

15 FORGIVENESS AND MERCY

Luke 6:36-37 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful...Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Everyone stands as much in need of being forgiven as to forgive. The two are directly related and work only in tandem. Forgiveness and mercy are expressions of *"the love that covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8). How can things done against us be 'covered' unless they are 'not counted' against the wrongdoer? That is what forgiveness is – *"it keeps no record of wrongs"* (1 Corinthians 13:5). It means all charges are dropped. There is no more need to think or talk about it. The clichéd expression 'forgive and forget' becomes redundant. There is really no need to forget once there has been genuine forgiving. There is nothing to forget because nothing has been recorded or remembered. Forgiveness for ourselves and forgiving others keeps us rightly related to God and men continually. It is a travesty of truth to be seeking forgiveness for ourselves without forgiving others.

Jesus once told his hearers to go and learn what was meant by the scripture *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice"* (Matthew 9:13). We too need to understand what it means to have mercy. It is an unfashionable word to modern ears. Mercy stands opposite to judgment, just as love is to the law. To be merciful is to have a heart for, to be compassionate and sympathetic. It is to pass over and not count what is owed. Mercy is love in action, whilst judgment is law in action.

How thoughtless, heartless, inconsiderate, and insensitive we can be towards others in a hundred little ways. How unforgiving and critical we sometimes are towards the failings of others. The merciful man is magnanimous and big-hearted. Mercy makes a person less dogmatic and self-righteous. It removes the harshness of the Pharisee's hypocrisy and condemnation. It gives others hope and induces gratefulness. It is a sweet savour that befriends and wins others. Why then are we slow to embrace it? It is hard to be merciful when the stubborn self still stands tall, when we regard our rights too important to be forgone. But when we can count ourselves as nothing, we have nothing to lose and no territory to protect. It becomes easy to forgive and to forget.

As in forgiveness and forgiving, so we are likewise blessed in receiving and granting mercy. Even as God is merciful, so must His children be. *"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do"* (Colossians 3:12-13). Leave the judging, avenging, and punishing to God who can do a better job of it than we.