

MERCY  
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INTRO: Some time ago I did a message on grace. It is a word so misunderstood that it has led, in my estimation, to all kinds of false thinking. If it were understood, Calvinism would cease to exist. So let me see how you would respond to this statement: Before you can be saved you have to please God! How many say that is true? How many say it is false?

*James 4:6: But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*

Do the proud receive grace from God? No! When I used to study grace in the OT I thought the word grace occurs very little in the OT but it occurs many times in the OT, only the original word is translated by several different English words, the main one being favor. Many times, it is translated, "find favor," or "found favor." You see, if someone extends grace you must first find favor with them. Now let me recommend our message on grace on sermonaudio if you find this hard to believe.

But here is the problem; when man wants to find favor with God or he wants to please God, unless he is instructed by the Scriptures, he always does so by doing good works. But one cannot please God like that. Well, you can listen to our messages on grace on [sermonaudio.com/mecl](http://sermonaudio.com/mecl).

Well, this morning I will begin to seek to explain the meaning of the word "mercy" as I understand its use in Scripture. Words are incredible things. It is my conclusion that in modern Christianity we have come to understand some very crucial biblical concepts in ways the Bible does not mean them and this has had a major impact on Christianity. Over the years I have sought to come to grips with some of these words and mercy is one of those.

When I went to Bible school and learned how to study the Scriptures one of the key principles I was taught was to learn to observe. I am not very observant by nature and it was a hard thing for me to learn. And I was given to read an account that has impacted me more than most others and it is called: "The Student, The Fish and Agassiz." Louis Agassiz was a Swiss-born

American biologist and geologist, and he was known for his regimen of observational data gathering and analysis.

I have never read anything that has spurred me to study Scripture by careful observation than that story. But the reason I read it was to point out what he said about facts. He said, "Facts are stupid things until brought into connection with some general law."

Observation is the first step in Bible interpretation. You find the facts and put the whole picture together. I would put it like this: Facts are like the pieces of a very complicated puzzle. Each piece belongs into one specific place. When you are trying to put the puzzle you probably start by doing the edge pieces first. That is the easiest. But then you might sort the different colored pieces and get one larger section done. For example there might be a barn and a horse and some cows and a tractor. And you might do the tractor and from there you can fit other pieces to it.

Words are like that. What you try to get out of words is meaning. But generally you cannot know what someone means when they say certain words. For example, my wife is a seamstress and she was very puzzled when I put new sleeves in a motor for my machine.

When you have words like love, or grace, or mercy, now you have very difficult words to understand even if you have some context to them. Now words are not stupid things, but they can be quite meaningless unless they are found in some context, and even then they can be easily misunderstood.

The rule in Bible interpretation is this: You have not interpreted correctly until you have in your mind what the writer had in his mind when he wrote. So, we will begin with my personal definition of mercy.

## I. PERSONAL VIEW OF MERCY DEFINED

Let me begin by giving some common definitions:

### A. Common Definitions

#### 1. A common saying:

So, let me ask you this morning; how would you define mercy? Get a definition in your mind from what you have heard in the past as to what mercy is.

Here is a common definition: Grace is when you get what you don't deserve, and mercy is when you don't get what you do deserve. Here is how one definition put it: "In a nutshell, they are two sides of the same coin. Grace is a gift we don't deserve, while mercy is not getting the punishment we deserve."

2. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary said:

**Essential Meaning of mercy**

**1:** kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly

**2:** kindness or help given to people who are in a very bad or desperate situation an act of *mercy*

**Full Definition of mercy**

**1a:** compassion or forbearance... shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power  
*also:* lenient or compassionate treatment

**b:** imprisonment rather than death imposed as penalty for first-degree murder

**2a:** a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion May God have *mercy* on us.

**b:** a fortunate circumstance *it was a mercy they found her before she froze*

**3:** compassionate treatment of those in distress  
*works of mercy among the poor*

3. Webster's 1828 Dictionary

Webster's 1828 Dictionary gives 9 points under this word but in the first point he says this: "That benevolence, mildness or tenderness of heart which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves; the disposition that tempers justice, and induces an injured person to forgive trespasses and injuries

and to forbear punishment, or inflict less than law or justice will warrant. In this sense, there is perhaps no word in our language precisely synonymous with *mercy*. That which comes nearest to it is *grace*."

#### B. Personal Definition

There are elements in those definitions that may be correct, but a general idea that usually comes out is that while *grace* is getting something you don't deserve, *mercy* is not getting something one does deserve. For example, I deserved to pay a \$5,000.00 fine, but was let off with \$250.00.

I did a message some time ago which I called, "Mercy: Reference Points. Here is how I defined mercy: "In my understanding, *mercy* is first and foremost a feeling or an emotion. In the last message I said that *agape* love is not an emotion. But *mercy*, as I see it, is an emotion. It is a feeling or emotion of compassion or pity that wells up from within because of something one hears or sees or becomes aware of in some way; something that shows a need in something or someone else. This feeling causes within us a desire to seek to alleviate the need in that other person.

Pastor Daryl referenced that in a recent message. I want to make a little change, and I would be interested in any insights anyone might have. As I worked through the chain of events in *mercy*, I discovered something that slightly changes my original definition. I would now give a definition of the biblical word translated *mercy* as: *Mercy is an action caused by feelings of compassion in one who sees another in a need that person cannot take care of, and the one who sees it can and does provide for that need. The act of mercy satisfies the feelings of compassion in the provider and alleviates the need in the one provided for.*

So rather than it being an emotion, it is the result of the emotion of compassion. Let me say another thing about *mercy* in my understanding of the word *mercy*: *Mercy* is the second to last thing in a chain of events.

## II. PERSONAL VIEW OF MERCY DEFENDED

### A. The Make-up of Man

So let me make a defence of this understanding of mercy. To understand the biblical idea of mercy one needs to understand the psychology or make-up of man's soul according to the Bible to some extent. Psychology properly defined is a study of the soul. The body is made up of many parts as we observe from all the physical data we see. The soul is also made up of many parts, of which we have very little knowledge unless we are taught. And the problem is that the soul is immaterial, and no human can understand the immaterial unless it is likened to something in the material realm. And who is it that knows the immaterial realm and how man is made up in that realm? No one, but One alone, and that is man's Maker, and that is the God of the Bible.

The Bible likens various things in our soul to parts of our physical being so we can understand them. For example, when the Bible speaks of the heart, unless it speaks of the literal, physical heart, it speaks of the mind. The mind is part of the soul, not the body. So, the heart, in Scripture, used like this speaks of things intellectual or logical, not something emotional. That is a fact the English, German, French and I don't know how many other language speakers, cannot come to grips with and it leads to huge misunderstanding when it comes to the word agapee love.

Let me give you another example. When the Bible speaks of the emotions it does not use the heart to show that area in the soul that is affected, it uses the...? bowels. That is so foreign to our thinking that we cannot make that switch and it greatly distorts a lot of our thinking.

I will use the KJV for numerous verses because it is more accurate in translating the words related to the psychology of man. Isaiah 63:15 which speaks of the gurgling of the stomach as the sounding of the bowels. I want to give you an example from the OT of the

connection of the bowels and the emotions. In the KJV it says this:

*15 Look down from heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where are Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained?*

The word translated heart is actually *bowels*. So it is the yearning of the bowels and the Lord's mercies are clearly linked together. When one does not check the original words, one will never rightly understand the psychological make-up of man. There is simply a huge difference between the heart and the bowels in biblical psychology. In the Bible the emotions are rightly associated with the bowels. If you are put under great emotional stress, this is where it will likely show up in ulcers or such-like.

Now note it talks about bowels and mercies. The word translated "mercies" I believe would be better translated *compassions*. When we see that which tugs on our emotions of compassion, it happens through that in the soul which is called the bowels. The bowels trigger compassion.

You know the story of Joseph. Joseph's brothers had come for food and they had told him of their father and younger brother. Turn to Genesis 43. You remember that when they went home he kept one of them bound and said they needed to bring their younger brother to prove they weren't spies. Well, they got quite desperate before Jacob allowed Benjamin to return with them. Reuben said to Jacob, "Kill my two sons if I don't bring Benjamin back." When the famine got worse Judah begged, "Send the lad with me. If you don't we may all die."

Well, they went again, this time with Benjamin. Listen to Genesis 43:29-30:

*29 Then he (Joseph) lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son."*

*30 Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to weep. And he went into his chamber and wept there.*

That reading is from the NKJV. Listen now to verse 30 from the KJV:

*30 And Joseph made haste; for his bowels (racham, inward parts) did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.*

The word the NKJV translates as *heart* is the word *compassions* which take place because the bowels have caused feelings of compassion to rise up.

Let me show this from the NT. Listen to these verses from the KJV. You might write them down and study them:

*Philippians 1:8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.*

*Philippians 2:1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

Now in this last passage note that the bowels are connected with the word *mercies*. The word *mercies* again is literally *compassions*, not mercy. When we did Bible studies on these words the class teased me and said, "Whenever we point out a verse that says something different you say, 'Oh, that is a different word in the original.'" It is such a blessing to have people in the pew with cell phones on which, in a few minutes they can check the words and find definitions. Bible scholars from not many years ago would find it hard to believe what any Christian can do on the cell phone today.

Well, we will see more of the connections between these words later. Let me just mention here that it is a pastor's job to study the Bible and teach it so that the people who come are given a correct understanding. As a pastor I do not expect people in the pew to do this kind of work, though they too should read and study the Bible.

Listen to a few more verses from the KJV:

*Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*

Again, the word translated *mercies* is *compassions*.

*Philemon 1:7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.*

Paul credited Philemon with being an encourager. He refreshed the bowels of the saints.

*Philemon 1:20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.*

*1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

Note the words, "bowels of compassion." The word *compassion* has been supplied by the translators. The translators clearly understood that the bowels spoke of compassion here. In the NKJV and the ESV the word 'bowels' is translated 'heart.' I know they are trying to help the English reader, but what it does instead is cover up truth in words.

All that to say this that the emotions are connected to the bowels in Scripture and that is accurate to our physical nature. To put our puzzle together on the word mercy I make this proposition. Mercy happens because the feelings of compassion have been triggered by the bowels of the soul.

I propose that mercy is almost the end run of a series of events. But before we look at that let me mention this. In mercy there is always one in need of something he or she cannot provide. Then there is one who can supply that need. If you don't have one of those, you will never have mercy. I may add that this holds true for grace and prayer as well.

So let me show you where mercy fits in a series of events. Mercy does not simply happen on its own when



there is nothing going on. There is a series of things that bring about mercy.

We will look at this as the word mercy relates to man and then as it relates to God and salvation. This morning we begin by how it relates to man. Let me say this, that God puts a great premium on man being merciful to man.

Understanding this will help us when we now look at the chain of events in which mercy takes place.

B. The series of events in human mercy

1. The Event

Earlier I told you that, as I see it, mercy is the second to last thing that happens in a chain of events. So let me give you the very first thing that is generally there before mercy happens. When we studied this in our Bible study, to give an event I showed this Pulitzer winning picture and it will cause you to feel compassion.

**[Show picture.]** This child is one kilometer from a UN food station and he won't make it. It is the vulture that will have lunch. The man who won the Pulitzer committed suicide not much later. He probably saw so many like this that it overwhelmed or flooded his emotional capacity.

2. Bowels of the soul

Seeing or hearing of such an event sets off an area in the soul that is likened to the bowels of the body. Not all events cause the same emotion. Some cause anger, some happiness, some fear, some disgust, some anger and some surprise. some joy; and there are many more. And if there is no event that arouses this emotion mercy will not happen. For example, we may see something and we might express it like this: It wrenched my gut. It is the bowels in the soul that cause us to feel compassion. That is where all compassion originates.

3. Compassion

So, we had first the event. Second, the bowels of the soul are moved. Now third, compassion is set off in us. Compassion is an emotion. It is aroused by seeing something like the picture I showed earlier. Compassion is that feeling caused by seeing someone in need which causes one, or should cause one to do whatever one can to alleviate the need of the other.

Now before we go on, let me just add that as I studied for this message, I learned to distinguish between such words as pity, empathy, sympathy, and compassion. In my view pity feels sorry for what is being experienced by another, but it is not interested in or cannot help. Empathy means you can put yourself in the other person's shoes. Sympathy is feeling along with a person who is going through some difficulty. But compassion, though it may have elements of all those things is different in that it will do whatever it rightfully can to alleviate the need.

Some time ago I was in the hospital and I had to change into a gown and put my clothes in a bag. On our way home I realized my wallet was missing. I called the hospital and when I wanted to thank the nurse that spent a lot of effort into finding it, and they did find it, I wanted to thank her. And another nurse answered the phone and I told her I wanted to thank the nurse who had found my wallet and she said, "Oh, we were all looking for your wallet!" So, I thanked the ward. Why did they put such an effort into finding my wallet? One nurse told me they knew what it was like to lose a wallet. So, they had compassion on me!

When translators translate bowels as heart and compassion as mercy, I believe that from those uses one cannot come to the right conclusion as to what the Bible means on this subject.

So, in mercy there is first an event. This event causes that which is in our soul, which is likened to the bowels of the body, to cause compassion. This is the second and third thing in a string of things that lead to mercy. The event triggers the

emotion. In our house we have a fire alarm. If a little too much smoke gets into the air, that alarm will sound. If we have a loud racket in the house the alarm won't sound. It is not made to detect noise it is made to detect smoke. The bowels of the soul are made to send signals that arouse our compassion when we encounter certain events.

In our soul we have something the Scripture likens to the bowels, and when we see a picture like the one we saw earlier, or something gut wrenching, it causes something to happen in our soul which triggers our emotion of compassion. This is steps two and three.

There are many emotions but it is the emotion of compassion that is aroused which causes us to want to extend mercy. So the bowels trigger the emotion of compassion. So, I want you to see two words in the NT.

Turn to Luke 10. You will remember the story of the good Samaritan. A man was beaten by robbers and left half dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. We begin in verse 30:

*30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*

*31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

*32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.*

*33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,*

Now note that he had *compassion* on the injured man. The word here is the word *splanchnizomai*. It is a verb which comes from the word "bowels." If we had such a word, we might say it like this, "He

compassioned him." We did have a word like that but we don't use it any more. In this account the trigger for compassion, the bowels, moved him to do something for the one in need.

Go now to Luke 15. It is the story of the prodigal son. Here we have a young man who thinks he knows better than his dad and he wanted his inheritance prematurely. No doubt the dad tried to talk him out of it and finally realized that this young man will only learn the hard way and so he finally gave in. He divided the inheritance and gave it to the younger son and he left. We'll read the story beginning in verse 11:

11 *Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.*

12 *"And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.*

13 *"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*

14 *"But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.*

15 *"Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

16 *"And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*

17 *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

18 *'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,*

19 *"and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."*

20 *"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*

Notice the word "compassion." It is the word for the emotion which the bowels trigger. It is the word *oiktirmos*.

We go now to Philippians 2. The word we are looking at now is *oiktirmos*. It is the word for compassion.

Verse 1 says:

*1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies <3628>,*

I used the KJV because it speaks of bowels of mercies. The NKJV says "affection and mercy." Bowels is correct. Here again we have the connection between the bowels and compassion. The word translated *mercy* or *mercies* is not the word for mercy. It is *oiktirmos* and means compassion.

Colossians 3:12 says:

*12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies <3628>, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*

This is the KJV again. The words are the same as the previous verse. So, the order is that there is some event that triggers the bowels in the soul and the emotion of compassion is born. So, we have an event that triggers the bowels, which gives rise to compassion, and true compassion will do whatever is in its power to do to alleviate the need of another. And in order for compassion to be justly administered, whatever is done has to be right. Compassion is often not administered properly. We might have such feelings of compassion for someone that it might cause us to do that which is not

truly just. We might not discipline a child because of our compassion.

So let us say you meet a very poor person and you feel true compassion and would like to do something to alleviate the need. The need, he says, is for some money for a meal. You would gladly buy him a meal and so you offer to take him for lunch, and now he is not interested. You now know what the money will go for if you give it to him and so you cannot help him.

#### 4. Love

That brings us to the next thing in order as I interpret this, and that is love. You see, compassion may be wrongly exercised. We might not spank our children when we should. We may give money to a drunk when all he will do is buy more alcohol. What I see as the next step is that whatever is done needs to be the right thing to do, and it is right here that agapee love comes in. It is love that must find a just way to alleviate this need. True love requires that whatever is done must be right. 1 Corinthians 13 says that love rejoices in the truth!

True compassion leads to agapee love. Agapee love is love that which operates by truth, not by emotion. Agapee love is logical. Emotions may want to lead us away from being logical. Agapee love is a mind-based thing, not emotion based. It always puzzled me that there were no emotions involved in agapee love and then in this study I learned that compassion, an emotion, motivates love. Agapee love seeks a way in which it can rightfully alleviate the need of the needy one, but agapee love only allows one to do what is right. Agapee love never makes decisions based on emotions; it bases its actions on truth. That is why the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13 says agapee love rejoices in the truth.

If God or man can find a way to alleviate compassionate feelings by love based on truth, they will do so because it is right. There are times

when we see someone in need and we do not feel compassion but we know what the right thing to do is. In that case, love will do what is right whether we feel compassion or not.

When love finds a way to alleviate another's need, it will do so. Then there are times when love does not let you meet someone else's felt need. A child may think they do not need a spanking, but if truth says that is a need, love will do so.

When it says, "For God so loved the world..." His love is based on the truth that the one way in which He can alleviate man's great by sacrificing His only begotten Son in sinful man's place. In this way He can justly save man from sin and hell. I have spoken to you on this verse and that the word translated "so" would better be translated, "For in this way God loved the world..." It is not, "God sooooo loved the world..." but rather, "In this way God loved the world. In what way? By paying the price Himself!

#### 5. Grace

In my original studies I had mercy following love. But as I pondered all this I wondered, where does grace come in? I concluded that grace follows love. And as I pondered that I pondered this question: What comes first, grace or mercy.

Now listen carefully to these verses:

*1 Timothy 1:2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith: **Grace, mercy,** and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*2 Timothy 1:2 To Timothy, a beloved son: **Grace, mercy,** and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Titus 1:4 To Titus, a true son in our common faith: **Grace, mercy,** and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.*

2 John 1:3 ***Grace, mercy,*** and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Note that grace is always given first. Does this indicate an order? Well, note, peace is always given last. Peace cannot be before grace or mercy, so I conclude we have an order.

We have studied grace quite some time ago. Grace speaks of how one gets what one desires. It means you get it freely because you found favor with the one who can provide what you need. There is no price attached to grace. Here is the difference between grace and mercy. Grace is how one gets what one desires; i.e., freely. Mercy is what one gets, and we'll see that later. When love decides that it is right to meet a certain need in another, it does it freely.

When I read Webster's definition of mercy here is what he said in part: "...there is perhaps no word in our language precisely synonymous with *mercy*. That which comes nearest to it is *grace*."

If I am correct in my conclusions, you see how near to mercy grace is.

CONCL: So, we conclude for this time. Mercy in Scripture is connected to a part of the soul that is likened to the bowels of the body. This area of the soul is set off by an event that triggers feelings of compassion. Without such an event these feelings do not come to our attention.

When these feelings, or the emotion of compassion is aroused, it causes one to want to alleviate the need in another, a need with which we can identify. It is possible to let our feelings of compassion to override logic or truth. But to truly satisfy the feelings of compassion, love must find a way to satisfy those feelings in a way that is just, or right.

When love has found a way to legitimately take care of that need, mercy will take place, and that is what we want to see in the next message. In the account of the good Samaritan, the event that triggered the emotional response of compassion in the Samaritan passing by was a man who was left half dead on the road by some robbers. Love said you need to take care of this



man by binding up his wounds and taking him to a place where he could be cared for. And since he was robbed, pay the ones who will take care of him. And so that is what this Samaritan did. He loved his neighbor by having mercy on him. Mercy was doing what was needed to be done. He could not say to the wounded, unconscious man, "Now just a minute. Pay up and I'll help you." If he was going to help this man it must be by grace, which is freely.