pet 1:2). When we see God's extreme mercy, we ask, "Why?" and come up with the answer that God has a greater purpose to reconcile mankind back with Him, establishing fellowship and co-working with them.
- Praise due to His mercy. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which He lavished upon us" (Eph 1:6-8).

Summary: From the Garden when man sinned, the need for mercy began. God's wrath, seeking justice from His righteous throne, started oppressing everyone. Death, the curse of life, entered the scene and remains with us to this day. God's wrath, like a falling roof above our heads, constantly threatens to come down upon us. The walls to hold back His wrath are His mercy. So although death threatens, God's mercy extends life so that He can in history come to earth and die for us, providing redemption, and then proclaim this message about Christ to the world.

2) The Difference Between Mercy and Grace

Much confusion arises due to these two words of mercy and grace largely because they both display God's rich goodness expressed to His people not deserving it. They do have different meanings which highlight the special aspects of God's goodness.

- The commonality of mercy and grace: The two words overlap at times, but they both emphasize God's general goodness and man's undeserving nature. The words, mercy and grace, are often used adjacent to each other.
 - "And he prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that **Thou art a gracious and compassionate God**, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity'" (Jonah 4:2).
 - Mercy and grace are used together in the New Testament too. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).
 - The combination mercy, grace, and peace is used three times as an opening salutation (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 John 3).
- The distinctive characteristics of mercy and grace:
 - Mercy** is God's extraordinary kindness that withholds His judgment upon man for his wrong.
 - Grace** is God's bestowal of favor even though man does not deserve it.

In the above situation with Jonah, the Lord holds off judgment upon a nation by exercising mercy and sending the prophet a second time to speak God's Word so that the Ninevites might hear and repent.

- **Lovingkindness** (*hesed*): This powerful word combines both God's patience (i.e. mercy), God's wisdom (i.e. saving plan by which He could exercise mercy), and His willingness to work with inferior and sinful and rebellious creatures (grace).
 - "But Thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in **lovingkindness** and truth" (Ps 86:15).
(*hesed*: lovingkindness (NASB); mercy (KJV); steadfast love (ESV); love (NIV).
 - "The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in **lovingkindness**" (Ps 145:8).

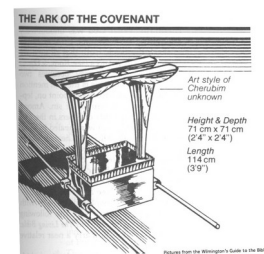
Summary

These two words further display God's interest in helping His people to contemplate the depths of God's love.

- For Him to forgive us, He had to come up with a plan. He couldn't just overlook our sins.
- He had His only Son Jesus Christ die for our sins.
- We are humbled at such a great scene of compassion and commitment to us.
- And so, our salvation is birthed in love. We are as a little baby without knowing what is going on.
- That love, birthed into us, becomes our DNA and affects our own actions and treatment of others.

3) God's Mercy and His People

There are many exhortations and illustrations portraying the important part of forgiveness in God's kingdom. We are saved by His mercy and—so to speak—swim in it our whole lives. We are "in Christ" and therefore bound to Him. This should greatly affect our own lives. There is not much to boast about if God forgives us but we do not forgive our brother.



- The Lord's Prayer (Mat 6) three times mentions the need.
 - "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12).
 - "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Mt 6:14).
 - "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Mt 6:15).
- Revenge is the Lord's duty, not our own
 - "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord" (Rom 12:19). We can trust the Lord for proper vengeance. This is the day to cry for mercy and salvation (John 3:17).
- Bitterness one's heart of revenge and means that if we had power, we would take revenge.
 - "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Eph 4:31).
 - "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Heb 12:15).
- Complete forgiveness is necessary for good relationship with our Heavenly Father and effective ministry.
 - "Peter...said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'" Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ... 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ...You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Mat 18:21-35).
- Jude's heart:
 - "May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you" (Jude 2).

- “Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” (Jude 21).
- “And have mercy on some, who are doubting” (Jude 22).
- “Save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh” (Jude 23).

Study Questions

- How do you summarize the similarities between mercy and grace? How are they different?
- Describe the mercy seat? Why is it called such and what does it demonstrate?
- Why is it so important that we forgive one another?
- Are you upset with anyone right now? Why is it completely unreasonable for any Christian to be bitter?

“A deep consideration of the holiness of God cannot but be followed with a deep consideration of our impure and miserable condition by reason of sin: we cannot glance upon it without reflections upon our own vileness.”⁹