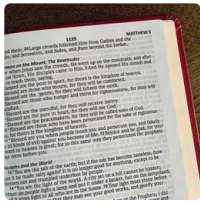


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The Merciful (Part 2)



The Beatitudes - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg discusses the biblical principle of showing mercy to others in order to obtain mercy oneself. He argues that forgiveness should be given without strings attached and that a new heart is required to truly exhibit mercy. Gregg emphasizes the reciprocal principle of God's wrath upon the wicked and the importance of seeking to restore relationships. He also cautions against picking and choosing verses to justify one's actions and encourages a constant disposition of sacrificial love.

Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 5 once more. This is the text for this entire series of studies in The Beatitudes. Matthew chapter 5 contains the most complete list of The Beatitudes.

There are shorter, well there's a shorter list of Beatitudes in Luke 6 and there are other scattered Beatitudes in the ministry of Jesus and elsewhere in the scriptures. But this particular cluster of statements, Jesus chose apparently to introduce the greatest sermon ever preached in the estimation of many, and that is what we usually call the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus was seated on a mountain when he addressed his disciples with these words. This set of Beatitudes in some respects is a summary of the entire sermon.

I have often been strongly tempted to try to find some way to artificially make the successive paragraphs of the sermon unpack the successive Beatitudes, but it doesn't work quite that neatly. It isn't quite so tidy as that. But it is the case nonetheless that the things that Jesus says in these statements are generally clarified, amplified, illustrated, and driven home in the remainder of the sermon.

As we shall see, especially in tonight's Beatitude, very much of what we find in this fifth Beatitude is expanded upon and amplified and illustrated in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. It is Matthew 5, 7 that we're looking at tonight. It says, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Now, all of the Beatitudes have their origins in the thought of the Old Testament. That is

to say, Jesus didn't originate any novel ideas in these Beatitudes. Some of them are little more than just a restatement of a verse of the Old Testament scripture.

Others summarize what was taught in the Old Testament. Jesus was a great teacher, but innovative teaching was not his specialty. He didn't innovate anything.

Everything he taught had been taught before. You can find every teaching of Christ in the Old Testament, whether in the Psalms or in the Proverbs, in the Law or in the Prophets. And this particular statement, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, is very much a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament, as we shall see, and the New.

Mercy is a very important thought, and we have in other series on these Friday nights talked about mercy. For example, when we were talking about cultivating Christian character, we have a study in that series where mercy was somewhat discussed. I don't intend to duplicate tonight what was said there.

I want to talk about the Beatitude itself and what Jesus is trying to get across here. Now, when Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. This sentence is structured like all the Beatitudes.

A certain class of people are said to be or they are pronounced to be blessed. And it is said of why they are blessed. Now, in every case, the group that is spoken of, whether it's the poor in spirit or the those who mourn or those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, whatever group it is, there is some privilege that is said to belong to them.

And it can be said that that privilege not only accrues to them, but it accrues only to them. It does not accrue to others. It is not as if the kingdom of God is going to belong to the poor in spirit and to those who are not poor in spirit, too.

It is not the case that those who do not mourn shall be comforted along with those who do more. And it certainly is not the case that the unmerciful will obtain mercy along with the merciful. When Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, he could have as easily said and many other statements of scripture as much as say it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they alone shall obtain mercy. The unmerciful will not. James said, Judgment shall be without mercy for him who is showed no mercy.

And of course, James was alluding to this the attitude, as James alludes frequently to the Sermon on the Mount in his epistle. But judgment shall be without mercy to those who have shown mercy. Now, we need to take those things into consideration when we form our theology of salvation, because it's so much a temptation to package a salvation message neatly and attractively that can be memorized by a child in a few minutes time.

And this for the sake of mass soul winning and so forth. And I grew up in not only an evangelical Christian home, but in an evangelistically oriented home, very much wanting to see people saved and very actively trying to get them saved in my even in grammar school, but especially in high school and junior high. I tried to get people saved, but I must confess that the gospel message, as I was taught, it did not contain this element.

And as I presented it, it did not either. The gospel, as I understood it, was something like, you know, you need to accept Jesus into your heart so you can go to heaven and be saved. But mercy from God is conditional.

And the Bible didn't say it's conditional upon accepting Jesus into your heart. As a matter of fact, accepting Jesus in your heart is not even mentioned in Scripture. The concept is not well, if the concept is there, it's disguised in other words, because there is no there is actually no place in the Bible that speaks of inviting Jesus into your heart, unless, of course, it's the famous verse in Revelation 320, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

But it's very questionable whether he's knocking at a heart's door there. It's the church door in a likelihood that he's knocking at there. But in any case, we have often soft peddled the gospel and not made it clear to people that in order to have a relationship with God that saves, you must have a transformation of your attitudes and a transformation of behaviors.

Now, you don't get saved by changing your behavior. You get saved by repenting of your sins and believing on Jesus Christ who forgives your sins. But when it comes to obtaining mercy, it's not just a one shot deal.

You don't just obtain mercy one time and then it's all over. You know, you've got mercy for the rest of your life. It's very clear in Scripture that you can obtain mercy on one occasion, but because of unmercifulness at a later time.

Lose it. This is taught by Jesus as well as the other voices in Scripture, but none is so authoritative as that of Jesus. If you look at Matthew 18, this is not even in your notes.

I sometimes ignore the notes altogether, but I will not ignore them through the entire message. I do want to go through them in Matthew 18, beginning at verse 21. It says Peter came to Jesus and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me? And I forgive him up to seven times.

And Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to 70 times seven. Therefore, Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

This amount of money is an incredibly large amount of money. There are different authorities that give different values to a talent. For instance, if it's a talent of silver,

obviously a talent is a measurement of weight.

So obviously a talent of silver would be a very different amount than a talent of gold. But this ten thousand talents is said by most commentators to be equivalent to millions of dollars. This is a huge, huge debt, which the ordinary person could never pay.

And it says, but as he was not able to pay. His master commanded that he be sold and his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made. The servant, therefore, fell down before him saying, Master, have patience with me and I'll pay you all.

Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. There's no question this man received mercy. He didn't even ask for mercy.

He said, just give me time and I'll pay the debt. The king says, forget it. I'll just forget the whole thing.

Can you imagine the weight that would be off of that servant's shoulders walking in before his king and the king says, OK, you owe me a few million bucks, as I recall. And if you can't pay, I'm going to sell your wife and your children, you into slavery. It's going to change your life big time.

And he says, you know, you know, suddenly his whole life flashes before his eyes and it's all over now. And he says, please give me some time. And the king says, how about if I just forgive the whole debt? It's gone.

You don't owe me anything. Can you imagine the relief that would be felt by that guy receiving that mercy? Obviously, I mean, Jesus intends that this is a picture of us receiving mercy from God. We have been forgiven by God.

But then, of course, it goes on and says, then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt. Verse twenty eight. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred denarii, which is only a small amount of money.

I think someone said around fifty bucks. I'm not sure of the exact amount. It doesn't matter for the sake of the illustration.

And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, have patience with me and I'll pay you all. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servant saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came

and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him.

Then Jesus says this, so my heavenly father also will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother, his trespasses. Now, here's a man who obtained mercy. Was this person a Christian in the terms in terms of the illustration of her? Was he was he say was he forgiven? Well, what did the master say in verse thirty or verse thirty one? Actually, it's further down than I thought in verse thirty two, then his master, after he had called him, said, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt.

Was he forgiven? Yes, he was. He was a forgiven person. His debt had been forgiven.

He owed nothing. He was a free man. He was saved.

He was justified. He obtained mercy, but he didn't just put that mercy in his back pocket and carry it the rest of his life and go to heaven with it. As a matter of fact, he didn't seem to get there.

He was forgiven, but he did not show mercy when he had opportunity to do so. He refused to show mercy, and it says in James, based on this beatitude we're saying tonight, judgment will be without mercy for those who have shown no mercy. And this man showed no mercy.

And so what the king do? He called him back in and said, I forgave you, but I'm not forgiving you again. I'm going to I have not forgotten your debt. I'm going to put it back on you.

You're back in debt to me and you're going to debtor's prison until you can pay it off. Now, that story is is pretty scary in itself, but, you know, some some parables. You can't take every detail of them, you know, as an illustration of a spiritual truth.

There are some parables that it's a long story with one one thing in it that illustrates one truth and the rest is all stage scenery in the parable. However, if we wonder what is the message, what is the spiritual truth that Jesus wants us to get from this parable, he doesn't leave it in enshrouded in mystery at all. He tells us as soon as he finishes the story said this is what my father will do to you.

What? This man gave the governor's to the torturers and said, you are not forgiven anymore. You obtain mercy, but you didn't show mercy, so you have lost mercy. Now, if that somehow tweaks our understanding of theology about salvation, let Jesus be the one to tweak it.

I mean, let there be none less than Jesus as an authority to shape our understanding. Now, there is plenty in Jesus teaching and in the rest of scripture to convey this. Now, let's talk, first of all, about our need for mercy, because Jesus said the merciful shall obtain mercy.

Do I really care to obtain mercy? Is that really is that a good incentive to me to be merciful? Do I need to be do I need to obtain mercy for anything? What do I need mercy for? Well, we we have a debt just like this man had a huge debt he could not pay to his king in the Sermon on the Mount. Also, later on in verse in chapter six and verse twelve, Jesus instructs us to pray apparently on a regular basis because the model prairies is when you pray, pray in this manner. How often does he wants to pray just once, twice in our lifetime? No.

In one place, he said men are always to pray and never to think. So whenever you pray, pray like this. And among the things you should be praying on an ongoing basis is forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us.

We are entitled by Christ decree to pray for forgiveness on a daily basis. Apparently we need it on a daily basis. However, we are only commissioned, only authorized to ask for forgiveness conditional on what as we forgive.

Only the merciful can obtain mercy. Now, you might say, well, it's not Steve like you're saying what you're talking about being saved by works. No, you're being you're saved by mercy.

Showing mercy to others is not works, it's grace. If you've obtained grace, then you should possess grace. You should be graceful.

You should be gracious. A person who has no grace hasn't received any, has he? Many people claim that they're saved by grace, but they don't have any grace. So how can they be saved by it? Now, some might think, well, Steve, you're manipulating this.

When we say we're saved by grace, we were saved by God's grace toward us. OK, I agree. That's exactly right.

But on what authority do we cut out the rest of what the Bible teaches that once we have received grace, we are to be people of grace. We're to be people animated by grace so that as we have obtained mercy, we extend mercy as naturally. As God did toward us, they say, well, that sounds like a hard thing to do.

The disciples said that to, you know, Jesus said over in Luke 17, if your brother sins against you seven times in one day and seven times he comes, says, I repent, forgive him. And, you know, the disciples said, Lord, increase our faith. They cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead before this, they'd seen everything.

But when Jesus said, forgive your brother seven times a day, they said, Lord, you better increase our faith for that. He didn't say they didn't increase our works because it's not a matter of works to forgive. It's a matter of faith.

Do you believe that God has forgiven you? How could you not forgive someone else? How could you not extend mercy? We are indebted to God. And Jesus said we are authorized by him to pray, forgive us our debts and to apparently expect that forgiveness. But what if somebody is indebted to me? And in this case, I'm not thinking in terms of financial debt, although we could not exclude that entirely from consideration in terms of showing mercy.

But but, of course, our debt to God is not a financial one. We say forgive us our debts. It doesn't mean that we owe God money like we haven't paid our tithes for a few weeks or something, you know, so forgive us our tithe debt.

Now, he's talking about our indebtedness to God in that we owe it to God. To give him what he's got, what he what he deserves from us, what does he deserve? Well, he observes our full obedience. We are his people.

We're the sheep of his pasture. It is he that has made us, not we ourselves. He owns us.

He deserves to be obeyed all the time. Jesus said, why do you call me Lord? Lord, you don't do the things that I say. What we owe God is perfect obedience and nothing less.

And if we have not given him perfect obedience, if there's been any one moment of any day of your life where you did not love the Lord, you've got all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind, which is the great commandment. And where you did not love your neighbors, you love yourself and you have broken his commandments, you are indebted to him. How are you going to pay that debt back? You can't.

Like that man in this parable, he had a debt that was millions of dollars, he could never pay it in a lifetime. Neither could you, you can't pay the debt you owe to God. So what do we do? We say what Jesus said to say, forgive us our debts.

Forgive us of this infraction, this violation of your rights, God, you have rights to us that we have violated. We have violated your rights. By not obeying you all the time, forgive us this debt.

In just the same manner as we forgive people their debts to us now, their debts to us might be financial, but might not be. If a person borrows money from you, do you have to automatically forgive them that debt? Not really. Although if they asked you to, that would be something seriously to consider.

In fact, I would dare say that if anyone asked me to forgive them a debt that they owed

me, I would have, I would, I could not, I could not withhold that forgiveness of that debt. I've been forgiven too much by God to withhold that. Although, of course, forgiving your brother in most instances is not a financial transaction.

It's more often that you think they owed you more deference. They didn't, they didn't honor your privileges and rights. They didn't do what you thought they should do to please you.

And they wronged you. They committed some injustice against you, some cruelty, some, uh, some violation of your trust. And in that you feel that they are indebted to you because they did not pay you what they owe you, which is good behavior.

They, they owe it to you to treat you good. And therefore you're holding the IOU against them. But we are to forgive them.

If we are to be forgiven by God. Now, what does God owe us? We owe God something, but we can't pay it. What does God owe us? Well, he owes us our wages.

God's, God's not one of those, uh, you know, unjust employers, you know. Um, there are, the Bible always speaks harshly of employers who withhold wages. Well, God always will see to it that, that, uh, we will receive our wages.

And since we have violated his commandments, we have sinned. And the Bible says the wages of sin is death. So that's what God owes us.

Of course, everyone knows that Romans 6, 23, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. But what we owe God is perfect obedience. What he owes us is death because we haven't paid that debt.

We deserve to die. We deserve not only to die, but to go to hell. When the Bible says the soul that sins, it shall die.

Or the wages of sin is death. It is talking about a spiritual condition. It's not merely talking about physical death, because even righteous people who are forgiven still physically die.

Even after God forgives you your sins, you'll still physically die. That's not the death that is the wages of sin, because once you've been forgiven, you don't have to pay those wages. That is, or be paid them.

Uh, God owes it to us to send us to hell, unless of course he can forgive us. And that's, of course, what he managed to do in sending Jesus and putting him forth as a propitiation for our sins to cover as a sacrifice of atonement so that he could be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. Now, do we need mercy? Absolutely.

We have an unpayable debt and all that we are owed, unless we obtain mercy, is

damnation. We deserve to go to hell. Every one of us.

If anyone here doesn't believe that they deserve to go to hell, you're in serious trouble. Because in order to come to Christ, you have to really believe that you need him. You have to be a beggar in spirit, poor in spirit.

You have to know that you're in desperate condition. A.W. Tozer said. Anybody who really and truly believes that he deserves to go to hell probably won't end up there.

But he says it's a guarantee that anyone who believes he deserves to go to heaven won't end up there. If you think you deserve to go to hell and really believe that you could still end up there, but you probably won't, because you will cry out to God for mercy. If you if that weighs upon your conscience as much as it would to a rational person, you'd probably cry out to God for mercy.

But anyone who thinks they deserve better than hell, they're not going to get any better than hell. There is no mercy for those who are not poor in spirit either. But once we have obtained forgiveness, once God has given us mercy, we need continuous mercy unless we can live the rest of our lives without ever sinning again.

And I haven't met anyone who's done that. I've met some people who claim that they've gone a long time without sinning and maybe they've gone longer than I have without sinning. That's a good possibility.

But I haven't met anyone who's convinced me that they haven't sinned for seven years, although I've heard people say they haven't sinned for seven years. They're usually redefining sin in order to be able to make that statement. And I I don't I wouldn't want to redefine sin in order to to try to decide whether I'm sinning or not.

I'd rather rather go by God's definitions, because on the Day of Judgment, that's the one that's going to that's going to count. Well, the principle that if I do not show mercy, that I will not continue to benefit from mercy from God is taught in many places in scripture. Let me just give you a few scriptures initially about this principle of reciprocity, as we could call it.

And then I want to talk about what mercy is and how it is shown to others, how we show mercy, how we are to be merciful. In Luke, chapter six, we have something like a parallel to the Sermon on the Mount. And in verse thirty one, Jesus said, and just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

We recognize that as the parallel of Matthew seven twelve, sometimes called the golden rule. But to expand on that in terms of human relations, if you look at verse thirty seven. Jesus said this Luke six thirty seven, judge not and you shall not be judged, condemn not and you shall not be condemned, forgive and you will be forgiven.

Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, press down, shaken together, run over women, put into your bosom for with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. This is a principle that Jesus states the way you measure it out to others, what you dish out to them and in whatever.

Implement, you do so, whatever size spoon you use to dish out your treatment of others, that same size spoon will be used to dish it back out on you by God. And therefore, he says, if you don't judge others. Unrighteously, then you won't be judged unrighteously, if you don't condemn others, you won't be condemned, if you forgive, you'll be forgiven.

Now, you might say, well, see, that's that's a really strange doctrine of salvation, it seems to me, because where where does the whole idea of, you know, you have to believe in Jesus come in? Well, it underlies the whole thing. You cannot live a life of graciousness toward others unless you have obtained grace and that grace comes through faith in Jesus. Only after you've really become a Christian, do you have the spirit of grace dwelling in you who can truly make you forgive as you hope to be forgiven.

If you are not regenerated, you only have a wicked, self-centered heart and any appearance of generosity and mercy on your part is manipulative, is self-serving. There are many people who are not regenerated, who seem very generous and very kind and very merciful to other people. But the Bible indicates that unless they've got a new heart, they're still operating on their old heart, which can only do things that are self-centered.

And you can count on it. They are showing kindness to others because they're manipulating the situation. Maybe they've learned to do this as a habit.

Maybe they seem like they're always generous and nice, but that's the way they manipulate people so that they get what they want. To have the kind of forgiveness that has no strings attached, that just forgives and shows mercy and is gracious in the same way we hope God is toward us, requires that we have a new heart. We have to be regenerated through faith.

We have faith in Christ. He gives us a new heart, but a new heart is new. And it operates differently than the old one.

The old one is totally self-centered. And if someone violated our rights, we couldn't help but be angry or irritated, even if we learned to conceal it because it was not socially acceptable to manifest our hostility. But only by receiving the love of Jesus through regeneration can we possibly be merciful in the sense that we must be merciful to others.

If we want God to be merciful to us, it's a reciprocal thing. I've several times quoted already tonight, James 2, 13. It's in your notes there.

James said, judgment shall be without mercy for those who have shown no mercy, for him that has shown no mercy. So, I mean, that's pretty clear. And he's obviously reframing the statement in this beatitude that we're studying tonight.

In Revelation, we have some examples of this reciprocal principle in God sending his wrath upon the wicked in these visions. John has recorded for us in Revelation 16 in verses 5 through 7. After the rivers and springs of water are turned to blood, he says, I heard the angel of the water say, you are righteous, O Lord, the one who is and who was and who is to be, because you have judged these things, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets and you have given them blood to drink, for it is their just due. And I heard another from the altar saying, even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments.

God gives people, really, what is just, unless you, of course, receive mercy. But he has already made it clear, you receive mercy only if you are also a merciful person. In Revelation 18, verses 6 through 8, this is with reference to the judgment of Babylon.

It says an angel or some voice in heaven cried out these words, render to her just as she rendered to you and repay her double according to her works. In the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her in the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously in the same measure, give her torment and sorrow. For she says in her heart, I sit as a queen, I am no widow and I will not see any sorrow.

Therefore, her plagues will come in one day, death and mourning and famine, she will be utterly burned with fire, etc., etc. Now, the same measure that she used to treat others will be measured back to her, only double in this case. But Jesus said the measure that you use will be used to measure back to you.

God reciprocates in kind. In Matthew 25, we have that well-known parable, the sheep and the goats. And the sheep are those people who are saved and they go into eternal life after this judgment that is described here in this parable.

The goats are not saved and they go into everlasting fire at the end of this parable. But the distinction between the sheep and the goats is described in an interesting manner. Jesus, when he taught, was apparently not aware of our evangelical norms of presenting the gospel, because he never did it quite the way that is popular to do today.

He did not say, for example, then shall the judge say to the sheep on his right hand, enter into the joy of your Lord because you believed in Jesus Christ and said the sinner's prayer. And to the goats who say, you neglected to believe in Jesus Christ and neglected to say the sinner's prayer, that's not really true. In all likelihood, you meant what you said.

That's why you said it. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. It's better

to say, I did mean it and it was wrong.

And I repent, because repent means I changed my mind. If a person's always hurting you, you say, I didn't mean it, didn't mean it, didn't mean it. You say, OK, OK, I'll keep my distance from you since you do a whole bunch of things you don't mean to do.

Hurtful things. It's hard to trust you. But if he says that was a mean, rotten thing for me to do and I've really changed my mind, I realized that was a terrible thing.

I don't want to do that anymore. I disagree with that. Of course, I don't approve of that.

And I've determined to do a different thing from now on. Then you have the freedom to trust them again. Now, of course, what if you go to him, as Jesus said, and rebuke him, he doesn't repent.

Jesus only talks here about if he repents, forgive him. What do you do if he doesn't? That is taken up in another place. In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus answers that question.

In Matthew 18, 15 through 17, Jesus said, Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. That's what we just read. And if he hears you or if he repents, you have gained your brother.

OK, all of that, verse 15 is all summarized in those verses in Luke 17 we just looked at. But what if he doesn't repent? Well, here, Jesus takes up that continuously. If he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more that notice this by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.

That may fix it once he hears that you're not alone in your opinion and others share your opinion about this. He may come to a sense and say, well, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you're right.

But if he still doesn't hear it, it says if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. And if he still refuses even to hear the church. Then let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

No, not not someone that you despise, but someone you don't trust. You still love him, but you don't trust him. Why? Because he's been given every opportunity to show some change of heart.

He's not interested in a change of heart. He did the wrong thing. He's been confronted by the wrong thing.

He doesn't care that he did the wrong thing. Therefore, you have no reason to believe he won't do the wrong thing again and again and again. He doesn't even care that he did it.

Therefore, you just have to treat him the same way you treat someone who had no

conscience toward God at all. In other words, the relationship is broken. Now, we are supposed to do our best to restore relationships.

And as much as lies in us, Paul said in Romans 12, he said, if it is possible, as much as lies in you, be at peace with all men. And that means that insofar as you are concerned, you've done everything that conceivably could contribute to the peace of the relationship. That other person, though, has to do some things, too, in order for there to really be peace in the relationship.

They may not do them. In that case, you're under no obligation to be at peace with someone who won't be at peace. That's why Paul said, if it's possible, as much as lies in you, be at peace.

You need to watch your own heart and your own spirit. There will be people who will never be peaceable toward you. There will be people who will not forgive you of things you've done to them, although you've begged them to.

There will be people who've done things against you and they don't repent, although you've begged them to do that. You will have done everything you know to do to promote peace in that relationship, but they simply are not men of peace. In Psalm 120, the psalmist complains, he says, I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.

And that's going to be the way it is in some cases. But you need to not give up on the relationship quickly with a person. Now, if it's a marriage, you need not give up on it at all.

But if it's just a neighbor or someone in the church or whatever, you shouldn't give up quickly just because they looked at your cross side and you got offended. That doesn't give you the right to never speak to them again or sit on the opposite side of the church or change churches. You are under obligation before God to get it right.

Jesus told you what to do. If they sin against you, you go to them. If they repent, forgive them.

That's the end of it. If they don't repent, take it up with in a relatively private situation with only two or three other people. If they won't hear them, then it has to go public.

And if they don't care what the public thinks or they don't care what the church thinks, you just got to write it off, write off the relationship. Say, sorry, I did the merciful thing. I did everything I could to restore this thing.

That's mercy. Forgiveness has to be responsible. You can forgive in the sense of loving that person.

That's the heart part. And you should love unconditionally and unilaterally, whether they

do anything to warrant it or not. But you cannot pardon and restore the relationship unilaterally.

They have to see what they did wrong and get it right. This is exactly the way God shows mercy to us. Exactly.

God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son. OK, are they all saved? No. Did he forgive them all? No.

Well, in one sense, he loved them enough that he was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. That's that's sort of forgiving them in his heart. But I mean, in his heart, he held no animosity.

He did not impute their trespasses to them. In Christ, he was reconciling the world to himself. But that doesn't mean there's a pardon granted to everyone.

That doesn't mean that there's a restoration of relationship. Why? Because the offending party has to repent before that can happen. And even God can't restore a relationship with someone who won't repent with him.

Nor can we, with people who won't repent for what they did to us. I mean, we can forgive. We say, I can live the rest.

I have some people like that. Not very many. But there's a few people who, you know, I've tried to reconcile with them.

They don't want to reconcile. And I just have to go through my life and say, well. Maybe they'll never like me.

That doesn't have to keep me from loving them. The Bible indicates that you can be generous to your enemy, even though he may never be won over by it. Even in the law of Moses, it said that if if the ox, if you see the ox of him who hates you out wandering around, take it back to him.

If you see that the donkey of him who's your enemy fallen under its burden, help it up. The man doesn't love you, but you're merciful. That's mercy.

You release, you sacrifice your right to be offended. In order to be merciful. There is a divine reciprocity in this kind of mercy.

We've seen it already in Matthew six. At least I quoted earlier. Jesus said, teach, pray this way.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors just as much as we do. And not more or not less. And Jesus, if you don't forgive men of their trespasses, your Heavenly Father won't forgive you.

In Mark 11, 26, I quoted that again earlier. God said it. Jesus said, if you don't forgive them in their trespasses, your father in heaven will not forgive you yours.

Why should he? You don't apparently think forgiveness is a good thing. Remember the parable Jesus taught in Matthew 18. The man forgave a great debt, the king forgave a great debt to one who couldn't pay it back.

The guy who was forgiven went out and found someone to owe him a little tiny bit and wouldn't forgive him. The king comes back to him, says, listen, I forgave you, but I changed my mind. Go to jail.

Do not pass go and don't come out until you have paid every last penny. It says it specifically says Jesus says that the king took this unforgiving servant who had been forgiven. He was a Christian.

He had been forgiven by God in the parable, but he didn't forgive others. So God says, I mean, this is the king in the parable. The king says, OK, I'm delivering you over to the torturers until you repay every last penny.

And then, you know what Jesus said in summarizing that he said, so shall my heavenly father do to you if you do not everyone from his heart forgive his brother. I don't know how many times you've got to say that before Christians hear it. I mean, I could find five places in the teachings of Christ where he said the same thing.

And yet, why isn't that part of the gospel presentation offered to sinners? When sinners come to Christ, they need to know that if they obtain mercy, they must extend mercy. Only the merciful shall obtain mercy and blessed are they because they will. Now, there's another mercy, another circumstance of mercy, and that's not where there's been offense, but where there is need, where there's poverty, where there's pain, where there's misery, where there's something you can do.

That is also in the Bible a very common manifestation of mercy. In Isaiah chapter 58, this is the chapter as some of you, I'm sure, will recognize by the number, it's the chapter about how the Israelites had been fasting as they had been abstaining from food and praying, but God had not answered their prayers and they were complaining about this. Why have we fasted and you have not answered? What's going on here, God? We've been paying the price.

We've been praying, fasting, we've been sacrificing our meals, and yet you act like we're not even there. What's going on? And God says, then, well, you're not really fasting in the way that I'm interested in. You're fasting only from a few meals.

I want you to fast from injustice. I want you to fast from oppression. I want you to fast from your mistreatment of your servants and so forth.

He says, for example, in verse six and seven, is this not the fast that I have chosen to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, not to miss a few meals, but to stop doing wickedness and stop putting heavy burdens? In fact, to undo the heavy burdens that are already on people. Now, before I read any further, remember, Jesus said in Matthew 23, the scribes and the Pharisees. They say, but they don't do.

It says, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, because you bind heavy burdens and put them on men's backs, but you will not lift so much as a finger to relieve them. Well, you may encounter people. You don't even have to be one who puts burdens on people.

If you meet people who have a burden, someone else put there. To undo the burden, that is that is the merciful thing that God is calling for. That's fasting from oppressive behavior to let the oppressed go free and that you break every yoke.

The yoke is an emblem of bondage slavery. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and that you bring your into your house, the poor who are cast out when you see the naked that you cover him when and not hide yourself from your own flesh? That means from your own fellow human being. Now, this is what God says he's looking for, not missing a few meals, not some ritual abstinence from food.

But God is looking for is abstinence from wickedness. And in particular, he's looking for merciful conduct in seeing hungry people. You feed them naked people, your clothing, homeless people.

You give them a home. You take the burdens off of people's backs. In fact, Paul said the same thing in Galatians six.

He said, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Yes, there is a law of Christ. And you're supposed to fulfill it.

How do you do it? You bear other people's burdens, you release them from their burdens somehow. And what does it mean? I mean, in practical terms, what's it mean to relieve somebody of their burdens? Well, if their burden is poverty, you help them. And this is what mercy is in many places in the Bible, especially in the Proverbs.

This comes up. But even the New Testament in Matthew. Chapter five and verse forty two, Jesus said, give to him who asks you and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

Now, I need to say about this in Luke's parallel, it actually says, give to every man that asks you. I am a firm believer that Christians are obliged to do what Jesus said, even when it's uncomfortable and unpopular to do. At the same time, I want to make something clear.

Jesus spoke in idioms recognized in his own day, including an idiom frequently used in

scripture called hyperbole, where a statement is made so absolutely as if it was unqualified, but without intending that they understand it as an unqualified remark. It's a hyperbole is an exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. It's as when Jesus said in one gospel, it has him saying no sign will be given to this generation.

But in another place that no sign will be given this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah, there's an exception in one place, he says, if a man divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery. And in other places, except for the cause of fornication, that is, there are times when he makes a statement that sounds absolute, universal, unqualified, unconditional, and yet in another place, conditions are stated. It's common in scripture for this to be the case.

That's why we have to take the whole counsel of God. That's why we don't just take a verse where Jesus said, ask and it'll be given to you. Everyone who asks receives.

Everyone who seeks finds. We I mean, we can't just take that as the whole counsel of God on the subject of prayer. There's more.

There are qualifiers elsewhere. We're not supposed to pick and choose a few verses here and there to say what we want and impress them. And and and this verse would be a wrong one to press in a vacuum.

This this verse is not a standalone teaching of everything the Bible has to say about giving here. Jesus says, give to him who asks you from him who would borrow. Do not turn away.

That is describing a disposition where you are moved with compassion toward the needy. It should not be taken to be unqualified. The rest of scripture qualifies it in other places.

Second Thessalonians 3:10, he that will not work, let him not eat. That's a qualifier. And there's many places in the scripture to talk about stewardship.

If I had to give that to everyone that asks of me, I'd be out of money if I listened to the Christian radio for more than two or three hours. There's a lot of people asking for money that aren't the best ways to steward the money that God's put in your hand. And there are certainly if you gave your children everything they asked for, you'd be a very poor parent.

There are times when you should not out of out of love. You should not give or out of responsible stewardship. You should not give when someone asks.

But what Jesus is saying is mercy is expressed when you when there's someone poor and you give. Now, you should do this more often than than to withhold it if you have the ability. Now, it is very possible that you may have funds that are not really yours.

You may owe them somewhere else. I have known people who've given to the poor when they didn't even possess the thing they were giving away. I knew a guy came to our school in Bandon years ago, and he was kind of I think drugs had done some damage to his head.

But he and some other brethren hitchhiked up to somewhere, Portland, to do some witnessing. And he borrowed somebody's Walkman. One of the other students, he borrowed a Walkman so he could listen to tapes as he was hitchhiking.

Well, once he got to Portland, he saw someone who he thought would be blessed to have a Walkman, so he gave the Walkman away. And when he came back, the guy said, where's my Walkman? Oh, I gave it to someone. Didn't offer to pay for it.

He didn't have it in his head. He just thought, well, he's supposed to just be generous, right? Yeah, but not with other people's stuff. That frankly, that is why most conservative Christians, I think legitimately are opposed to a whole lot of government giveaway programs, because if you give to the poor, that's generosity.

If you give from your money, if the government gives to the poor, the government doesn't own any money. They have to give your money. It's easy to give away other people's stuff.

And it's good to do good works with money, but there's no virtue in giving away what doesn't belong to you. And that is why many times Christians, I would have to count myself among them, don't believe in welfare programs and things like that of the government, because we believe that welfare should be taken care of through more biblical means than having a government steal money from citizens and give it to other citizens. Some of whom the citizens from whom the money was taken might not even believe in the cause that the government is giving it to, like paying for an unwed mother to have another abortion.

You know, I mean, they steal money from people and give it to someone else. That's not generosity. Of course, if anyone questions this, you're called ungenerous.

But the fact of the matter is what is generosity is when you have money that is yours and you and it's not obligated to something else. You don't owe it somewhere else. And someone has need and you give, you know, if there were no government programs, I'm not here to talk about politics at all, but because this is definitely related, because Christians are often confused.

Should I support government programs that help the poor? I mean, we were supposed to be concerned about the poor, but we need to understand in in the in the scriptures, there are avenues of support for the poor and God cares for them, but they have to be through the generosity of people who wish to give the poor are to be sustained by

mercy, not by simply the redistribution of stolen goods. And there are principles, there are ethics in the scripture that I believe are contrary to government programs of this kind. But but I believe that we should be have every compassion on those who are legitimately poor.

But I mean, here's an example. The scripture says, if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat. Therefore, if a man came to the church with his handout, the church could ascertain whether he's capable of working or not.

If he's not, the church could give him a handout. If he was capable, but unwilling to work, the church could say, sorry, the scripture says that the best thing we can do for you is not give you some money, but to to help find you a job. You need to work.

That happened once to a guy who came to our community and abandoned. Actually, he came up for Orange County, California, and and some friends of mine down there who knew him called and they said, hey, this guy's coming up. He says, you're going to come join your school.

And we need to warn you about this guy because he will not work. No, no one can get him to do any work of any kind. And he's going to arrive there today.

So I said, thanks for him. So he showed up and he said, hey, it's about lunchtime, isn't it? And I said, yeah, it's about lunchtime. Tell you what, go out and weed this garden out here for a couple hours and we'll bring you some food.

And so I went to get the food and I came back and he's just wandering around the dorms doing nothing. And I said, oh, did you get the gardening that we did? We did already. He said, it's just not right.

He was shaking his head and he's a hippie. And he said, it's just not right. He said, Jesus wouldn't do that.

Wouldn't do what? He wouldn't wouldn't make you work for food. Well, actually, Jesus would, if you could. Jesus was always compassionate on people who couldn't.

There are legitimately disabled people who need to be supported strictly by the generosity of people who have money, but people who can work and won't. I mean, that's not the more generous thing to do is to get them out of that sinful pattern of living as parasites, you know. And so mercy needs to be not confused with bleeding heart liberalism, if we might use that term.

I shouldn't have used that term because I don't want to get political. But the fact of the matter is there are ethical issues involved in politics and economics. Christianity is not just about how to go to heaven and how to behave at church.

It's about how to manage money. It's about how to manage time. It's about how to relate with other people and help help them redeem their time and their finances and their families and their conduct.

It's an all it's a whole life proposition. And so you can't really avoid ethics when you're discussing things like economics and politics and so forth. Those things come up.

Now, the fact is. We are to give to the poor, but we have every right to this to distinguish between one poor man and another and say, OK, this man could be working, but he won't. This man clearly can't.

And he has need. He is the one I'll support. I won't support him.

That is. So when Jesus said, give to everyone who asks you that that should be understood as a hyperbole that has modifications and qualifications elsewhere throughout the scriptures. Now, in Proverbs chapter 14 and verse 21 says, he who despises his neighbor sins, but he who has mercy on the poor.

Happy is he now having mercy on the poor doesn't just mean you sit back and say, oh, what a shame he's poor. Having mercy here has to do with doing something about it. Happy is he who does in the same chapter, verse 31, it says he who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he who honors him, that is whoever honors the poor.

Or I see honors God, the maker has mercy on the needy. Again, having mercy on the needy is a reference to helping in some practical way. In Proverbs 19, 17, Psalms said he who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord and he will pay back what he has given.

There's that reciprocal stuff. God will pay back what is given to the poor. The merciful shall obtain mercy.

Now, this is what mercy is in the Bible. Mercy is the sacrificing of your right to something so that someone else can have a benefit they would not otherwise have and that they need. Why did Jesus die for us? Well, you could say because he loved us, actually, more accurately, because the father loved us and sent him.

And he loved us, too. But at one level, we could say the reason Jesus came is because we needed him to come. We needed it.

The reason Jesus extends and God extends mercy to us is because we need it, not because we deserve it, because if we did, we wouldn't be using the word mercy for it. Mercy is by definition something that we have no innate claim to. That's not deserved.

And therefore, it is when I need something that I don't deserve to have. That I can receive mercy, but I can only do so when I meet people who need something that they don't deserve to have. And I extend that and I sacrifice what I have for them.

So that the man who strikes me on one cheek, he doesn't have the right to hit me again. In fact, all he has the right to is me hitting him on one cheek. That'd be a settling of the score in a perfectly just manner.

But if I surrender my right to retaliate and extend him another cheek, I'm giving him a benefit he didn't have already. He doesn't need it necessarily. But the fact of the matter is.

I'm surrendering my rights to give him something that he doesn't have any right to in any. And that is what mercy involves, and it especially in the scripture is called for in cases where someone does not deserve for you to forgive them. But you do anyway, and where someone does not deserve for you to give them what they need, but you have it and you give it anyway.

This is a pattern, a lifestyle. When Jesus said, bless her, the merciful, he didn't mean people who on occasion throw a few coins at Christmas time in the Salvation Army can outside the post office. He's talking about people who are moved with compassion, people who are merciful as he is merciful.

And that means it's a constant disposition. If you see someone in need and cannot help them, it ought to be that you are grieved that you can't help them and that you would if you could. It is a that's one of the saddest things.

That we are acquainted with so much misery in the world, and yet there's so little that we can personally do about it. It should be a great grief to you. When you see something, you know, from World Vision or or from some other agency that talks about how poor people are in another country or something, rather than being upset that they're bringing this to your attention, you should be upset that you can't alleviate all of that.

You should have compassion, suffering with is what compassion means. And those who have such compassion and allow themselves to be moved by it resemble Jesus. Who also is moved with compassion toward us.

But only if. As we receive mercy, we extend mercy. As we receive grace, we extend grace.

As we allow God to make sacrifices for us, we are prepared to make sacrifices for others who need them as badly as we need ours. And so this is what that beatitude is about.