

Blessed!

A Study on the *Beatitudes* of Jesus

As of 4/26/20

Part 6 The Exposition of Matthew 5:4- continued

Matthew 5:1-12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

2 He opened His mouth and *began* to teach them, saying,

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Blessedness of the Merciful

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Now the first four Beatitudes deal entirely with "*inner* Principles"- which are Principles of the heart and mind. They are concerned with the way we see ourselves before God. But the last four are actually outward manifestations of those very same Attitudes. For example, those who, in "poverty of spirit", recognize their need for God's Mercy respond to that- by showing Mercy to others. Those who mourn over their own Sin- respond by a Purity of heart (v. 8). Those who have been gifted with spiritual Meekness- respond by seeking to make Peace (v. 9). And those who hunger and thirst for Righteousness respond by not avoiding the price of that Righteousness- which is

being persecuted for Righteousness' sake (v. 10).

The concept of Mercy is all throughout Scripture, from the Fall to the consummation of History at the Return of Christ. Mercy is a desperately needed Gift of God's providential and redemptive Work on behalf of sinners. And so, the Lord *requires* that His people to follow His Example by extending Mercy to others- *especially* those who have done nothing to deserve it. So, to discover the essence of Mercy- we will look at three basic aspects:

- The Meaning of Mercy
- The Source of Mercy
- The Practice of Mercy

The Meaning of Mercy

Now for the most part, the days in which Jesus lived and taught were *not* characterized by Mercy. Those days were very harsh, cruel, violent, barbaric, and patently *unmerciful*. The Jewish religionists themselves were not inclined to show Mercy to anyone- because to those who are proud, self-righteous, and judgmental- Mercy is always seen as a weakness and a compromise with Evil.

Also, to many of Jesus' hearers- showing Mercy was considered one of the least of virtues, if it was thought to be a virtue at all. It was in the same category as Love- reserved only for those who had shown that same virtue to you. So, to a Pharisee, you only loved those who loved you. And you only showed Mercy to those who had already showed Mercy to you. That Attitude was specifically condemned by Jesus later in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:43-48

43 "You have heard that it was said, '*YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR* and hate your enemy.'

44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the evil* and *the good*, and sends rain on *the righteous* and *the unrighteous*.

46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Yet many people have interpreted this Beatitude in another way that is just as selfish and just as humanistic. These people maintain that our being merciful causes those around us- *especially* those to whom we show mercy- to then be merciful to us.

So, in their mind- Mercy given will mean Mercy received. For such people, Mercy is shown to others ONLY in an effort toward self-seeking.

The ancient rabbi Gamaliel is quoted in the Talmud as saying,

"Whenever thou hast mercy, God will have mercy upon thee, and if thou hast not mercy, neither will God have mercy on thee."

... Gamaliel's idea was correct. When God is involved there will be Mercy for Mercy.

Matthew 6:14&15

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

But as a platitude applied among other people- the Principle does not work. One writer sentimentally says,

"This is the great truth of life: if people see us care, they will care."

... yet neither Scripture nor experience bears out that idea. God works that way, but the world does not. With God there is *a/ways* proper reciprocation, and with interest. If we honor God, He will honor us; if we show Mercy to others, especially to His children, God will show even more abundant Mercy to us. But why is that?

It is because the only reason we show Mercy- is because God has already enabled and empowered us to do so. So, we are NOT earning Mercy by giving Mercy. No. We are giving Mercy because God has graciously empowered us to do so and God is actually NOT reciprocating to us at all. God is freely being merciful to us- simply because He chooses to.

Romans 9:15&16

15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

16 So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

The English word, "*Mercy*" comes from the Hebrew word, *hesed* and the Greek word, *eleos*, and it means: *steadfast love; lovingkindness; underserved kindness; or compassion*. The Bible teaches *repeatedly* that the one true living God is not only Almighty and Omipotent- but is also, by Nature, Merciful. The God of the Bible is Kind; Good; and Compassionate.

One of the strangest things about God's Mercy is that- even though it is one of the most *precious* Qualities about God- it is also one of the most *misunderstood* and

misappropriated. And once Mercy is understood from a Biblical perspective- from God's Perspective- it is often looked at with great disdain and in many quarters- is even *rejected*.

Mercy Isn't "Fair"

The very first thing that we need to understand about Mercy- is that it is *always* "underserved". Nobody *deserves* Mercy. Nobody has *earned* it; or *qualifies* for God's Mercy. And no human, born of woman, is *entitled* to receive Mercy. And so, by definition, Mercy is never, at any time, distributed "equally" among all people. And even among those to whom Mercy *is* distributed- it isn't always distributed to the same *extent*. Mercy is always "free" and God is never *obligated* to show anyone His Mercy. And that has the net effect of making Mercy very precious indeed. And it should also make us all very grateful and thankful when God does show us His Mercy.

If Mercy was *deserved* and was always distributed *equally* among *all* people- it would make Mercy to be a *Payment*- rather than a Gift. It would make Mercy something that God *owed* to us- and not something that He graciously *gives* to us. It would make Mercy something that God is *obligated* to give- and not something that He wondrously provides.

So, by definition, Mercy is not "Fair". Now by saying that- I do NOT mean that God is "Unfair". He isn't. What I mean by that- is that God is not interested in having to measure up to some arbitrary human standard of "Fairness". God is interested in being Almighty God- Who does all things...

... after the counsel of His will, (Ephesians 1:11b)

"Fairness" would dictate that God gives *nobody* His Mercy- since we are all undeserving wicked sinners. Yet God DOES give His Mercy. In fact, God grants Mercy way beyond our comprehension. But He always grants that Mercy based solely on His Own Choice- and nothing else.

We must understand that God is the only truly "free" Being in the Universe. He does what He does- based on nothing but His Own Good Pleasure.

Psalms 115:3

But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

So, the criteria by which God acts and moves and does *anything*- is whether it will bring Himself Glory; whether it will magnify His Own pristine Holiness. And God's Mercy is no exception to this. Therefore, Mercy is *always*, and in *all cases*, distributed according to God's Will; God's Prerogative; God's Plan; God's Choice; and God's Desire without *any* consideration of Man's condition, will, need, or desire. The Bible does NOT teach that people receive Mercy from God simply because they *ask* for it; or even because they *need* it. No, the Bible teaches that God sovereignly chooses to "grant" or "give" His Mercy to them. Thus, it is true that everybody who *needs* Mercy- does *not* receive it.

Romans 9:14-21

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

15 For He says to Moses, "*I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.*"

16 So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "*FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.*"

18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Mercy is not "Leniency"

Now as we define God's Mercy- we must be clear that Mercy is *not* Leniency. Leniency is defined as:

The act of appeasing; the act of agreeable tolerance; being permissive; indulgent; or alleviating.

Leniency is a *weakness* of character- not a strength. It is a character *defect* and is birthed in an *inability* or *unwillingness* to confront and/or stop something that is wrong. But the God of Scripture is not weak; neither is His Character defective in any way. God's Character is Perfect and is the one single Standard of Righteousness. It is God's Justice that assures that *everything* that is wrong will be corrected. And that fact makes God's Mercy to *never* be Leniency.

But the one thing that becomes crystal clear from studying the Scriptures is the great distinction between the God of the Bible- the one true and living God; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Creator Redeemer God; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ- and all the other man-made "deities" of the false religions and human philosophies of the earth. *None* of these false "deities" are compassionate; *none* of them are loving; *none* of them are gracious; *none* of them are forgiving; *none* of them are kind; and *none* of them are merciful.

There aren't any "savior-gods" in the other religions of Man. There are not any "gods" of love, or tenderness or compassion or mercy in the demonically inspired religions of sinful men. Therefore, in all other religions- Man must "do" for God. Only in Christianity does God "do" for Man.

So, don't pick Islam if you want a merciful God- because you will never find a "god" like that anywhere in the *Qu-ran*. Don't search for a merciful God in the *Bhagavad-gita*; or the teachings of Confucius; or the writings of the American Indians; or the writings of the Buddha because you will never find Him there.

The concept that the Omnipotent, Omniscient God and Creator of the Universe is also Loving, Kind, Compassionate, Good, and Merciful- is *unique* to the God of the Bible. The "gods" of the false religions of the nations are distasteful, unhappy "deities"- who can *never* be appeased; are *never* satisfied; and will *never*, in a million years, issue Mercy to *anyone*. But it is the very Nature of the one true and living God to feel real Compassion and to have genuine Love and Mercy on us.

How Do "Mercy" and "Justice" Relate?

We need to understand that as human beings who are sinful- we elevate Mercy far above God's Justice- precisely because we are guilty. But from God's Perspective- His Justice and His Mercy are *always* kept at a perfect Balance. God is *never* more Merciful than He is Just; and He is *never* more Just than He is Merciful.

And that reality, creates a terrible problem- that most people haven't really considered. Because God's Attribute of Mercy seems to clash with the Attribute of His Justice. And so, normally speaking, God is *either* Just *or* Merciful- but He simply CANNOT be *both* Just and Merciful at the same time to the same person.

Exodus 34:6&7a

6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin..."

Here Moses was "carried along" by God the Holy Spirit to teach that God is...

- Compassionate
- Gracious
- Slow to Anger (Longsuffering)
- Abounding in Lovingkindness (Mercy)
- Abounding in Truth
- Who Keeps Lovingkindness (Mercy) for thousands
- Who Forgives Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin

... and we rejoice over a God like that! He is full of Mercy! But now look what Moses said next:

Exodus 34:7b

... yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on

the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

... look again at the phrase,

... yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished

... this means that ALL sinners MUST be punished. God has promised that not a single person, who commits Sin, can go unpunished. But wait! Look what the Apostle Paul said:

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Here, the Apostle wrote infallibly that ALL of Humanity has sinned. But if ALL has sinned- then ALL are guilty. And if ALL are guilty- then ALL must be punished! Because the Bible says that God **will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.**

But if ALL guilty sinners are punished- how does God show anyone His Mercy? This problem is what is called, "*The Great Theological Conundrum*". It is a Theological issue which no other religion- other than Biblical Christianity- can solve. All other religions fail in their effort to allow God to be both Merciful and Just at the same time to the same person. And the Problem is displayed something like this:

If God is Just- then He must judge all Sin. And God judges all Sin by damning it and the sinner alike. But when God shows Mercy to someone- He pardons them. So, if God damns all Sin- on what basis then can God show Mercy to anyone- since everyone is a guilty sinner? If God allows even one Sin to go unpunished by forgiving the Sin and pardoning the sinner - then Justice was NOT served. And since Justice was not served- God ceases to be Just (Righteous). Yet if God judges all Sin and damns all sinners- He ceases to be Merciful.

God's Glory and Our Sin

You see, because God is perfectly Righteous- every unrighteous thought or intent of the heart or action by people- *offends* and *insults* God. And that is why Sin is wrong. Sin *belittles* and *dishonors* God's Glory.

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

God's Holiness is the *summation* of all of God's Qualities and Characteristics and Attributes. So, God's Holiness is what makes God to be- God. In other words, God's Holiness is Who God is. And so, God's Glory is the various parts of God's Holiness that radiate out from Him (as He manifests them) like the beams of sunlight radiate out from the sun. So, for example, when God chooses to manifest; or show; or

distribute His Mercy to some undeserving sinner- that portion of God's Holiness "radiates" out from God- and "shines" upon that individual.

So, God's Glory is shown or displayed or revealed when God chooses to manifest that portion of His Own Holiness on that individual. And the Bible teaches that God *loves* His Own Glory more than anything else. And that means that *everything* God does- *including* Creation and Salvation- He does for one of three reasons:

- For My Glory
- For My Name's Sake
- So they will know there is none like Me in all the earth.

Now *why* did Paul connect our Sin with God's Glory in **Romans 3:23**? Because Sin *attacks* God's Glory. The phrase, "**fall short**" that Paul used here- does NOT mean "*we almost hit the mark but fell just short of it.*" No, this phrase has to do with "*trampling something under foot- with disgust.*" So, Paul teaches here that our Sin- every Sin- tramples God's Glory under our feet with total disgust. How?

When we sin- we are telling God that we *prefer* our Sin over Him. We are saying that sinning brings us more Joy and more Happiness than does obeying Him. So, Sin is the *rejection* of God's Glory. It is the *repudiation* of what God loves the most. Yet God is the most glorious; and the most beautiful; and the most important Being in the Universe. And everything God expects from us- is Right and Correct. So, to prefer something that has been made; or something that is passing away- over and above the immortal God- *insults* and *belittles* God's Glory more than anything else.

What Sin Is

It is as though God is standing before us- in all His Pristine Magnificence and Brilliance- offering us Himself- and yet we tell Him, "*No thank You- I would rather have something else besides You. I don't see You as the Treasure of the Universe and loving and obeying You- doesn't make me happy. So, I would rather ignore You and live my life according to the dictates of my own heart- rather than submit myself to You and Your Ways.*" That is what Sin is. And so, *whatever* we love; desire; or want more than God- is Sin- because it *rejects* God. And you simply *cannot* insult God any more than rejecting Him.

So, when God's Glory is attacked; belittled; rejected; or insulted- God's pristine Righteousness *demand*s that this Offense be adjudicated. And that Adjudication releases God's Wrath and Judgment against the offender.

Now the Bible teaches that "God is Love". (**1John 4:8&16**) Yet the Bible does NOT say, "God is Wrath." So, from where does God's Wrath come? Wrath and Damnation are the "vehicles" by which God's Righteousness (His Justness) *defends* and *adjudicates* the Offense against God's Glory (our Sin). And so, when God's Wrath is poured out against unrepentant sinners- we say, "*God has judged.*"

Now the Bible is clear- God is infinitely Merciful. But the Bible also teaches that God is also infinitely Just (Righteous). And God's Justice (Righteousness) will never

tolerate an Offense against His Own Glory. So, while it is true that God issues Mercy to thousands- freely- it is also true that God's Righteousness *judges* all Sin and all unrepentant sinners through His Wrath and Judgment.

"The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations

Now the Punishment must always fit the Crime. And an Insult to God's Glory is the *highest* Evil that can be perpetrated. And so, the Adjudication against that high Crime- is the highest Punishment: Death- *eternal* Death. And we call that eternal Death: Hell. So, God's judgment against Sin- is "Damnation".

Now, many times, this Reality of God's Righteous Judgment shocks the sensibilities of people, who have not read or understood the Bible very much. So, another way of understanding this would be to say:

If God did not damn all Sin- then He would be agreeing with the unrepentant sinner- that His Glory was not worth defending.

The Problem is Solved in Jesus

No other religion other than Biblical Christianity can solve this "*Theological Conundrum*" because no other religion has the "*Incarnation*". When God became a Man; when God left His Throne in Glory and took on human flesh. And in His flesh- Jesus lived a perfectly sinless Life. Jesus obeyed all of God's Law- *perfectly and continuously* in thought, word, and deed- every second of every day for 33-1/2 years! And by doing this- Jesus *fulfilled* the Law. And by fulfilling the Law- Jesus received the Reward that Law promised: Righteousness. So, in reality- Jesus *earned* Righteousness by what He did (works)- living a perfectly sinless Life.

Now many people emphasize Jesus' Death on the Cross and His Resurrection. And those two parts of Jesus' Ministry on the earth deserve to be emphasized. But as we correctly emphasize Jesus' Death and Resurrection- we must not forget His sinless Life. Because it is the fact that Jesus perfectly obeyed God's Law (that He gave through Moses) and earned the Righteousness that the Law promised. And without Jesus being perfectly sinless (Righteous) we would still NOT be able to enter into Heaven- even though Jesus died and rose from the dead.

You see, for anyone to enter Heaven *requires* that we are "just as Righteous and God Himself is Righteous." So, to enter Heaven requires MORE than merely being Forgiven. We also have to become perfectly Righteous. And yet, the Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that every human on earth is a sinner and has "fallen short" of perfect and continuous Righteousness. So, how do sinful people become perfectly Righteous?

Many false religions (and human philosophies) teach that humans have to “try harder”; and “put forth more effort” to earn their own Righteousness (through Good Works and Obedience to God’s Law). For example, the Roman religious system teaches that our own, personal, intrinsic Righteousness must be “developed” throughout our lifetimes by our efforts at keeping God’s Law; attending the Mass; and through participation of the Sacraments. And yet, at death- we still are NOT Righteous enough. And so, those, who are deceived by Rome, believe and teach that they will enter into Purgatory to be “purged” until they are Righteous enough to enter into Heaven.

The Holy Bible, however, teaches “Justification”. And Justification (Latin: *Iustus: the act of being made Righteous*) is “accomplished” or “made real” for the undeserving sinner “by Faith alone”. You see, Scripture teaches that at the Crucifixion- God the Father *imputed* (credited) all of the Sins (of all of God’s elect) onto Jesus. So, legally, Jesus became *pure Sin* while He was still personally sinless.

2Corinthians 5:21a

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf...

... and as legally sinful- God the Father poured out the full Fury of His Wrath against all those Sins- on Jesus- acting as a “Propitiation.”

Romans 3:24&25a

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;
25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith...

Hebrews 2:17

Therefore, He [Jesus] had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

1John 2:1b&2

1 ... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;
2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

1John 4:10

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Now the word, “*Propitiation*” was used in ancient Greek literature to describe something (or someone) who *appeased the anger of the gods*. And that was what both Paul and John had in mind when they used this word in inspired Scripture. Jesus *appeased* or *satisfied* the Wrath (Anger) of God by His Death on the Cross.

So, the word, "Propitiation" means much more than merely a "Substitute" (which is how many in the modern church use it). Jesus' horrific Death on the Cross actually and literally "paid for" the Sins of all of God's elect. But how? How did Jesus' Death "pay for" all of the horrible and wicked thoughts and deeds that have been committed; and that are being committed now; and that will be committed in the future by all of God's elect? By *satisfying* God's Justice (Wrath) against those Sins.

So, on that Cross- the full fury of the Wrath of God against all Sin (brought about by God's Righteousness) was poured out without measure on Jesus. Why? Because all of our Sins were *imputed* to Jesus- as He hung on the Cross. And as God's Wrath was poured out on Jesus- God literally *damned* all Sin. And in doing that- God's Justice (Righteousness) was entirely vindicated.

So, Jesus *satisfied* the righteous Requirement that all Insults and Offenses to God's Glory must be damned (judged)- thus *appeasing* the Wrath of God. It was in this way that Jesus was a "Propitiation". And by *propitiating* the Offense against God's Righteousness- all Sin was forever judged (damned); and no Sin went unpunished. (God, by no means, cleared the guilty [Exodus 34:7]). All sin was judged- yet the *sinner* was *not* judged! Jesus died "in the place of" (Vicarious) those chosen for Salvation.

But, because all Sin has been forever judged/damned by God- He is now "free" to issue His glorious Mercy to those He has chosen to visit with that Gift. Thus, in the case of God's elect- God remains "Just/Righteous" because He has avenged His Need to punish all Sin. Yet this same God- is also the "One Who then Justifies" (Forgives and makes Righteous) those for whom Jesus died.

2Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Romans 3:21-28

21 But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

26 for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Now look closely again at **Romans 3:21-23**:

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

From the very beginning of Chapter 1- Paul has been teaching several key Doctrines of the Christian Faith:

- The importance of Righteousness to God
- God's Wrath against all Unrighteousness
- There is no distinction between an unrighteous Jew and an unrighteous Gentile
- The Law of God defines Righteousness
- The Law condemns both Jew and Gentile
- Nobody is Righteous

... and now, beginning in verse 21- Paul is teaching the central Doctrine of the New Covenant:

Justification by Faith Alone

... Or...

Sinners are “made” to be Righteous by “Believing”- and NOT by “Doing”

... so, he begins in verse 21 by saying,

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets

Now that Jesus has lived and died and risen again- the Righteousness of God is now manifested or made real to the individual sinner “apart from striving to obey the Law”. And yet, this Righteousness that is made real to the sinner apart from his obedience to the Law, was actually taught (witnessed) all through the Law- because the Old Testament *clearly* and *repeatedly* said:

Romans 3:10b-18

10 ... "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

**THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."**

**13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"**

"THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";

14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";

15 "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."

18 "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

And by using these Old Testament quotes, Paul is making a very important point:

Romans 3:19&20

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Paul teaches here that the reason God gave the Law was to accomplish two things:

- So that every mouth may be closed
- So that all the world may become accountable to God

Every foolish mouth that would dare to argue that they have kept God's Law- will be closed- precisely because *nobody* will be able to truthfully say that they have kept God's Law- perfectly and continuously- in thought, word, and deed, 24/7. And because nobody (neither Jew nor Gentile) has kept God's Law- nobody is Righteous. And because nobody is Righteous- everybody is nothing but a transgressor of the Law. And because everybody is a transgressor of the Law- everybody is guilty. And because everybody is guilty- everybody is going to stand before God- condemned.

And by quoting these various Old Testaments Passages here- Paul is, in effect, teaching, "*This is the way it has always been*". So, Righteousness was NEVER earned or deserved by anyone under the Law. *Nobody* "earned" Righteousness through their perfect obedience to God's Law. Every single person in the Old Testament, who was Righteous, was "made Righteous" the very *same* way people are "made Righteous" in the New: "By Faith alone". And then he says, "*The Law itself taught (witnessed) this Truth*". Then Paul said,

even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe... for there is no distinction

So, the “Righteousness” that Paul is talking about here is the Righteousness that is NOT earned or deserved by “works” (efforts to obey the Law)- but is the very same “Righteousness of God Himself” that comes to the individual “through Faith”; through Believing; through Trusting in Jesus Christ ALONE. Now why did God set it up this way? Paul says,

... for [because] there is no distinction

There is absolutely NO difference in an unrighteous Jew and an unrighteous Gentile. A Jew born as a legitimate “Son of Abraham” is just as unable to keep all the Law perfectly as is a Gentile, who knows nothing of the Law or Abraham. This is why Paul already said,

THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE

... and so, in verse 23, Paul repeats this very same Truth- but in a very unique way:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

... and by using the all-inclusive word, “ALL” here- Paul is teaching that the Jew, born as a son of Abraham, has “fallen short” of the Glory of God- *to the very same degree* as the pagan Gentile. And this means that the Jew is JUST AS UNRIGHTEOUS as is the Gentile.

So, what do unrighteous people need? They don’t need the Law of God- because the Jews already have the Law- and yet, they are just as unrighteous as are the Gentiles. So, what do unrighteous people need? They don’t need more Divine Threats- because God has already promised Eternal Damnation to those who do NOT keep the Law perfectly. So, what do unrighteous people need? They don’t need more will-power; or more energy; or more rules; or more Commandments. Being unrighteous is NOT about a lack of effort. And the proof that this is true- is the fact that God has already given the Jew all these things are much more.

So, what do unrighteous people need? They need a Savior- Who will give them a Mercy and a Grace and a Righteousness that they don’t deserve and cannot earn! This is what “Justification by Faith Alone” is all about.

A popular Roman philosopher of the 1st Century called Mercy *“the disease of the soul.”* Back then- Mercy was the supreme Sign of Human Weakness. Mercy was a Sign that you did not have what it took to be a “real man” and *especially* a “real Roman”. The Romans glorified “manly courage”; “strict justice”; “firm discipline”, and, above all, “absolute power”. So, they naturally looked down on Mercy, because, to them, Mercy was Weakness, and Weaknesses were despised above all other human limitations.

During much of Roman history, a father had the right of *patria opitestas*, of deciding whether or not his newborn child would live or die. As the infant was held up for him to see, the father would turn his thumb “up” if he wanted the child to live, and “down” if he wanted it to die. And if his thumb turned down- the child was immediately

drowned. Citizens had the same life-or-death power over slaves. At any time and for any reason- they could kill and bury a slave, with no fear of arrest or reprisal. Husbands could even have their Wives put to death on the least provocation. Today, Abortion reflects the same merciless attitude. A society that despises Mercy is a society that glorifies Brutality.

The underlying motive of Self-concern has characterized men in general and societies in general since the Fall. We see it expressed today in such sayings as, "*If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will.*" And "Every man for himself". Such popular proverbs are generally true, because they reflect the basic selfish Nature of fallen Man. Men are not naturally inclined to repay Mercy for Mercy.

The best illustration of that fact is the Lord Himself. Jesus Christ was the most merciful human Being Who ever lived. He reached out to heal the sick, restore the crippled, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and even life to the dead. He found prostitutes, tax collectors, the debauched and the drunken, and drew them into His circle of Love and Forgiveness. When the Scribes and Pharisees brought the adulteress to Him to see if He would agree to her stoning, He confronted them with their merciless hypocrisy:

John 8:1-7

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court,

4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.

5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"

6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

... and when no one stepped forward to condemn her, Jesus said to her,

John 8:11b

... "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more"

Jesus wept with the sorrowing and gave companionship to the lonely. He took little children into His arms and blessed them. He was merciful to everyone. He was Mercy incarnate, just as He was Love incarnate.

Yet what was the response to Jesus' Mercy? He shamed the woman's accusers into inaction, but they did not become merciful. By the time the accounts of **John 8** ended, Jesus' opponents "**picked up stones to throw at Him**" (v. 59). When the scribes and Pharisees saw Jesus "eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers" they asked His disciples why their Master associated with such unworthy people (**Mark 2:16**).

The more Jesus showed Mercy, the more He showed up the unmercifulness of the Jewish religious leaders. The more He showed Mercy, the more they were determined to put Him out of the way. And the ultimate outcome of His Mercy was the Cross. In Jesus' crucifixion, two merciless Systems — merciless Government and merciless Religion — united to kill the Prince of Life. Totalitarian Rome joined intolerant Judaism to destroy the incarnate God.

We must understand that the fifth Beatitude does not teach that Mercy *to* men brings Mercy *from* men, but that Mercy to men brings Mercy from God. If we are merciful to others, God will be merciful to us- whether men are or not. God is the Subject of the second clause, just as in the other Beatitudes. It is God Who gives the Kingdom of Heaven to the “poor in spirit”; and Who “comforts those who mourn”; and Who gives the earth to the Meek; and Who satisfies those who “hunger and thirst for Righteousness.” Those who are **merciful...shall receive mercy** from God. God gives the Divine Blessings to those who obey His Divine Standards.

Now the word, “**Merciful**” comes from the Greek word (*eleaemæn*), meaning: beneficial or charitable.

Hebrews 2:17

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Jesus is the supreme Example of Mercy and the supreme Dispenser of Mercy. It is from Jesus Christ that both redeeming and sustaining Mercy come. In the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) the same term is used to translate the Hebrew *hesed*, one of the most commonly used words to describe God's Character. And that word is usually translated as Mercy, Love, Lovingkindness, or Steadfast Love.

Psalm 17:7

Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand From those who rise up against them.

Psalm 51:1

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

Isaiah 63:7

I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, According to all that the Lord has granted us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has granted them according to His compassion And according to the abundance of His lovingkindnesses.

Jeremiah 9:24

but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.

... the basic meaning of *hesed* is to give help to the afflicted and to rescue the helpless. It is compassion in action.

So, here in Matthew 5- Jesus is not speaking of detached or powerless sentiment that is unwilling or unable to help those for whom there is sympathy. Nor is He speaking of the “false Mercy”; the “feigned Pity”, that gives help only to salve a guilty conscience or to impress others with its appearance of virtue. And this word is also not the passive, silent type of Concern which, though genuine, is unable to give tangible help. *Hesed* is genuine Compassion expressed in genuine Help, selfless Concern expressed in selfless Deeds.

Jesus says in effect, *"The people in My kingdom are not takers but givers, not pretending helpers but practical helpers. They are not condemners but Mercy givers."* The selfish, Self-satisfied, and Self-righteous do not bother to help anyone — unless they think something is in it for them. Sometimes they even justify their lack of Love and Mercy under the guise of “religious Duty.” Once, when the Pharisees and scribes questioned why His disciples did not observe the Traditions of the Jewish Elders, Jesus replied,

Mark 7:10-13

10 For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH';

11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),'

12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

13 thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

... so, in the “name of” hypocritical religious Tradition, Compassion toward Parents in such a case was actually forbidden.

Mercy is meeting people's needs. It is not simply *feeling* Compassion but actually *showing* Compassion; not only sympathizing but giving a helping hand. Mercy is giving food to the hungry; Comfort to the bereaved; Love to the rejected; Forgiveness to the offender; and Companionship to the lonely. It is therefore one of the loveliest and noblest of all Virtues.

Mercy and Forgiveness

A clearer understanding of Mercy can be gained by working through some comparisons. Mercy has much in common with Forgiveness but is distinct from it. Paul tells us that Jesus saved us ...

**5 ... not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,
6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5b-7)**

God's Forgiveness of our Sins flows from His Mercy. But Mercy is bigger than Forgiveness, because God is merciful to us even when we do not sin, just as we can be merciful to those who have never done anything against us. God's Mercy does not just forgive our Transgressions, but reaches to all our Weakness and Need.

Lamentations 3:22&23

22 The Lord's lovingkindnesses [mercies KJV] indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

... God's Mercy to His children never ceases.

Mercy and Love

Forgiveness flows out of Mercy, and Mercy flows out of Love.

Ephesians 2:4-7

**4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

So, even as Mercy is more than Forgiveness, Love is also more than Mercy. Love manifests itself in many ways that do not involve either Forgiveness or Mercy. Love loves even when there is no wrong to forgive or need to meet. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, although they both are without Sin and without Need. They both love the holy Angels, although the Angels are without Sin and Need. When we enter Heaven we, too, will be without Sin or Need, yet God's Love for us will, in comparison to Eternity, only be just beginning.

Mercy is the physician; Love is the friend. Mercy acts because of Need; love acts because of Affection, whether there is Need or not. Mercy is reserved for times of trouble; Love is constant. There can be no true Mercy apart from Love, but there can be true Love apart from Mercy.

Mercy and Grace

Mercy is also related to Grace, which flows out of Love just as Forgiveness flows

out of Mercy. In each of his three pastoral Epistles, Paul includes the words "Grace, Mercy and Peace" in his salutations

1Timothy 1:2

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

2Timothy 1:2

To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Titus 1:4

To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. (KJV)

Grace and Mercy have the closest possible relationship; yet they are different. Mercy and its related terms all have to do with Pain, Misery, and Distress- with the consequences of Sin. Whether because of our individual Sins or because of the sinful world in which we live, all of our problems, in the final analysis, are actually Sin problems and all Issues in this life- are spiritual problems. And it is with those Problems that Mercy gives help.

Grace, on the other hand, deals with the Sin itself. Mercy deals with the *symptoms* or the *results* of Sin- while God's Grace deals with the root Cause of those symptoms. Mercy offers Relief from Divine Punishment; Grace offers Divine Pardon for the Crime. Mercy eliminates the Pain; Grace cures the Disease.

When the "good Samaritan" of Jesus' Parable (**Luke 10:30-37**) bound up the wounds of the man who had been beaten and robbed- he showed Mercy. When he took him to the nearest inn and paid for his lodging until he was healed- he showed Grace. His Mercy relieved the Pain; while his Grace provided for Healing.

Mercy relates to the negative; Grace relates to the positive. In relation to Salvation, Mercy says, "*No hell,*" whereas Grace says, "*Heaven.*" Mercy says, "*I pity you*"; Grace says, "*I pardon you.*" So, Grace is God giving us something we don't deserve; while Mercy prevents what we do deserve from coming to us.

Mercy, therefore, is *more* than Forgiveness, but *less* than Love. It is *different* from Grace, but is *one* with Justice. And what is true of God's Mercy should be true of ours.

For example, Mercy led Abraham to rescue his selfish nephew Lot from Chedorlaomer and his allies. Mercy led Joseph to forgive his brothers and to provide them food for their families. Mercy led Moses to plead with the Lord to remove the leprosy with which his sister Miriam had been punished. Mercy led David to spare the life of Saul.

Those who are unmerciful will not receive Mercy from God. In one of his "Imprecatory Psalms" David says of an unnamed wicked man,

Psalm 109: 14&15

Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord, and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that He may cut off their memory from the earth"

Yet, here, David's anger was not vengeful or retaliatory. That man and his family did not deserve Mercy because they were not merciful themselves.

Psalm 109:16-20

**16 Because he did not remember to show lovingkindness,
But persecuted the afflicted and needy man,
And the despondent in heart, to put them to death.
17 He also loved cursing, so it came to him;
And he did not delight in blessing, so it was far from him.
18 But he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment,
And it entered into his body like water
And like oil into his bones.
19 Let it be to him as a garment with which he covers himself,
And for a belt with which he constantly girds himself.
20 Let this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord,
And of those who speak evil against my soul.**

Paul characterizes godless men as being,

Romans 1:29b-31a

**29 ... unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice;
they are gossips,
30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to
parents,
31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving ...**

... but the climaxing Evil at the end of that long list- is these people being

... unmerciful

Being without any Mercy- is the "capstone" marking those who *reject* God's Mercy.

Proverbs 11:17

**The merciful man does himself good,
But the cruel man does himself harm.**

The path to genuine Happiness is through Mercy. The way to certain Misery is through Cruelty. The truly merciful person is even kind to animals, whereas the merciless person is cruel to *everything*.

Proverbs 12:10

**A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal,
But even the compassion of the wicked is cruel.**

As He preached on Mt Olivet- Jesus warned that those who claim to belong to Him but who *have* not served *and have* shown no Compassion to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Jesus said to them,

Matthew 25:41b-46

41 ... 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

44 Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'

45 Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

In 2:10-13- James wrote,

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

In the midst of our corrupt, ego-centered, and selfish Society that tells us to grab everything we can get, the Voice of God tells us to give everything we can give. The true Character of Mercy is in giving - giving Compassion, giving Help, giving Time, giving Forgiveness, giving Money, and giving ourselves. The true children of the King are merciful.

The Source of Mercy

Pure Mercy is a gracious Gift of God. It is NOT a natural attribute of Man but is a Gift that comes with the New Birth. And so, we can only be merciful in its full sense and with a righteous motive- when we have personally experienced God's Mercy. Mercy is

only for those who, through Grace and Divine Power, have met the requirements of the first four Beatitudes. It is only for those who, by the Work of the Holy Spirit, bow humbly before God in “poverty of spirit”; who “mourn” over their sin and turn from it; who are “meek” and submissive to His Control; and who “hunger and thirst” above all else for His Righteousness. So, the Way of Mercy is the Way of Humility, Repentance, Surrender, and Holiness.

Balaam continually prostituted his Ministry, trying to keep within the “letter” of God's Will while conspiring with a pagan king against God's people. He presumptuously prayed,

"Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!" (Numbers 23:10).

As one Puritan commentator observed, Balaam wanted to *die* like the righteous, but he did not want to *live* like the righteous. Many people want God's Mercy- but most do NOT want that Mercy on God's Terms. And so, they don't get Mercy- at all.

God has both “absolute” and “relative” Attributes. His *absolute* Attributes — such as Love, Truth, and Holiness — have characterized Him from all eternity. They were characteristic of Him before He created angels, or the world, or Man. But His *relative* Attributes — such as Mercy, Justice, and Grace — were not expressed until His creatures came into being. In fact, they were not manifest until Man, the creature made in His Own Image, sinned and became separated from his Creator. So, apart from Sin and Evil- Mercy, Justice, and Grace have no meaning.

When Man fell, God's Love was extended to His fallen creatures in Mercy. And only when people *receive* God's Mercy can they *reflect* God's Mercy. God is the Source of Mercy.

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness [Mercy] toward those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11).

... it is because we have the Resource of God's Mercy that Jesus commanded,

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

The great Presbyterian theologian, Donald Grey Barnhouse writes,

“When Jesus Christ died on the cross, all the work of God for man's salvation passed out of the realm of prophecy and became historical fact. God has now had mercy upon us. For anyone to pray, ‘God have mercy on me’ is the equivalent of asking Him to repeat the Sacrifice of Christ. All the mercy that God ever will have on man He has already had, when Christ died. That is the totality of mercy. There could not be any more The fountain is now opened, and it is flowing, and it continues to flow freely.” (*Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 4:4)

We simply cannot have any genuine Blessing apart from the Blessor. We cannot

even meet the condition apart from the One who has set the condition. We are blessed by God when we are merciful to others, and we are able to be **merciful** to others because we have already received Salvation's Mercy. And when we share the Mercy received, we **shall receive Mercy** even beyond what we already have. We never sing more truthfully than when we sing,

Mercy there was great and grace was free
Pardon there was multiplied to me
There my burdened soul found liberty
At Calvary.

The Practice of Mercy

The most obvious way we can show Mercy is through physical acts, as did the good Samaritan. As Jesus specifically commands, we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and give any other practical Help that is needed. In serving others in need, we demonstrate a heart of Mercy.

It is helpful to note that the Way of Mercy did not begin with the New Testament. God has *always* intended for Mercy to characterize His people. The Old Testament Law taught,

Deuteronomy 15:7&8

You shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks

Even in the "Year of Release" (Jubilee), when all debts were canceled, Israelites were to give their poor countrymen whatever they needed. They were warned,

Deuteronomy 15:9

"Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you.

Mercy is also to be shown in our attitudes. Mercy does not hold a grudge, harbor resentment, capitalize on another's failure or weakness, or publicize another's sin. On a great table, at which he fed countless hundreds of people, Augustine inscribed,

Whoever thinks that he is able,
To nibble at the life of absent friends,
Must know that he's unworthy of this table.

The vindictive, heartless, indifferent are NOT subjects of Christ's Kingdom. When they pass need by on the other side, as the priest and the Levite did in the story

of the good Samaritan, they show they have passed Christ by.

But Mercy is also to be shown *spiritually*. First, it is shown through Pity. Augustine said,

"If I weep for the body from which the soul is departed, should I not weep for the soul from which God is departed?"

The sensitive Christian will grieve more for lost souls than for lost bodies. Because we have experienced God's Mercy, we are to have great concern for those who have not.

Jesus' last Words from the Cross were Words of Mercy. For His executioners He prayed,

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

... to the penitent thief hanging beside Him He said,

"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43).

... to His mother He said,

"Woman, behold your son!"

... then He said to His disciple [John],

'Behold, your mother!' and from that moment, John took Jesus' mother into his own household" (John 19:26-27).

Like his Master, Stephen prayed for those who were taking his life,

"Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60).

Second, we are to show spiritual Mercy by confrontation. Paul says that, as Christ's servants, we should gently correct

"those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25).

... we are to be willing to confront others about their Sin in order that they might come to God for Salvation. When certain teachers were "upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain," Paul told Titus to

"reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:11,13).

Love and Mercy will be severe when that is necessary for the sake of an erring brother and for the Sake of Christ's Church. In such cases, it is cruel to say nothing and let the harm continue.

As Jude closed his Epistle with the encouragement,

Jude 21

keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life,"

... he also admonished,

Jude 22&23

And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh

Extreme situations require extreme care, but we are to show Mercy even to those trapped in the worst systems of Apostasy.

Third, we are to show spiritual Mercy by praying. The "Sacrifice of Prayer" for those without God is an act of Mercy. Our Mercy can be measured by our Prayer for the unsaved and for Christians who are walking in disobedience.

Fourth, we are to show spiritual Mercy by proclaiming the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ- the most merciful thing we can do.

The Result of Mercy

Reflecting on the fact that when we are merciful- we receive Mercy; we see God's "cycle of Mercy". God is merciful to us by saving us through Christ; in Obedience, we are merciful to others; and God, in faithfulness, gives us even more Mercy- pouring out Blessings for our needs; and withholding severe Chastening for our Sins.

As in the other Beatitudes, the emphatic pronoun *autos* (**they**) indicates that *only* those who are merciful qualify to *receive* Mercy. For example, in **2Samuel 22:26**, David sang of the Lord,

**With the kind You show Yourself kind,
With the blameless You show Yourself blameless;**

And speaking of the opposite side of the same Truth, James said,

James 2:13

For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over Judgment.

At the end of the "Disciples' Prayer" Jesus explained,

Matthew 6:14&15

14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

... again, the emphatic Truth is that God will respond with Chastening for an unforgiving disciple.

Neither in that Passage nor in this Beatitude is Jesus speaking of our Mercy bringing forth Salvation for ourselves. We cannot earn Salvation by being merciful. We must be saved by God's Mercy before we can truly *be* merciful. We cannot work our way into Heaven- even by a lifetime of merciful deeds. So, the Truth that we always need to keep in our minds about Mercy is that God does not give Mercy for Merit. God always gives Mercy- in, by, and through His Grace. And that is always true- because Mercy is needed- not because it is earned.

In **Matthew 18:23-30**- Jesus illustrated the working of God's Mercy.

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

25 But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'

27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

28 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.'

29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'

30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

... so, look what happened:

Matthew 18:31-35

31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'

34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

... now look at the Conclusion to this Parable:

Matthew 18:35

My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

In this Parable, Jesus gave a picture of God's saving Mercy in relation to forgiving others (vv. 21-22). The first man pleaded with God for Mercy and received it. The fact that he, in turn, was unmerciful was so inconsistent with his own Salvation that he was chastened until he repented. The Lesson for us here is that the Lord will chasten us, if need be, to produce Repentance in a stubborn child.

We must understand that Mercy to others is a Mark of true Salvation- *especially when they don't deserve it*. So, when our hearts become hard and we don't show Mercy to those who least deserve it- we may be disciplined until we do. Why? Because God showed us His Mercy- when we least deserved it. And so a hardness of heart concerning Mercy to others illustrates how we view our own Sin and why God forgave us.

The one who is hard either thinks his Sins were not as bad as others; or he might even think he has not sinned at all. So, on what basis did God forgive him? The hard-hearted one has to eventually admit that he must have *earned* God forgiveness- either by something Good that he did; or by NOT doing something Bad. And this Self-righteousness is the very *epitome* of spiritual Blindness and Hypocrisy. It is precisely what being a Pharisee is all about. And you simply cannot be further removed from the Gospel than this.

So, when we hold back Mercy- God restricts His flow of Mercy to us- and one of two things become apparent:

- Either we forfeit a great Blessing
- We come to realize that we're not really saved

If an infinitely Holy and Righteous God has showered unlimited Mercy on us- as wicked rebels- that cancels our unpayable debt of Sin- we, who had no Righteousness of our own; but were "poor in spirit"; mourning over our load of Sin in a beggarly and helpless condition; wretched and doomed; meek before Almighty God; hungry and thirsty for a Righteousness we did not have and could not attain- it surely follows that one of our primary characteristics is that we are merciful to others. Amen.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.