



For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.
(Hosea 6:6)

In addressing the implications of biblical MERCY¹, we should first breach the subject of GRACE. Grace is not the nullification of the Law, but a substitution of the one for whom the penalty of disobedience is legally justified. Jesus did that for us. The Law was not set aside, but enforced thoroughly upon the Lord Jesus Christ as our substitute. He paid the penalty for us, and only One who is innocent can pay the penalty for another; else, he would suffer for himself that penalty. Mercy is the mother of Grace. Unconditional Grace is granted to those who are the Elect of God through the agency of unconditional MERCY - Mercy RESULTS in Grace. While it is true that God is love: *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love”* (1 John 4:8); God is also totally just. He will allow no sin to go unpunished by the terms of the Law. The terms of the Law were satisfied wholly in Jesus Christ at Calvary. His blood was sufficient to cover every sin of those who believe.

Last winter, there was a church near my home which had this statement, written in red, upon its marquee: *“WE ONLY WANT TRUE CHRISTIANS!”* I am sure every church would like to have all become *“True Christians;”* but what were you and I before we became *“True Christians?”* What were the preacher of that church, and every member of it, before they became *“True Christians?”* To post such a dreadful sign is tantamount to a hospital posting *“We want only healthy people here.”* Where will true Christians be found if the sinner is not admitted to church to hear the Word? I believe, as a final act of mercy, that the last sense a person loses at death is that of the sense of hearing. Many dying mothers, fathers, husbands, and wives have revived momentarily at the anguished mourning of their loved ones. Those medical personnel who officiate at the final moments of a patient’s life say that it would be easier for the patient to ‘turn loose’ if their loved ones were not heard weeping. But, I believe it is also an evidence of God’s final mercy. Some may believe seconds before death. *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17) God is merciful in ways that are beyond our means of comprehension. He leaves the Door open until the last moment.

¹ mercy - 1. compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.

We have had the Great Physician attend our bedsides of sin, and He has granted a cure. While we were lost and dying, He spoke life into our souls as a result of His unfailing Mercy and Compassion. Jesus once told the very legalistic and unbelieving Pharisees, when they condemned His apostles for eating grain on the Sabbath: *“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meanest, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* (Matt 9:12-13) We have many religions of sacrifice, and another of mercy. The only true religion is one of Mercy which Christ taught us. The religion that Christ brought was one of mercy through His own sacrifice – for God would require no man (even Abraham) to sacrifice his own child for the sins of others. He sent His own beloved Son as a sacrifice out of an incomprehensible sense of mercy and compassion for us.

That is, the one rather than the other. "Sacrifice," the chief part of the ceremonial law, is here put for a religion of literal adherence to mere rules; while "mercy" expresses such compassion for the fallen as seeks to lift them up. The duty of keeping aloof from the polluted, in the sense of "having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," is obvious enough; but to understand this as prohibiting such intercourse with them as is necessary to their recovery, is to abuse it. This was what these pharisaical religionists did, and this is what our Lord here exposes.

Note whom Jesus came to heal: *“for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* There are two classes of people – those who CONSIDER themselves righteous; and those who are self-confessed sinners. The latter Jesus can offer salvation – the other is beyond the voice of conscience. They consider themselves already righteous and not needful of salvation. The Pharisees were self-righteous and not accessible to the Word of Mercy. *“The righteous” are the whole; “sinners,” the sick. When Christ “called” the latter, as He did Matthew, and probably some of those publicans and sinners whom he had invited to meet Him, it was to heal them of their spiritual maladies, or save their souls: “The righteous,” like those miserable self-satisfied Pharisees, “He sent empty away.” Had they understood the great principle of all religion, which the Scripture everywhere recognizes -- that ceremonial observances must give way before moral duties, and particularly the necessities of nature -- they would have refrained from these captious complaints against men who in this matter are blameless. But our Lord added a specific application of this great principle to the law of the sabbath, preserved only in Mark: “And he said unto them, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath”. A glorious and far-reaching maxim, alike for the permanent establishment of the sabbath and the true freedom of its observance.—* JFB Commentary

Many, many years ago, there was a hardened criminal who lay behind the stone walls of a prison. He was a man of no redeeming values whatsoever – a cutthroat, murderer, and a man of profane and vulgar disposition. No man would have trusted this man around his family or his business. This criminal had been sentenced to death and was fearfully awaiting the execution of that sentence. There was no avenue of appeal. The law, too, afforded no provision for mercy for the law is blind to mercy. On the morning of his execution – and it was a terrible means of execution he faced being nailed to a wooden cross – he watched in dread as the iron-barred door to his prison was opened and his name called. He was belligerent and sullen as the guards dragged him to the outside gate of the prison.

There was a crowd of on-lookers there who were much worked up, and seemed disinterested in his coming execution. In fact, they were screaming for the crucifixion of another man named Jesus. The morning sunrise, bursting over the Judean

Hills into the eyes of Barabbas, made it difficult to discern the image of this man who, amazingly, was wearing a crown of thorns. "Gives us Barabbas," they yelled, and "Crucify this Jesus who claims to be the Son of God." Barabbas wondered what all of this meant. He heard the Roman Prefect exclaim, "But why? I find nothing wrong in this man, Jesus!" But the crowd grew even more vociferous in calling for Barabbas to be set free, and for Jesus to be crucified. "Crucify Him (Jesus) the crowd screamed – His blood be upon us and upon our children!" What a terrible and ominous thing to say! It is far better to have our sins remitted UNDER His blood than to be guilty of that blood. But, to be sure, we all are guilty of the shedding of that blood. Had we not been sinners from birth, He would not have had to suffer and die in our stead.

Barabbas could not make sense of this affair. He KNEW of the magnitude of his own guilt; and he had heard the Prefect pronounce Jesus innocent. So why would the crowd prefer a hardened criminal be set free than an innocent man? Good question, is it not? Barabbas could not comprehend the great mercy being shown him anymore than you and I can comprehend why Jesus would die for us. Before you condemn Barabbas for being set free, and Jesus (the righteous) being crucified, had you not better know that YOU and ME are that Barabbas. Jesus died in our stead and for OUR sins – not His own. We were set free and Jesus went to the cross. That, my friend, is MERCY!

Jesus never raised His voice in anger toward a sinner, but He did do so toward the self righteous Pharisees and religious leaders of the day. This reminds me of the gravity of answering the call to minister. The minister, above all others, must guard against false pride, self-righteousness, and a judgmental condemnation of those to whom the Lord has sent him. Jesus washed the feet of the apostles. Are we too good to sweep the church floor after fellowship? Is our time too demanding to visit the poor and sick? I know a certain minister at one of our churches who washes the dishes after fellowship when needed. THAT is the spirit of humility that we all should manifest. We are under-shepherds of the Great and Good Shepherd. He loves the sheep – the little lambs are the "apple of His eye." If we mistreat His lambs, or sheep, how do you suppose He will feel about that? If we fail to feed them with the wholesome Bread of Life that He has given to us, what reckoning will we face on that last day?

Jesus ALWAYS showed compassion on the poor sinner. He knew their burdens bowed their shoulders down with grief and shame; but He told them: "***Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.***" (Matt 11:28-30) He gave up the Ghost, later, suspended between Heaven and earth (because He was wholly God, and wholly Man), for those same sinners – for you and me. That is mercy! He ALWAYS showed compassion on the lame, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and even those who suffered the sleep of death. You and I, too, have suffered the sleep of death before we came to know this magnanimous Lord of Glory, for every man who does not know the redeeming blood of Christ is yet dead in trespasses and sin while he yet walks. (Ephesians 2:1-10) It is one thing to KNOW of that sacrifice that our Lord made at Calvary, and altogether another thing to TRUST in that blood as a remission of your sins. He came in love, and all that he did was mercy and grace for us! If that mercy and grace of His are rejected, there is no other place to acquire it!