In View Of God's Mercy

By Rich Carmicheal

One of the attributes of our God is that He is full of mercy. This truth is sounded over and over in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, when the Lord revealed His glory to Moses, He passed by before Moses *"…and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin…"* (Ex. 34:6-7). The psalmist declares that the earth is full of the Lord's mercy (Psa. 119:64) and that *"…as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him"* (Psa. 103:11). *"...His tender mercies are over all His works"* (Psa. 145:9) and *"His mercy is everlasting"* (Psa. 100:5). Jeremiah reminds us that it is because of *"…the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning…"* (Lam. 3:22-23). The prophet Micah offers this praise: *"Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy"* (Mic. 7:18).

In the New Testament, Mary rejoices that God's *"mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation"* (Luke 1:50), and Zacharias rejoices in *"…the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us"* (Luke 1:78). Paul encourages us with the truths that our God is *"the Father of mercies"* (2 Cor. 1:3), and that He is *"rich in mercy"* (Eph. 2:4). Peter likewise reminds us that our Father's mercy is abundant (1 Pet. 1:3), and James writes that the Lord is full of pity *"and of tender mercy"* (Jas. 5:11).

What Mercy Does

God's mercy is not just a feeling of compassion toward us, but an active response to meet our needs. As A. W. Tozer writes, "Mercy is the goodness of God confronting human suffering and guilt." Thus, Jesus responded to those who cried out to Him for mercy by healing, cleansing and delivering them (Matt. 9:27-30; 15:22-28; 17:14-18; Luke 17:12-19). It was His mercy that led Him to dine at Matthew's house with many tax collectors and sinners, because He knew that it was the unrighteous ones who needed His help and His call to repentance (Matt. 9:10-13).

Because God is full of mercy, He moves compassionately to forgive us, save us, sustain us, comfort us, heal us, encourage us and meet our various needs. Such mercy toward us is not based on our merit to receive His help, but on the fact that it is God's very nature to show mercy.

In other words, whatever good the Lord has done and is doing in our lives is not because we have deserved or earned it, but because He is merciful. We actually deserve His judgment since we have sinned and fallen short of His glory (Rom. 3:23). But in His mercy toward us, He does not treat us as our sins deserve (Psa. 103:10). To the contrary, even when we were dead in our transgressions, God in His abundant mercy, made us alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5). He has

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done for us what we could never have done for ourselves!

If you know the Lord and are walking with Him, you are certainly among the most blessed people in the world. To have His mercy at work in your life is to have the most precious of gifts. And with this great privilege and blessing comes at least three great responsibilities:

Offer Yourself Fully to God

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, the Apostle Paul develops the theme of God's mercy to undeserving sinners, and then in view of that mercy, he gives this admonition: *"I beseech you therefore...by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Rom. 12:1-2). One of the proper responses to God's mercy toward us is to offer ourselves fully to Him.

God has saved us *"according to His mercy…by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"* (Titus 3:5). We have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, and are therefore dead to sin and alive to God through Christ (Rom. 6:3-11). We have been set free from sin and are now able to walk in newness of life in the newness of the Spirit to the glory of God!

In light of such mercy, and in light of all the spiritual resources and power He has now given us, it is time to deny *"ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:12). If you have drifted from the Lord or in any way hardened your heart toward Him, or if there is anything in your life that is displeasing to Him, now is the time to repent and turn fully toward Him. *"Or despiseth thou the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"* (Rom. 2:4).

In His mercy, the Lord offers this invitation: *"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"* (Isa. 55:6-7). *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"* (Prov. 28:13). Look to Jesus, the *"merciful and faithful high priest"* who sympathizes with your infirmities and temptations, and who is able to help you (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). And come boldly unto the throne of grace that you *"may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:16).

Be Merciful

In view of the mercy shown to us, we also have the responsibility to be merciful toward others. In his letter to Titus, the Apostle Paul instructs God's people *"To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another"* (Titus 3:2-3). He goes on to remind us that God saved us, not because of any righteousness on our part, but because of His mercy (vv. 4-5).

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In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus tells a parable of a servant who was forgiven an incredible debt, but who then refused to forgive a fellow servant a very small debt. The parable emphasizes how wrong it is if we do not extend mercy and forgiveness to others as our Heavenly Father has extended to us. We are to be merciful, even as He is merciful (Luke 6:36), and we need to be very careful about having a judgmental, critical and unforgiving spirit toward those who sin. James issues this solemn warning: *"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy…"* (Jas. 2:13).

Of course, sin is of utmost consequence and those who do not repent will one day face the judgment of God. We must never become tolerant of sin, and we must continue to share the message of repentance. But in light of God's patience and mercy toward us, we also need to treat those who sin with as much love and mercy as possible. With the help of the Lord, we need to learn how to not condemn others, while at the same time helping them to go and sin no more (John 8:11). Jude writes, *"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"* (Jude vv. 22-23, NASB).

Bless Israel

One of the most beautiful passages about God's mercy is Romans chapters nine through eleven. In fact, it seems that the Apostle Paul could hardly contain himself as he ends chapter eleven with this doxology: *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen"* (vv. 33-36). What led to such praise?

In the first portion of Romans, Paul shows that through the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, not a righteousness based on the law, but a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul rejoices that the Gentiles have obtained the righteousness by faith, but he is grieved that the Jews stumbled over Christ, and have become hardened. He longs for the Jewish people to receive salvation in Christ.

In chapter eleven, he discloses a wonderful mystery regarding Israel. He states emphatically that God has not rejected Israel as His chosen people (vv. 1, 28-29), and that the hardening of the Jews is only until the full number of Gentiles has come in (v. 25). He points out that the transgression of Israel has resulted in salvation for the Gentiles and riches for the world, and he anticipates how much more Israel's fullness will bring! (vv. 11-12).

Just before the doxology, Paul reveals how God's mercy is foundational to His whole purpose and plan. The Gentiles received mercy through the Jews' disobedience, in order that the Jews may receive mercy through God's mercy to the Gentiles (vv. 30-31). God's glorious plan is to work even through man's disobedience to have mercy upon all – Jew and Gentile! (v. 32).

With this in mind, we have the great privilege and responsibility to be a blessing to the people of Israel and to let God's mercy in us provoke them to jealousy (v. 11) and help them obtain His mercy as well. *"Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is*

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plenteous redemption" (Psa. 130:7).

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