

THE MERCY OF GOD

(Chapter Nine of "The Attributes of God")

The next attribute for consideration is His (God's) mercy. Mercy is inseparable from God's goodness in that it is an effect or result of goodness. "O give thanks unto the Lord: for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever." (Ps 136:1) Mercy is that attribute of God that presupposes man's misery. Mercy works from love to relieve this.

First, I will point out the characteristics of God's mercy.

1. Mercy is natural and essential to Him as God. "And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." (Ex 34:6). It is natural and essential that God, as Governor, should have the misery of His creatures at heart. This we see in that He was longsuffering, and does not afflict willingly, but tenders to man appeals for the removal of his misery, which are rejected and despised by man. When God shaves off a nation He is said to do it with a borrowed razor (Is 7:20); His acts of severity are rather forced from Him as necessary acts of justice towards a rebellious and stiff-necked people. (Is 27:4; Lam 3:33). Mercy is a darling attribute, and is the work of His right hand, while punishment is His strange work (Is 28:21). God's mercy is a loadstone to draw sinners to Him, and without this all other attributes would be fearful, and God would be unapproachable.

It is natural that God, as a Father, should show mercy toward the elect who have been chosen and adopted to make up His family. Whereas the above expression of mercy is general: toward all men; appealing to their natural faculties, this is special wherein God's sovereignty is displayed in that He will be merciful to whom He will be merciful in the actual removal of sin's misery from those of His free grace choice. (Rom 9:10,18).

2. Mercy is the act of God's own goodness and has no cause outside of Himself. God's only obligation to display mercy is in Himself and not in the creature. Although mercy has as its object man in misery, yet, man's misery is not the cause of mercy: "When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off; the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will show them no favour." (Is 27:11). Man does not merit God's mercy by his works: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." (Tit 3:5). The work and merits of Christ are not the cause of mercy, but are rather an effect or fruit of mercy: "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring (Christ) from on high hath visited us." (Lu 1:78).

3. God's mercy is infinite, i.e., it is overflowing, without bottom God is "plenteous in mercy" (Ps 86:5); He is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4); He has "multitude of mercies" (Ps 51:1); His mercies "are new every morning" (Lam 3:23). There is not and never will be any need but that there is a mercy to meet it. God's mercy can never be drained out, but is new in store for every saint in every condition.

4. God's mercy is eternal. Mercy is as eternal as God Himself in being a part of His essence and nature. God could no more cease being merciful than He could stop being God. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps 103:17). That His mercy endures forever is repeated twenty-six times in Ps 136. What comfort this should give to sinners that have been awakened to their need of Christ and are now resting at His feet for mercy. He cannot cast you off any more than He can cast away His eternal mercy. Cling to Him in faith, sinner! His mercy endures forever.

5. His mercy is immutable. I mean by this that He cannot change in His mercy. As His mercy is everlasting it is unchanging. God is not fickle as men are who change from one object of favour to another, but God ever keeps the objects of His mercy before Him. Ah, dear friend, think not that God will forsake you in your time of weakness and stumbling. If you have renounced all hope in your own righteousness, if you are pleading mercy through Christ, if you are by faith seeking God's favour, if you have the witness of His grace in you, stirring you up to seek Him while He may be found, worry not, for

He will not leave you comfortless. “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” (Mal 3:6).

6. God’s mercy is common to all persons of the blessed Trinity. It is the Father’s mercy: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Pet 1:3). It is said to be the Son’s mercy: “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.” (Jude 21). It is the mercy of the Holy Spirit: this is by way of implication in the work of mercy that He does for us: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom 8:26).

The mercy of God should be of comfort and encouragement to all.

To *the saints*. Those who have a steadfast hope in Christ should look upon Him as One clothed in mercy, who has opened the way of the mercy seat that we might call upon Him in every need. Ah, how this attribute of God should close our mouths from murmuring and fretting; how it should drive us to our knees in every situation to plead His mercy on our behalf; how it should encourage us to know that He has mercy enough for our every need. Also, dear saint continue to look to His mercy and goodness for preserving grace. Never depend upon yourself for the least expression of grace in the performance of duties. Lean heavily upon Him

To *the awakened*. You have been made, by the Spirit of God, to see your misery and danger. Fears have gripped your heart, and you have thought that every moment would find you in Hell. Your sins have marched before you, one by one, with horrid faces, to add to your misery. You have wondered whether Christ would regard such a one as you. You *know* that you deserve Hell! You *know* that there is nothing within you that you can bring before the Lord that will merit your pardon. Listen, sinner, your every awakening and conviction is an act of God’s mercy towards you. It is a mercy that He did not leave you hardened in your conscience against Him. It is *His* mercy that He gave you a hearing ear, and rooted you out of your lethargy to seek Him. Don’t rest in your feelings! Go to Him in faith! Take hold upon the cross of Christ and plead for mercy *there!* Reason with God that He broke your heart, and that in His mercy He receives broken hearts! Oh, realize that He who begins a good work of mercy will not forsake you, but will finish His work in you. Thank Him for His mercy in awakening you.

“Yet awakening is not a thing to rest in, or to desire to have lengthened out, month by month. If I start up in a fright, and find my house on fire, I do not sit down at the edge of the bed, and say to myself, ‘I hope I am truly awakened! Indeed, I am deeply grateful that I am not left to sleep on!’ No, I want to escape from threatened death, and I hasten to the door or to the window, that I may get out and not perish where I am. It would be a questionable boon to be aroused and yet not to escape from the danger. Remember, awakening is not salvation. A man may know that he is lost, and yet may never be saved. He may be made thoughtful, and yet he may die in his sins. If you find out that you are bankrupt, the consideration of your debts will not pay them. A man may examine his wounds all the year around, and they will be none the nearer being healed because he feels their smart, and notes their number. It is one trick of the Devil to tempt a man to be satisfied with a sense of sin; and another trick of the same Deceiver to insinuate that the sinner may not be content to trust Christ unless he can bring a certain measure of despair to add to the Saviour’s finished work. Our awakenings are not to help the Saviour, but *to help us to the Saviour*. To imagine that my feeling of sin is to assist in the removal of sin is absurd. It is as though I said that water could not cleanse my face unless I had looked longer in the glass, and had counted the smuts upon my forehead. A sense of need of salvation by grace is a very healthful sign; but one needs wisdom to use it aright, and not make an idol of it.” (C.H.Spurgeon—‘Around the Wicket Gate’).

Sinner, don’t rest until you are resting Christ. Don’t stop short of Him by thinking your convictions are enough. Let these *drive you* to Him who is able to heal. Plead His mercy, and believe Him to have the mercy to relieve your misery.

“Come humble souls with guilt oppressed
No longer yield to doubt;

Come, says the Saviour, to my breast,
I will not cast you out.”

To *the sinner* You have not yet been awakened to your need of Christ, you yet do not see the danger that you are in, you yet do not see that Hell is moved towards you. You go from day to day as though you would live eternally here, and as if there were no judgment awaiting you. Your thoughts are never about death and the day of reckoning. You live as though you are safe and secured forever. It is a mercy that God has not already cast you in to Hell. Though I would not want you to take a carnal encouragement in the mercy of God to continue in your present way, I would plead with you that the mercy of God should encourage you to consider that God has spared you from Hell and death for a purpose. As long as there is life there is hope that you are one of God's elect. Spurn not His mercy, but see your need of Christ. Plead with God for awakening mercy. Wait upon the ministry of the Word with the desire that your danger and misery will be shown to you. Oh, may the longsuffering and mercy of God lead you to repentance! If you continue in your sin you shall know that God's justice is not tempered with mercy. God will not silent forever. That soul that sins *will* die. The wages of sin *is* death. It is either Christ, or perish. It is turn or burn. Mercy cannot be found in the circumstances of your natural birth, works (good deeds), nor the exercise of your own will (to reform yourself). The mercy of God unto eternal life is in Christ *alone*. Look to Christ, for only He can give you a thirsting heart to drink of living the water. Look upon your sin with horror for it is this which separates you from God! Oh, may some sinner be awakened today to find rest in Christ!