

“God's Mercy In our Life”

To a certain respected bishop there once came a man *who* was in great despondency, as if weighed down by something, and he asked the bishop what he should do: his life had turned out not at all as he had wished and supposed, and in place of happiness he had total dissatisfaction and an oppressed state of soul.

The bishop listened to his complaint and, taking a sheet of paper, said: "You know, let us compile a small list of your misfortunes. Perhaps your wife has left you?"

"No, Vladika," the man replied despondently.

"Perhaps your disobedient children have run away from home and have become drug-addicts or drunkards?"

"No, Vladika, this misfortune has not occurred to me."

"Has *your* house burned down?" the bishop continued to ask, writing down the answers.

.....

Again the man replied in the negative.

"Have you lost your job?" was the bishop's next question; and again the man replied that he had not.

"Perhaps you have an incurable disease?" the bishop finished his questions, and on receiving a negative reply and seeing that he had exhausted the list of his possible misfortunes and catastrophes, the bishop said to him:

"Well, I advise you to return home, make your own list of the mercies God has shown you, and then return to me and we will talk."

Indeed, in every human society and in every individual who belongs to it there can be observed a dissatisfaction and oppressed spirit similar to this man's, occurring as the result of a seeming disorder and failure in life.

This unhappy man came to a bishop with his complaints about life; but bishops also, it would seem, have grounds to be dissatisfied with their fate--they are swallowed up by purely administrative work in their dioceses, they have to examine unpleasant cases and quarrels, they are constantly in public, being deprived of prayerful concentration, and in worldly gossip they are subjected to judgment and often slander.

If we look deeply into the life's path of a priest, perhaps we will see there also reasons for dissatisfaction in his personal life--the frequent impossibility of being "all things to all men," which evokes judgment on the part of his flock, while every relaxation he makes in anything immediately evokes reproaches for his lack of firmness; while his lawful strictness can push people away. '

And if we turn to monastics, here we too can see great difficulties. Monasticism is true loneliness, as the Greek root of this word indicates (monos, "alone"). The monk in his loneliness conducts an unceasing battle, as if with himself. His battle against human passions is greater than

that waged in human society. Spiritual discipline and the strictness of obedience, even against his own will, constant labor, vigils and fasts, a constant restraining of his own will--always and in everything he is alone.

And what of laymen? Each of them is dissatisfied with something. Let us take, for example, motherhood. To be a mother is a joy, but at the same time how many cares there are, often there is no time to pray in peace or to read or to rest from daily labors; and how often a mother's heart is grieved by family quarrels and outbursts of dissatisfaction; and how much do disobedient, careless children weigh upon a mother! And what fear she has for their lives, how upset she can be over their fate, and how many difficulties there are in their moral upbringing and their contacts with others. And to all this is added great material difficulties and the grief of illness,

So it is that a mother, or a father, or a single person could well compose *a list of* complaints, griefs and sorrows such as the bishop asked of the despondent man: and there is no end to this list.

But look about you, O man, and learn to value what you have been granted to have in God's unceasing mercy towards you.

Should a bishop not rejoice? Is he not a *successor of* the Holy Apostles? Is he not a preserver of the Divine Truth, a proclaimer of the good tidings of Christ? And a priest, although it is true he has no life of his own, but by God's mercy he has the whole fullness of spiritual life. He is the preformer of Christ's Mysteries; by his prayers the "mercy of peace" descends to earth, and in his heartfelt cries at the altar is invoked and made real the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Holy Gifts of the Body and Blood of Christ. Monasticism is a sacrifice and a voluntary martyrdom. But this kind, according to the testament of the Apostle Paul, more than anyone else is capable with mind and heart to enter "within the veil" (Heb. 6:19) that separates earth from heaven, Is not this the highest mercy of God?

And you who live in the world: think on what I have said. Even if there have occurred to you all those misfortunes about which the bishop asked the despondent man, by this the abyss of God's mercy *to* you has not even been touched. Have you ever stopped *to value* the freedom which you possess? Have you rejoiced at the wondrous beauties of nature set by the Lord before you at every step?. Have you valued as you should the joy of knowing the wisdom of the sciences? Have you looked with love into the eyes of your wife or children, and have you thanked the Lord that you are one family with them, and they with you? Do you realize and understand the joy of having your own church, sanctified by prayer, and of being in the bosom of the true Church, of approaching with trembling the Mysteries of the Church, being united in them with Christ? Has the Lord not placed in your soul the grace of sincere prayer; has He not directed to you on your life's path the deprived and offended, so that you might know the joy of heartfelt kindness in the happiness of giving alms?

There is no end to this inspiring list. But do you occupy yourself with the *contemplation* of God's mercy towards you; humble-yourself more frequently, pray more from the heart, labor spiritually, and then you will ignite in your heart the true joy of Pascha, of the *Resurrection* of Christ.

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Orthodox Christian Authors and the Holy Fathers on the subject of God's Mercy and our need to be merciful as a result

"The mercy of God supports all of us, but if we are proud, God will lift off His grace and we will become worse than the others." *Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mount Athos, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"*

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' Now I know that in many passages of the Divine Scripture holy men call the Divine Power merciful; as does David in the Psalms, Jonas in his prophecy, and the great Moses frequently in the Law. If, therefore, the term 'merciful' is suited to God, what else does the Word invite you to become but God, since you ought to model yourself on the property of the Godhead? For if the Divinely inspired Scripture calls God merciful, and if the Divinity is truly blessed, then it should be clear how the following is to be understood. It means that if a man is merciful, he is deemed worthy of the Divine Beatitude, because he has attained to that which characterized the Divine Nature." *St. Gregory of Nyssa, On the Beatitudes*

"And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart's burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he continually offers up tearful prayer, even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns in his heart without measure in the likeness of God." *St. Isaac The Syrian, Homily 81, from "The River of Fire", Dr. Alexandre Kalomiros*

"Because the Deity is goodness itself, true mercy and an abyss of loving bounty - or, rather, He is that which embraces and contains this abyss, since He transcends every name that is named (cf. Eph. 1:21) and everything we can conceive - we can receive mercy only by union with Him." *St. Gregory Palamas (On Prayer and Purity of Heart no. 1, The Philokalia Vol. 4 edited by Palmer, Sherrard and Ware; Faber and Faber pg. 343)*

"But God said, 'I require mercy, and not sacrifice; and the acknowledgement of God, and not whole burnt offerings' Hosea 6:6. What is meant by mercy? and what by sacrifice? By mercy then is signified Justification and grace in Christ; even that which is by faith. For we have been justified, not by the works of the law that we have done, but by His great mercy. And sacrifice means the law of Moses." *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*

“Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved. St. John Chrysostom

Ever let mercy outweigh all else in you. Let our compassion be a mirror where we may see in ourselves that likeness and that true image which belong to the Divine nature and Divine essence. A heart hard and unmerciful will never be pure. *St. Isaac of Syria, Directions on Spiritual Training (Test 85. B #8)*

“Let no man deceive himself, let none be misled. Only the Lord can grant mercy. Sins committed against Him can be cancelled by Him alone Who bore our sins and suffered for us, by Him whom God delivered up for our sins. Man cannot be above God, nor can the servant by any indulgence of his own remit or condone the graver sort of crime committed against his Lord, for that would make the lapsed liable to this further charge, that he knows not the words of the prophet: ‘Cursed be the man that putteth his hope in man.’ It is Our Lord we must pray to, it is Our Lord we must win over by our satisfaction; for He has said He will deny the man that denies Him, and He alone has received all power of judgment from His Father.” St. Cyprian, *The Lapsed*

“Should you exercise mercy toward another, you will receive mercy for it.” *Counsels of the Optina Elder Moses (Putilov)*

“Those who do not have a conscience assured of purity of heart cannot pray with the words of the Prophet ‘Give reward unto Thy servant.’ If, indeed, the reward is according to the measure of our works, we remain within the chastisement of our sins and our faults. It is already good if one has the means of assurance that permit thanks to God thus: ‘Not according to our iniquities hath He dealt with us, neither according to our sins hath He rewarded us. For according to the height of heaven from the earth, the Lord hath made His mercy to prevail over them that fear Him...for He knoweth whereof we are made’ (Ps. 102: 9,10,12). It is important to recognize such mercy on the part of God for us, to now that we are insulated by the accustomed practice of our faults, and for us to begin to be worthy of the mercy of God.” *St. Hilary of Poitiers quoted in The Lament of Eve by Johanna Manley*

“You hear in church more often than anything the voices of the priests, deacons, readers and singers praying God to have mercy upon us. What does this signify? It signifies that all of us who are in God's Temple are deserving, by our sins, of God's punishment, and that before everything - on our coming into the church - we must remember that we are sinners, and have come to the Lord of Heaven and Earth, to our Creator and Benefactor, Whom we have daily and hourly angered by our iniquities, to ask for mercy, each one for himself, and also, in accordance with Christian love, for others.” *St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ, Part 1; Holy Trinity Monastery pg. 29*

“Even though we, in our supreme ignorance, childishness, and tendency toward evil, turn away from true life and place many impediments along our path because we really do not like to repent, nevertheless, He has great mercy on us. He patiently waits for us until we will be converted and return to Him...that our faces may not be ashamed in the day of judgment.” *St. Macarius the Great*

“The mercy of God is hidden in sufferings not of our choice; and if we accept such sufferings patiently, they bring us to repentance and deliver us from everlasting punishment.” *Saint Kosmas Aitolos +1779*

The Goodness & Mercy Of Our Lord God

The Lord God loves us all! It is a profound and wonderful truth that His love for us is filled with His goodness and mercy. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who is ever-present with us, our soul finds peace, knowing how much goodness and mercy is offered to us because of the love of our God. The essential lesson we learn, because of this goodness and mercy of our Savior Jesus Christ, is that we too should be good and merciful.

But the goodness and the mercy our Lord God offers us are but two of the great spiritual virtues He desires that we should know and experience. For example, we must begin to learn about gentleness and meekness, because our God is also meek and gentle.

Christ our Lord has told us in His Holy Gospel that He would not leave us comfortless. This is a sacred promise He desires us to discover as truth for ourselves – that He did not forsake us but gave us the grace of the Holy Spirit (St John 14, v.26) to abide with us.

Therefore as faithful Orthodox Christians we should learn to know about our Creator, and His great love for us all! Know the love of Christ, and live with peace in your soul, because in the end we behold not only His goodness and mercy, but also His meekness and gentleness.

Let us turn to our God in prayer, and within our Mystical Church behold Him, and learn more about Him through the beautiful services that the Church offers us. Learn more about Him through the Holy Gospels, the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and also through the teachings and great examples we have been given in the lives of the saints and martyrs of our beloved Church.

Our loving prayer really does reach Paradise, especially when prayer is said with all our mind, heart, and soul. Let us then lift up our prayers to God within our Holy and Mystical Church, for then our Lord will rejoice in us, and we discover that the Church is the point of unity between earth and heaven.

Now we are on the path towards our salvation. Salvation is from Paradise, so we must seek the things of Paradise and try not to cling to everything earthly. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in St Matthew's Gospel that our treasure should be in Heaven (19, v21). Our treasure is found there because of our open-hearted generosity and love for one another, knowing that God loves us like His beloved children. We must be filled with goodness, mercy, meekness and gentleness towards all.

We finally begin to know God through the Holy Spirit, just as our Lord God gave the Holy Spirit to His Holy Apostles. His Holy Spirit is always with us, leading us into the presence of God that

we may know Him, and grow daily in His abiding love. Then we behold His mercy and His goodness, as well as His gentleness and His meekness. What a blessing for us all!

Thanks to God for all things!

Humbly In Christ Our Lord,

In the Love of His Glorious Resurrection
+Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes
Who prays for you!
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<http://www.serfes.org/spiritual/june2003.htm>

Kyrie Eleison, Lord Have Mercy

Anthony M. Coniatis

Many people remember the Russian couple, the Rosenbergs, who were tried in court for treason against the United States. The trial was a long and bitter one. As the final sentence was pronounced, the lawyer for the Rosenbergs cried out, "Your Honor, what my clients ask for is justice!"

Judge Kaufman replied, "What the court has given them is what they ask, justice! What they really want is mercy. But mercy is something this court has no right to give them."

The One who has the right to give mercy is God.

THE THEME OF GOD'S MERCY

This is brought out in the Gospel reading of the Pharisee and the Publican. "God, be merciful to me the sinner," prayed the Publican. His only plea was for mercy, *Kyrie Eleison!* Without this prayer Christianity would be a philosophy, a history, a code but not a religion that saves.

The same theme of God's mercy is expressed again in the Gospel lesson of the Prodigal Son. Listen to the words of the following hymn from the vesper service of the Prodigal Son:

"As the Prodigal Son I come to you, merciful God. I have wasted my whole life in a foreign land; I have scattered the wealth which You gave me, O Father.

"Receive me in repentance, O God, and have mercy upon me."

One of the most beautiful examples of God's mercy is the prodigal son, who leaves home, wastes all his father's resources in sin, ends up living with pigs, remembers his father, repents, and returns home where he is embraced by the waiting father, who declares a feast to celebrate his return. That is God's mercy.

The same theme of mercy is emphasized again in the Gospel reading which deals with the second coming of Christ. Listen to the words of the following hymn from the Orthros:

"Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy upon me. I cry to you, when you come with your angels to give to every person due return for his/her deeds."

From the Matins' Services of Lent

After the Gospel reading at matins on each Sunday during Lent, we hear the following beautiful hymns of repentance:

"Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-Giver ... But in your compassion purify me by the loving kindness of your mercy."

"When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment, but trusting in Your loving-kindness, like David I cry out to You. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy."

These hymns are preceded by the reading of Psalm 51, one of the most used psalms in Orthodox worship services. In this Psalm, David asks God's mercy for his sins and proclaims that God's steadfast love and mercy are greater than the sins of His creatures:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love. According to Thy abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51.1-2).

From the Penitential Canon of St. Andrew of Crete

Another place where the call to God for mercy is heard during the first week of Lent is in the penitential canon of St. Andrew of Crete sung each evening during compline. Listen to some of the hymns:

*"I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned against you.
Be merciful to me though there is no one whose sins I have not surpassed.
I cry to You, O Lord: Have mercy, have mercy on me!
When You come with Your angels to give due reward to each person for his deeds."*

*"I have sinned as no other person before,
I have transgressed more than any other, O Lord.
Before the Day of Judgment comes be merciful to me, O Lover of Man."*

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!"

David once showed us the image of true repentance in a psalm he wrote exposing all that he had done:

"Be merciful to me and cleanse me!" he wrote,

*"For against You only have I sinned, the God of our fathers.
Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!
I have distorted Your image, O Savior, and broken Your commandments.
The beauty of my soul has been spoiled, and its light extinguished by my sins."*

"But have pity on me and," in David's words, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation."

*"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!
Return! Return! Uncover what is hidden!"*

*"Say to God who knows all things:
'You are my only Savior and know my terrible secrets.'
Yet in David's words I cry to You:
'Be merciful to me, O God, according to Your steadfast love.'"*

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!"

The Canon of St. Andrew of Crete

The gateway to God's mercy is repentance. That is why St. John of Kronstadt said, "Let us hasten to call forth His mercy by repentance and tears."

One of the most repeated words in the liturgy is the prayer *Kyrie Eleison*, Lord, have mercy. It is repeated again and again, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, a hundred times.

THE MEANING OF KYRIE ELEISON

St. Symeon of Thessaloniki writes about the Kyrie Eleison prayer: " 'Have mercy upon us, O God, according to your great mercy, we beseech you ... ' This expression is appropriate, since we should not ask for anything except for mercy, as we have neither boldness nor access to offer anything as our own ... So as sinners and condemned through sin we cannot, nor dare not, say anything to our Loving Master except 'have mercy.' "

The excellent book "Orthodox Worship" describes the meaning of the word mercy as follows:

"The word mercy in English is the translation of the Greek word eleos. This word has the same ultimate root as the old Greek word for oil, or more precisely, olive oil; a substance which was used extensively as a soothing agent for bruises and minor wounds. The oil was poured onto the wound and gently massaged in, thus soothing, comforting and making whole the injured part. The Hebrew word which is also translated as eleos and mercy is hesed, and means steadfast love. The Greek words for 'Lord, have mercy,' are 'Kyrie, eleison' that is to say, 'Lord, soothe me, comfort me, take away my pain, show me your steadfast love.' Thus mercy does not refer so much to justice or acquittal a very Western interpretation but to the infinite loving-kindness of

*God, and his compassion for his suffering children! It is in this sense that we pray 'Lord, have mercy,' with great frequency throughout the Divine Liturgy.**

From the Liturgy

I share with you the following prayer from the liturgy because it reminds us that God's awesomeness, His majesty and His power are exceeded only by His mercy:

"O Lord our God, Whose power is unimaginable and Whose glory is inconceivable, Whose mercy is immeasurable and Whose love for mankind is beyond all words, in Your compassion, Lord, look down on us and on this holy house, and grant us and those who are praying with us the riches of Your mercy and compassion. For to You are due all glory, honor and worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages."

From the Scriptures

Think of the people who approached Jesus with this simple prayer, "*Kyrie eleison*", "Lord, have mercy":

- The Canaanite woman whose daughter was tormented by a devil. She persisted in her plea for mercy until her daughter was healed.
- The man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit that threw him into the fire. He came to Jesus with the plea *Kyrie eleison*. The prayer was answered and his son was healed.
- The two blind men sitting by the road outside Jericho who cried out to Jesus, *Kyrie eleison*. That cry was heard by Jesus who healed both of them.
- A final example. Jesus is left alone with the adulteress. Misery is left alone face to face with mercy. And she hears from the mouth of Jesus the words, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." That is God's mercy!

In all these instances *Kyrie eleison* was not a prayer that people recited unthinkingly and mechanically, but a cry of sincere faith that came from their hearts, a cry of desperate need and dependence on Jesus. Such a prayer God will not despise.

NOT WHAT WE DESERVE

A precious story pictures a mother pleading with Napoleon to spare her condemned son's life. The emperor said the crime was dreadful; justice demanded his life. "Sir," sobbed the mother, "Not justice, but mercy." "He does not deserve mercy," was the answer. "But, sir, if he deserved it, it would not be mercy," said the mother. "Ah yes, how true," said Napoleon. "I will have mercy."

We dare not stand before the throne of God and ask that we be given what we deserve. Our only cry is, "Lord, be merciful." And the miracle is that there is mercy. At the very heart of the universe beats the heart of God's love. "I tell you," said Jesus about the publican, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

NOT MY RIGHTS

C. S. Lewis tells an interesting story in his book "The Great Divorce." A busload of ghosts is making an excursion from hell up to heaven with a view of remaining there permanently. They meet the citizens of heaven and one very big ghost from hell is astonished to find there a man, who on earth, had been tried and executed for murder.

"What I would like to know," he explodes, "is what are you doing here, you a murderer, while I a pillar of society, a self-respecting decent citizen am forced to walk the streets down there in smoke and fumes and must live in a place like a pigsty." His friend from heaven tries to explain that he has been forgiven, that both he and the man he had murdered have been reunited before the judgment seat of Christ. But the big ghost from hell replies, "I just can't buy that!" "My rights!" he keeps shouting, "I have got to have my rights the same as you!" "Oh no!" his friend from heaven keeps reassuring him, "It's not as bad as all that! You don't want your rights! Why, if I had gotten my rights, I would never be here. You'll not get your rights, you'll get something far better. You will get the mercy of God."

This is why we pray so often in the liturgy: "Lord, have mercy." This prayer, uttered with the least particle of faith, will open the way for God's forgiveness and for the coming of His kingdom in our hearts.

Another one of the most precious prayers of the Orthodox Church the Jesus Prayer claims nothing but God's mercy: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner."

St. Isaac the Syrian said once:

"Never say that God is just. If he were just you would be in hell. Rely only on His injustice which is mercy, love and forgiveness."

"Have mercy upon me, O God ... according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." (Ps. 51.1)

WHAT YOU NEED IS MERCY

Once a woman hired an artist to paint her portrait. When he finished it, the woman complained that the portrait didn't do her justice. The artist laughed and said, "Lady, you don't need justice. You need mercy."

One man said, "This is what I felt Jesus was saying to me as He looked down from the cross. He said, 'You don't need justice. You need mercy. Here is the mercy you need. It's being poured out for you by the love of God. In spite of your tainted past, God loves you and wants to cleanse you.' "

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4.16).

"WHY SHOULD I LET YOU INTO HEAVEN?"

What if you die and appear before God. And this can happen at any moment since we are but a heartbeat away from Him. And God asks you, "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you say?

One person replied, "Like the publican I would fall to my knees, beat my breast, and with my eyes cast on the ground, I would plead, 'Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner.' "

Or, I would say as the prodigal did in the Gospel lesson, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of the hired servants."

"Even if we reach the summit of virtue, we are saved only by God's mercy," said St. John Chrysostom.

But God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-6).

BE MERCIFUL AS GOD IS MERCIFUL

We cannot pray for mercy without being willing to extend mercy to others. That is the point of Jesus's parable about the two debtors (Matt. 18:23-35). Matthew uses a form of the same Greek word *eleison* in presenting Jesus' teaching, "Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"

The mercy we ask for is the mercy we must give to others. Lord, have mercy and make us merciful.

A dying Christian was asked on his death bed, "Are you going to receive your reward?" "No, no!" he breathed. "I go to receive not my reward but God's mercy."

Prayer from the Triodion

"As the Prodigal Son I come to Thee, merciful Lord. I have wasted my whole life in a foreign land; I have scattered the wealth which Thou gavest me, O Father. Receive me in repentance, O God, and have mercy upon me."

Orthodox Worship, B. Williams and H. Anstall. Light and Life Publishing Co., Minneapolis MN.
<http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7124.asp>

"DISCERNING THE ORIGINAL GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST" -- excerpt
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11. The Purpose of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ

The Fathers were unanimous in declaring that the reason the eternal Son of God became a man was to allow the mortal sons of men to become sons of God. "Our Lord Jesus Christ," wrote Irenaeus, "through His infinite love, became what we are, so that He might bring us to be even what He Himself is." (45) This same summary of the Gospel as the Incarnation of God the Son leading to the deification (or divinization--Greek, *theosis*) of man by grace (2 Peter 1:4, described as sharing in God's glory in John 17:22, Rom. 5:1-2, 8:29-30, 2 Cor. 3:18, and 2 Thess. 2:13-14) was repeated by both Athanasius and Augustine:

...by death immortality has reached to all, and... by the Logos becoming man, the universal Providence has been known, and its Giver and Artificer the very Logos of God. For He was made man that we might be divinized; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality. (Athanasius of Alexandria (46))

The Mediator between the Trinity and the weakness and wickedness of men was made man, not wicked, but nevertheless weak. This was done so that by what was not wicked, He might join you to God... He justifies, being just of Himself and not from another; and He deifies, being God of Himself and not by participation in another. But He that justifies does also deify, because by justifying He makes sons of God. For, "He has given them the power to become sons of God." [John 1:12] If we are made sons of God, we are also made gods; but this is by grace adopting, and not by nature begetting. (Augustine of Hippo (47))

For the Fathers, God the Son's death and resurrection were the key events of the Incarnation that made our divinization possible through Christ's rectification of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Wrote Irenaeus:

To do away with the disobedience of man that had taken place at the beginning by means of a tree, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." [Phil. 2:8] He thereby rectified that disobedience that had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience that was upon the tree [the Cross]... In the first Adam, we had offended God Himself. For Adam did not perform God's commandment. However, in the second Adam, we are reconciled to God, being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors to no one else but to Him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning... By transgressing [God's] commandment, we became His enemies. Therefore, in the last times, the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation. He has become "the Mediator between God and men," [1 Tim. 2:5] propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned. He has canceled our disobedience by His own obedience. He also confers upon us the gifts of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker. (Irenaeus of Lyons (48))

Cyprian emphasized the saving work of Christ to free humanity from bondage to sin, death, and the devil:

The Son was willing to be sent and to become the Son of Man, so that He could make us sons of God... He underwent death so that He could present immortality to mortals... At His coming, the Lord cured those wounds that Adam had borne. He healed the old poisons of the serpent.... Those sins that had previously [been] committed are purged by the blood and sanctification of Christ. (49)

Athanasius and Augustine repeated the teaching that Christ's saving work delivered us from death and the devil:

For the Logos, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Logos to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Logos Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the place of all, and might, because of the Logos which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto Death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent. For being over all, the Logos of God naturally by offering His own temple and corporeal instrument for the life of all fulfilled the obligation by His death. And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection. For the actual corruption in death has no longer holding-ground against men, by reason of the Logos, which by His one body has come to dwell among them. And like as when a great king has entered into some large city and taken up his abode in one of the houses there, such city is at all events held worthy of high honor, nor does any enemy or bandit any longer descend upon it and subject it; but, on the contrary, it is thought entitled to all care, because of the king's having taken up his residence in a single house there: so, too, has it been with the Monarch of all. For now that He has come to our realm, and taken up his abode in one body among His peers, henceforth the whole conspiracy of the enemy against mankind is checked, and the corruption of death which before was prevailing against them is done away. For the race of men had gone to ruin, had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to meet the end of death (Athanasius of Alexandria (50))

For it was brought to pass that the bonds of many sins in many deaths were loosed, through the one death of One which no sin had preceded. Which death, though not due, the Lord therefore rendered for us, that the death which was due might work us no hurt. For He was not stripped of the flesh by obligation of any authority, but He stripped Himself. For doubtless He who was able not to die, if He would not, did die because He would: and so He made a show of principalities and powers, openly triumphing over them in Himself [Col. 2:15]. For whereas by His death the one and most real sacrifice was offered up for us, whatever fault there was, whence principalities and powers held us fast as of right to pay its penalty, He cleansed, abolished, extinguished; and by His own resurrection He also called us whom He predestinated to a new life; and whom He called, them He justified; and whom He justified, them He glorified [Rom. 8:30]. And so the devil, in that very death of the flesh, lost man... the devil thought himself superior

to the Lord Himself, inasmuch as the Lord in His sufferings yielded to him; for of Him, too, is understood what is read in the Psalm, "For Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels" [Psalm 8:5], so that He, being Himself put to death, although innocent, by the unjust one acting against us as it were by just right, might by a most just right overcome him, and so might lead captive the captivity wrought through sin, [Eph. 4:8] and free us from a captivity that was just on account of sin, by blotting out the handwriting, and redeeming us who were to be justified although sinners, through His own righteous blood unrighteously poured out. (Augustine of Hippo (51))

The early Church Fathers emphasized the Atonement as an act of deliverance from death and the devil, rather than as an act of penal substitution to appease or "satisfy" the just wrath of God the Father against man's sin. The latter view, first articulated formally by Anselm of Canterbury (d. A.D. 1109), is affirmed in both Roman and Reformed confessions:

...our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, "for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us," [Eph. 2:4] merited Justification for us by his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross...made satisfaction for us unto God the Father. (Council of Trent, Session Six, 7, A.D. 1547 (52))

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him... Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. (*Westminster Confession VIII, 5, XI, 3* (53))

The early Fathers, in contrast, rejected the idea that Christ's Sacrifice was either a deal with Satan, or the satisfaction of a demand by the Father that Someone be punished to appease His wrath against man's sin. Wrote Gregory of Nazianzus:

To Whom was that Blood offered that was shed for us, and why was It shed? I mean the precious and famous Blood of our God and High Priest and Sacrifice. We were detained in bondage by the Evil One, sold under sin, and receiving pleasure in exchange for wickedness. Now, since a ransom belongs only to him who holds in bondage, I ask to whom was this offered, and for what cause? *If to the Evil One* , fie upon the outrage! If the robber receives ransom, not only from God, but a ransom which consists of God Himself, and has such an illustrious payment for his tyranny, a payment for whose sake it would have been right for him to have left us alone altogether. But *if to the Father* , I ask first, how? For it was not by Him that we were being oppressed; and next, On what principle did the Blood of His Only begotten Son delight the Father, Who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his Father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim [Gen. 22]? Is it not evident that the

Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded Him; but on account of the Incarnation, and because Humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son, Who also arranged this to the honor of the Father, Whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things. (54)

As St. Gregory indicates, the offering of Christ's pure life was necessary for us, not for God. God cannot change (Num. 23:19, Psa. 102:27, Lam. 3:22, Mal. 3:6, Heb. 13:8), and He from eternity has loved both those whom He knew would be His friends, and those whom He knew would be His enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). *It is humanity that needs to change on account of our sin, not God.* While the logic of satisfaction and appeasement implies that God is reconciled *to us* by Christ's death, Scripture clearly teaches that the purpose of Christ's death is to reconcile *us to God* by defeating the devil and releasing us from bondage to sin and death (John 12:20-36, Rom. 3:21-26, 2 Cor. 5:17-21, Col. 1:11-23, 2:13-15, 2 Tim. 1:8-11, Heb. 2:10-18, 1 John 1:5-2:6, 2:28-3:10). Thus the Orthodox understanding of the Atonement, rather than affirming the novel Anselmian theory of *satisfaction through substitution*, views Christ's death and resurrection as an act of *sanctification through divine sharing* in human suffering and mortality. Writes Bishop Kallistos Ware:

...we should not say that Christ has suffered "instead of us", but rather that he has suffered *on our behalf*. The Son of God suffered "unto death", not that we might be exempt from suffering, but that our suffering might be like his. Christ offers us, not a way *round* suffering, but a way *through* it; not substitution, but saving companionship. (55)

Salvation involves the healing of the wounds of sin as they have affected the whole human person—body, soul, and spirit:

For that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man. And for this cause does the Apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man; saying thus in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians [5:23], "Now the God of peace sanctify you completely; and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Irenaeus of Lyons (56))

Since salvation involves the body as well as the soul and spirit, the Fathers saw the physical resurrection of Christ as a necessary part of the Gospel of redemption, and not merely an appendix to the message of the Cross. Wrote Clement, "God has made the Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits by raising Him from the dead [1 Cor. 15:20]." (57) Ignatius insisted, "For I know that after His resurrection He was still possessed of flesh. And I believe that He is so now." (58) Cyprian added, "On the third day, He freely rose again from the dead. He appeared to His disciples... Then, in a cloud spread around Him, He was lifted up into Heaven, so that, as a conqueror, He might bring man to the Father. For Christ loved man, He became man, and He

shielded man from death." (59) The identity of Christ as the "lover of mankind" Who became man and rose from the dead is affirmed today every time the Orthodox Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is celebrated.

Footnotes:

46. *On the Incarnation of the Logos* 54, from http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-04/Npnf2-04-16.htm#P1830_678055 .
 47. "Explanations of the Psalms", 29, 2, 1 and 49, 2, in Jurgens, Vol. III, p. 17.
 48. *Against Heresies* V 16, 3 to 17, 1, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-63.htm#P8900_2545577 .
 49. Treatise VIII, *On Works and Alms* 1, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-05/anf05-118.htm#P7475_2488788 .
 50. *On the Incarnation of the Logos* 9, from http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-04/Npnf2-04-16.htm#P1830_678055 .
 51. *On the Trinity* IV, 13, 17, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-03/npnf1-03-10.htm#P934_360132 .
 52. On-line at <http://history.hanover.edu/early/trent.htm> .
 53. Source: http://www.opc.org/documents/WCF_frames.html .
 54. Oration 25, 22, at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-07/Npnf2-07-56.htm> .
 55. *The Orthodox Way*, op. cit., p. 82.
 56. *Against Heresies* V, 6, 1, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-63.htm#P8900_2545577 .
 57. *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 24, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-05.htm#P171_20841 .
 58. *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 3, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-21.htm#P2123_357530 .
 59. Treatise VI *On the Vanity of Idols* 14, at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-05/anf05-116.htm#P7351_2431968 .
- <http://www.geocities.com/jej89/orthodoxgospel.html>

For the Mercies of the Lord

By Pastor Bob AuBuchon Jr.

Trinity Baptist Church, Willow Springs, MO

Psalm 103:6-18

<p>Sign tacked on a tree near a convent: No Trespassing! Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law! -- Sisters of Mercy *</p>
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Bless God for not prosecuting us to the full extent of His Law for having trespassed on His Word through our sins, iniquities and transgressions. We are guilty but God is merciful!

The book of James says . . . Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13b) *"Among the attributes of God, although they are all equal, mercy shines with even more brilliance than justice."* -- Vern McLellan

Tied to mercy are the strings of kindness and compassion. The Hebrew word for mercy (cheched) means, "to get inside someone's skin, to look at where they view life and feel what they are experiencing. But it also meant to move in and act on behalf of the one whose hurting."

The call of the Psalmist is to "bless" God for His mercies toward us.

1. Mercy that Forgives Us . . . vs.6-10

Psalms 103:6-10 The LORD executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

- God makes known His mercy ... it is not hidden!
- God abounds in mercy!
- God deals with our sins in mercy!

"Mercy understands the hurt, feels the hurt, and moves out to cure the hurt." Haddon W. Robinson, "Christian Salt & Light Co."

- Mercy Takes Note of us - Ephesians 2:4-5
- Mercy Identifies with us - Hebrews 4:15-16
- Mercy Takes Action for us - Romans 5:8

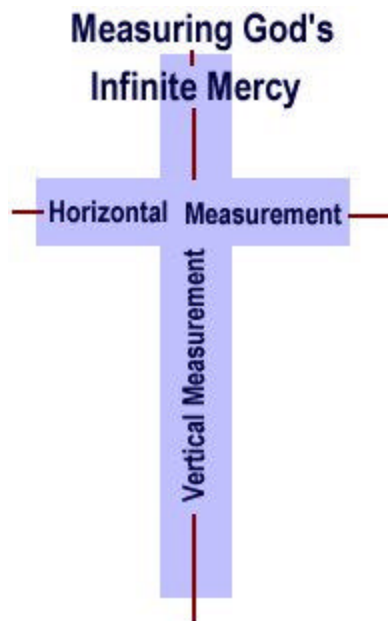
God's mercy is past, present and future in our lives. He has forgiven us, He continues to forgive us and when we get to heaven we will still be forgiven because He is merciful.

What would become of us, if God should deal so with us?

2. Mercy that Frees Us . . . vs.11-14

Psalms 103:11-14 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. 14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

"I was bound by the chains from the wages of my sin. Looking down with longing eyes, Mercy must have realized once His blood was sacrificed freedom would prevail. Mercy came a running like a prisoner set free, past all my failures to the point of my need. The sin that I carried was all I could see and when I could not reach mercy, Mercy can a running to me" -- song by Phillips, Craig & Dean



Someone may ask how high and how far does God's mercy go?
Infinite!

Vertical Measurement = High as the heavens

Horizontal Measurement = Far as east is from the west

If we could fasten a string here to the earth and string it into infinity beyond the planets and stars and then take another string and pull it in the eastern direction into infinity we might begin to measure God's mercy. However there is an easier way to measure. There is a point where those two strings converge (intersect) . . . where the vertical and horizontal meet - its called the cross. God measures His mercy with the cross!

How little we can do to set ourselves free from the likes of our transgressions. God looks upon on state of human frailty unable to set ourselves free and pities us, moving in our direction to set us free.

John 8:32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

3. Mercy that's Forever to Us . . . vs. 15-18

Psalms 103:15-18 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. 16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more. 17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, 18 To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.

David describes the "finite" days of man as passing. Our mercy toward one another is a best limited. As God's mercy is infinite, so it is eternal, unlimited and lasting forever!

God's grace goes beyond the point of forgiveness. About the time I begin to think of some past forgiven sin and to think that there is not way God could forgive me - mercy comes running in to remind me I am forgiven!

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Aren't you glad that when you get to heaven there will not be a sign that reads, No Trespassing! Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law! God's mercy will meet us to greet us into heaven!

Conclusion:

After Bill Gooch's father was saved this past Wednesday morning, which was literally a death bed confession, he said, "Mercy!" My response was "That's exactly what it is Bill, God's mercy!"

Here the great thing about God's mercy with kindness and compassion tied to it.

Lamentations 3:22-24 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

Amen!

This sermon was preached by R. AuBuchon Jr. on March 28, PM Service at Trinity Baptist Church, Willow Springs, MO. All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Copyright RFTPsermons.com

*Bob, The sign you mentioned actually in on the wall of the "Mercy Center" - a retreat center in Blassingame Calif. The center still has a convent on the grounds but rents out part as a retreat center - The convent is run by The Sisters of Mercy - I have seen the sign. Grace, Robin Crouch

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Hymns on Mercy

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice,
which is more than liberty.
There is welcome for the sinner,
and more graces for the good;
there is mercy with the Savior;
there is healing in his blood.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than in heaven;
there is no place where earth's failings
have such kind judgment given.
There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of man's mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
we should take him at his word;
and our life would be thanksgiving
for the goodness of the Lord.

Words: Frederick William Faber, 1862

Praise our great and gracious Lord

Praise our great and gracious Lord,
call upon his holy name;
raising hymns in glad accord,
all his mighty acts proclaim:
how he leads his chosen
unto Canaan's promised land,
how the word we have heard
firm and changeless still shall stand.

God has given the cloud by day,
given the moving fire by night;
guides his Israel on their way
from the darkness into light.

God it is who grants us
sure retreat and refuge nigh;
light of dawn leads us on:
'tis the Dayspring from on high.

Words: Harriet Auber (1773-1862), as alt. in The Hymnal 1982

What wondrous love is this

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss
to lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,
to lay aside his crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing,
to God and to the Lamb, I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb who is the great I AM,
while millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,
while millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.

And when from death I'm free I'll sing and joyful be,
and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
and through eternity I'll sing on.

Words: American folk hymn, ca. 1835

Bread of the world in mercy broken

Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
Wine of the soul, in mercy shed,
by whom the words of life were spoken,
and in whose death our sins are dead:
look on the heart by sorrow broken,
look on the tears by sinners shed;
and be thy feast to us the token
that by thy grace our souls are fed.

Words: Reginald Heber

“WHAT IS MERCY?”

The Hebrew word for mercy is "rachamim." It comes from "racham," which means to love tenderly, to pity, to sympathize with, and to have compassion on. Mercy includes showing kindness to those who don't deserve it, and forgiving those that deserve punishment.

MERCY IS GOD'S NATURE

Mercy is God's nature as it confronts human suffering and guilt. It is human misery and sin that reveal God's mercy. If it wasn't for human suffering God's mercy might have remained hidden in His heart, unknown to other intelligences. God would still be merciful even if there were no guilt, no pain, no tears, and no suffering. Because He is merciful the Almighty is naturally disposed to be kind to those who are in misery or distress, no matter how undeserving they may be. The tendency of His nature is to relieve the suffering caused by man's sin, which has caused us to be in a pathetic, pitiful situation. Because His nature is one of mercy, the God of the Bible feels our sorrows, sympathizes with our pains, and has pity for the terrible circumstances we find ourselves in. He is completely free from any cruelty or meanness toward us. Because He is merciful, God forgives us when we repent, although we don't deserve it, and withholds the punishment that we merit. God is therefore by His nature disposed to forgive man's rebelliousness.

God's mercy is not a temporary mood that can change, but an attribute of God's eternal being. Since it comes from within His eternal nature, God's mercy is infinite and inexhaustible. God's mercy never began to be - it always was. It will never cease to be. It can never be more since it is infinite. It can never be less because the infinite cannot suffer lessening. Nothing that has occurred or will occur in heaven, on earth, or in sheol can ever change the tender mercies of our God. His mercy will always exist, boundless, overwhelming, an immensity of divine pity and tenderest compassion.

THE THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES

Perhaps the greatest description of God's mercy is known in Jewish theology as the "Thirteen Attributes." The Torah records that Moses had been interceding for the Jewish people after the golden calf debacle. Moses went up Mount Sinai and the Lord passed by and proclaimed the Thirteen Attributes (Exodus 34:6-7):

1 & 2. *The Lord, the Lord* [the repetition of Adonai is explained as meaning: I am the merciful God before a man commits a sin, and I am the same merciful and forgiving God after a man has sinned],

3. *God* [the all-mighty Lord of the universe, the Supreme Ruler over all of creation and over mankind],

4. *merciful* ["rachum" - full of affectionate sympathy for the sufferings

5. *and gracious* ["v'chanoon" - consoling the afflicted and raising up the oppressed, even when we don't deserve it],

6. *slow to anger* [He is not quick to punish the sinner. He is not eagerly waiting to castigate us when we make the smallest mistake],

7. *and abounding in lovingkindness* ["rav chesed" - great in love and mercy, granting gifts and blessings beyond anything that man deserves],

8. *and truth* ["v'emet" - "emet" means firm, stable, reliable, faithful, loyal, and real. The God of Israel is the One who will never fail, disappoint or let us down],

9. *who keeps lovingkindness to thousands* [Since the natural tendency of children is to follow their parents, God remembers the good deeds of the righteous, and their lives have an impact on their descendants for a thousand generations. He reserves blessing and rewards to the remotest descendants, to the absolute maximum that is possible],

10. *who forgives iniquity* ["noseh avon" - "avon" means crooked, bent, twisted, depraved, perverse. This is sin that has affected man's nature. God is willing to forgive this aspect of sin, which has corrupted our very nature],

11. *transgression* ["pesha" - this is a very strong term for sin. This is sin as open rebellion, deliberate trespass, active rebellion and enmity against God. God is willing to forgive even these high-handed kinds of sins],

12. *and sin* ["chata-ah" - this is sin that misses the mark. This is aiming for the bulls-eye but missing the target. This is a shortcoming due to not paying enough attention, carelessness, heedlessness and error. God is willing and able to forgive these kinds of sins].

These first twelve attributes are very encouraging, but they are tempered by the thirteenth attribute:

13. *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.* Just as God remembers the good deeds of those who believe in Him for a thousand generations, He also remembers the wicked deeds of the God-ignoring. Their lives have an impact on their descendants too, but God will mercifully limit their evil to only the third or fourth generations. The descendants of the unrighteous are not doomed forever and ever. They can break out of the cycle of sin and death. God is infinitely merciful, but this last aspect tells us that His mercy can't destroy His justice. He will never obliterate the eternal and unbridgeable separation between good and evil, light and darkness. God can't leave repeated wickedness and obstinate persistence in evil unpunished. The unrepentant sinner must eventually suffer the consequences of his deeds. God is full of mercy, compassion and forgiveness, yet it is perfectly consistent for Him to punish those who reject Him. If you refuse God's mercy you remain in your sins and you will suffer punishment, but the person who acknowledges his guilt and accepts God's mercy embodied by Messiah's atonement is the one to whom God shows eternal mercy, and neverending forgiveness. He has always dealt with mankind in mercy, and He will always deal in justice when His mercy is despised.

GOD IS MERCIFUL TO ALL

We don't realize the extent to which sin has alienated every human being from a perfect, flawless and holy God, and how detestable the evil that pervades us has made us in His sight. Joseph Alleine wrote Alarm to Unconverted Sinners that emphasizes the awful effect that sin has produced on humanity. So corrupt and perverse is mankind apart from the Messiah that Alleine imagines that creation itself would turn on man if God didn't prevent it: "If inanimate creatures could but speak, your food would say, Lord, must I nourish such a wretch as this, and give forth my strength for him to dishonor You? The very air would say, Lord, must I give this man breath, so that he can speak against heaven and scorn Your people, and vent his pride and anger, and filthy language, and utter oaths and blasphemy against You? His poor animal would say, Lord, must I carry him upon his wicked plans? A wicked man! The earth groans under him, and hell groans for him, till death satisfies both." In spite of mankind's sinfulness, the Psalmist reminds us that *the Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works* (Psalm 145:8-9). Did you ever wonder why God did not destroy Adam and Eve after the Fall? Why the Lord forgave Israel after we worshiped the golden calf? Why He has endured all the sins of Israel for the past four thousand years? Why He has put up with the sins of the Church for two thousand years? There has been an endless succession of heresy, apostasy, greed, immorality, divisions, ceaseless struggles for power and preeminence in the visible body of Messiah. There have been professing Christians subjecting their fellow Christians to torture and death in the name of Christ. There have been nineteen centuries of anti-Semitism in the name of Jesus. Why has the Righteous One put up with the sins of this nation, which are growing worse day by day? Why does He put up with you and your sin, and me and my sin? The answer to all these questions is the same - because He is full of mercy to all. He does not enjoy it when people are punished or are eventually sent to hell. Here is the heart of God: *I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the Lord God. Therefore, repent and live* (Ezekiel 18:32).

GOD IS MERCIFUL TO THOSE WHO TRUST HIM

The Lord is merciful to everyone He has made, but He is especially compassionate to those that fear Him. As Miriam declared in her prayer, *His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him* (Luke 1:50). He is especially merciful to those who seek His salvation: *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon* (Isaiah 55:7). He specially favors those who call upon Him. *Lord you are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant to all who call upon You* (Ps. 86:5). To those who fear Him, who turn to Him, who call upon Him, He is the "Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3), and we are encouraged to draw near to His throne of grace where we are assured, we will now "receive mercy" and may find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

GOD'S MERCY WILL BE Poured OUT ON THE JEWISH PEOPLE

God's mercy came to the Gentiles through the Jewish people. In the Last Days the process will be reversed, and it is God's plan that the Jewish people will receive mercy through the Gentiles (see Romans 11:30-31). These touching words are directed to the storm tossed, persecuted, wandering sons of Israel. *For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you says the Lord your Redeemer* (Isaiah 54:7-8). Although we are in a state of great unbelief and don't deserve God's help, because of His great mercy He will deliver us. In His mercy He has not forsaken us or replaced us with the Church.

SHORT-CIRCUITING GOD'S MERCY

Although God's mercy is abundant and available to all, unbelief will prevent us from receiving that mercy. Many people either don't know or believe that God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4), He has great mercy (1 Pet. 1:3), and that He is full of compassion and is merciful (James 5:11). They don't realize that God's mercy is fresh and new every day. *The Lord's lovingkindnesses never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness* (Lam. 3:22-23). If we really believed that, we could start off every day from here to eternity fresh, clean new, and we would never be afraid that God's mercy would stop one day. How freeing, how liberating to know that even if we fell into sin yesterday, we can wake up and receive fresh mercy today!

We may lack the joy that we should have because we truly do not believe in the mercy of God as we should. It is not enough to believe that He showed mercy to Noah, or to Abraham, or to David, or that He will show mercy in some future day. We must believe that God's mercy is boundless and free and is available to us now in our present situation. Don't we believe that El Rachum - the God of Mercy (Deuteronomy 4:31) will forgive us seventy times seven times if we come to Him and ask for His forgiveness?

We can also hinder God's mercy by not being merciful to others. If God has forgiven us of our eternal debt that we could never ever repay, we must forgive our fellow human being who may be indebted to us. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. If you forgive men for*

their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:14-15). Withholding mercy to others will hinder how much of the mercy and forgiveness that God extends to us.

If we have experienced mercy from God, we must be merciful to others, even to those who do not deserve it. When we are confronted with ungrateful and evil people, our natural reaction is to say, "how wrong they are!" We take satisfaction from the knowledge that they are going to "get theirs" in the end. But Yeshua says our response should be very different. *Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful* (Luke 6:35-36). Our attitude toward people must be the same as our Father's - to have a compassionate spirit that is ready and willing to forgive, to hope and pray for their repentance and salvation. We need to hold out an open hand of friendship and forgiveness toward those who have sinned against us. We must not hope that they will be lost, judged, or condemned.

WE SEE GOD'S MERCY MOST CLEARLY IN MESSIAH

The supreme manifestation of the mercy of God was displayed in the sacrifice of God's Son. God looked down from heaven on His poor, pitiful, ruined children and felt great mercy, compassion and pity toward us. Knowing that all humanity was heading to hell, and there was absolutely nothing that any human being could do to prevent it, God did what only He could do; He came down from heaven to rescue us out of our terrible situation, though we did not deserve it. God sent Messiah Yeshua to spare us from the hell to which all of us were headed, and which all of us deserved. *God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged [that's mercy]; he who does not believe has been judged already [that's what we deserve]* (John 3:17-18). It was Messiah's death on the cross that opened the torrents of God's mercy for Jew and Gentile.

When after all our work and struggles here on earth are over, and we finally reach the New Jerusalem, what right will we have to be there? Didn't we, because of our sin, take part in that unholy rebellion that tried to dethrone the King of Glory? Didn't we, in the past, walk in compliance with the course of this world, affirming the prince of the power of the air, that evil spirit that continues to work in the sons of disobedience? Didn't we all live to satisfy the appetites of our flesh? Weren't we by nature, children of wrath, just like the rest of humanity? But we one-time enemies of God who were alienated from Him will see God face to face, and His name will be on our foreheads. Though we earned banishment, we will enjoy communion. Though we deserve the pains of hell, we will enjoy the bliss of heaven. All of this will happen because of the tender mercies of our God given to us in the Messiah.

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