

Grace Bible Church
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
The Tree of Life from the week ending 05/17/09
The Doctrine of Mercy.

Point 1. Definition.

To understand the doctrine of mercy believers need to know the difference between love, mercy and grace. Love is that in God which existed before He would care to exercise mercy or grace. Mercy is that in God which provided for sinful man. Grace is that in God which acts freely to save and bless mankind because all the demands of holiness have been satisfied in Christ. So the difference between grace and mercy is that mercy is that within God which provides for man while grace is the expression of that provision. The doctrine of mercy was taught in the O. T. when Jesus Christ, as the God of Israel was actually going to dwell above the mercy seat between the cherubs in the Holy of holies (Exo 25, Lev 9, Num 16).

The Jews celebrated what is known as the Day of Atonement. The tenth day of the seventh month was set aside as a day of public fasting. On this day the nation of Israel sought atonement for its sins (Lev 23:27; 16:29; Num. 29:7). It was the only fasting period required by the Law. The Day of Atonement was a solemn, holy day accompanied by elaborate ritual. The high priest who officiated on this day sanctified himself by taking a ceremonial bath and putting on white garments (Lev 16:4). Then he had to make atonement for himself and other priests by sacrificing a bull (Num 29:8). God dwelt on the Mercy Seat in the Temple, but no person could approach it except through the mediation of the high priest, who offered the blood of sacrifice. Blood was actually sprinkled twice on the mercy seat on the day of Atonement, once for the priest and once for the people.

The mercy seat was constructed of wood and gold. Inside the ark were three items that spoke of the sins of Israel. On each side was a gold cherub. One represented the righteousness of God; one represented the justice of God. When the high priest came into the Holy of holies on the day of Atonement, he sprinkled blood over the top of the ark or mercy seat. That blood represented the saving work of Christ on the Cross. One golden cherub representing the righteousness of God looked down and was satisfied because Jesus Christ was perfect in His humanity. The other golden cherub representing the justice of God judged those sins, and God the Father was satisfied with His own judgment.

“And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. And you shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. And you shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border around it.” (Exo 25:21-24)

The ark was a wooden box made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The wood represents the humanity of Christ, the gold represents the deity of Christ, together, they represent the Hypostatic-union.

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides

with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. (Heb 9:1-4)

- a) The urn of manna represented sin as rejection of God's logistical grace provision.
- b) Aaron's rod that budded speaks of sin in the sense of rebellion against the authority of God and rejection of God's system for communication of doctrine.
- c) The tablets of the Law spoke of sin as transgression of divine law, since the law defined freedom in the client nation. The contents represent Christ bearing our sins on the Cross.

The key to all of this is found back in Exo 25:22, **“And there I will meet with you;”** The mercy seat, or the place of mercy, was and is, the place where God meets fallen humanity. Every believer has a relationship with God which is based on His mercy. So think about those three items under the mercy seat.

**Point 2. Man can now approach God on the basis of God's mercy for man.
To God belongs mercy and forgiveness. (Dan 9:9)**

If we as believers do not have this attitude toward one another look at what Jam 2:13 says, **For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.** Mercy is one of the main reasons why the Lord is patient and compassionate toward us. **“For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more” (Heb 8:12).** Therefore, mercy is the basis and the grounds for the believer's relationship to God. Mercy is actually related to our sins and failures, whereas grace is related to the provisions of God.

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16)

We receive mercy for our past mistakes, and grace for our spiritual strength and integrity under pressure. Throughout the Word of God, God's people were constantly being offered mercy from God so that they would repent and come back into fellowship. **In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them; And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old. (Isa 63:9)**

“And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony” (Exo 25:22). This shows us that the integrity of God is the point of reference, the place of contact between God and man. The New Testament also confirms the importance of the mercy seat as a shadow of propitiation.

And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; (Heb 9:5)

The Day of Atonement portrayed the whole picture of salvation from the standpoint of propitiation. The sprinkling of animal blood represented the spiritual death of Christ bearing our sins and the acceptance by the integrity of God of that work. The resultant principle is that at the moment of salvation, the justice of the Father is satisfied, freeing the love of God to motivate the justice of God to bless the believer. God is now free to love and bless us.

Christ is the mercy seat. Sin is inside the ark underneath the mercy seat. The righteousness and justice of God see the blood on the mercy seat, which represents the work of Christ on the Cross, and is satisfied. This was just symbolic of the mercy of God in the O. T. because judgment was delayed on all sins until the Cross. This was true for all sins, past, present and future. That is why mercy is involved with our salvation.

He saved us, 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, (1Ti 3:5)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1Pe 1:3)

Point 3. The Parable of mercy is found in Luk 18:9-14.

This parable reveals how a merciful oriented believer thinks.

And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt [ridicule, disgust, scorn]: (Luk 18:9)

Note first of all what kind of people He spoke this parable to. Those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, that's self-justification, the first stage of the arrogant skills. There are people that you're going to meet, even born again believers, who are convinced that they're always right. If somebody says something and that proves that they are wrong, they go crazy because they move into the second stage of the arrogant skills, self-deception. This leads to self-absorption where they take their very own flaws and super-impose them on others. The Greek word for "mercy" is "hilaskomai" which is the word propitiation, the basis for God being merciful and gracious to us. Propitiation is the Godward side of the work of Christ in salvation. God the Father is satisfied with the sacrificial ministry of our Lord on the Cross. As believers we need to understand that we can approach God on the basis of His mercy.

Point 4. As members of the Royal Family of God, we are described as "vessels of mercy," which means we have received mercy (Rom 9).

What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, (Rom 9:22-23)

Notice that this verse talks about God making His power known. He does so through the expression of the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy. When we believed in Jesus Christ, we received forty things from God. That was the beginning of God's mercy and God's grace toward us. After that, we receive logistical grace support and blessing. that is the continuation of God's mercy and grace toward us. All believers receive this whether they are winners or losers. We are the beneficiaries of the most fantastic plan that God has ever put together for those who are believers in Jesus Christ. However, make sure that you understand that we do not earn or deserve a thing and that the Lord can and will show mercy to whomever He chooses.

For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Rom 9:15-16)

This is why we should all have an attitude of mercy toward each other in every facet of our lives. Paul mentions this principle in Rom 11. **For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also [the Jews] now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. (Rom 11:30-32)**

So the Lord desires to be merciful to everyone of us.

Point 5. The chief example of mercy is the Apostle Paul.

In genuine humility, Paul wrote that he was the worst sinner who ever lived and that he was the least of all the apostles. As an unbeliever, Paul murdered many Christians. Yet he became the greatest Church-age Christian. Paul became an apostle as a result of the sovereign decision of Jesus Christ according to Eph 4:11.

The principle is that if God would give mercy to the chief and greatest sinner of all, it follows a fortiori that He will give mercy to all.

Point 6. The responsibility that we all have to be merciful toward each other (Mat 18).

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (Mat 18:21)

Now this question illustrates Peter's ignorance toward true forgiveness and mercy. Because to forgive someone up to seven times means that you must keep count and that mercy and forgiveness has limitations. To keep a count means that you do not forget and you bring up the situation again, therefore, you really did not forgive. When Peter used seven as the number of times that an offending brother should be forgiven, he certainly thought he was doing some great thing. Peter was actually quoting a principle of doctrine found in Amos 1:3,6,9,11, which says that the Lord would forgive Gentile nations up till seven times. Actually what Peter did in suggesting a limit to our forgiveness and mercy toward one another was to imply the notion that a man in forgiving gave up a right which he might under certain circumstances exercise.

The purpose of this parable is to make clear that when God calls on a member of His kingdom to forgive and act merciful toward others is that He is not calling on him to renounce or give up a right, but in reality that he has no right in the matter at all.

Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Mat 18:22). This represents the unlimited amount of forgiveness and mercy that comes from God! And then our Lord begins the parable. **“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents” (Mat 18:23-24).** A considerable amount, especially in that day. Herod the Great's annual revenue from his entire kingdom was about nine hundred talents. **“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” (Mat 18:25).**

It was customary in the ancient world that if someone could not pay what they owed you, that you could not only take all of their property and attach it, but you could even take them and their family and sell them and their family as slaves.

“The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'have patience with me, and I will repay you everything. And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt (Mat 18:26-27). Notice the word compassion because compassion is an expression of a mental attitude saturated with mercy. **“But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii [a mere fraction of what he had owed]; and he seized him and began to choke him and kept on saying, ‘pay me back what you owe!’” (Mat 18:28)**

You see how unreasonable this person is. How can anyone who is being choked to death pay back the twenty dollars even if he had it in his back pocket? This is a picture of believers who want to be treated with mercy from God, but will not be merciful toward others. This man went out from the presence of his lord and found someone who had owed him something. It is because we go out from the presence of the Lord that we are in danger of acting like this servant with an unforgiving heart and no mercy. He has forgotten the benefits that he received from his lord.

“So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him or beg him, saying, ‘have patience with me and I will repay you.’ He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘you

wicked slave you evil servant,, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each one of you does not forgive his fellow-believer from your heart or right lobe.”

(Mat 18:29-35)

If someone has wronged you and you do not forgive them in your heart, you have had it! However, this is where the principle behind Dan 9:9 comes into focus **“To God belongs mercy and forgiveness.”** To have forgiveness toward others we've got to know God! It is through occupation with the Lord Jesus Christ that we develop a capacity to be merciful. The public servant portrayed in the parable would not forgive. He applied the principle of justice without mercy. Doctrine produces mercy in the life of the believer. **But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy (Jam 3:17).** So we must always have an attitude of mercy toward all members of the human race.