

## **Recapturing a biblical perspective on mercy**

We've been unpacking the Parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37. The parable points to a kingdom ethic taught by Jesus, i.e., a way of life that flows from lives which are transformed, from the inside-out, by the gospel of grace. In these articles I've noted that, the call to "love God and neighbor," at minimum means that we're to give ourselves in mercy and sacrifice toward the people that God brings into our lives seeking to point, ultimately, to their spiritual need in Jesus. I said that we can attempt to do this in, at least, one of two ways. One way is man-centered and works-centered and I called this, "The folly of religious activity." This person may serve his or her neighbor but their motives are not biblically informed. The second way—and just the opposite of the first—is Christ-centered and grace-centered and I called this, "The wisdom of redeeming grace." This is what we see in the life of the Samaritan. Implied in Jesus' parable is that the Samaritan helped the person in need without preconceived ideas of whether the mercy was deserved and without impure motives. The need was obvious and the Samaritan took the opportunity to help. We can see beyond the physical to the spiritual aspect of his service in that his actions modeled completely unselfish, sacrificial service and compassion (vss. 34-35).

If you're like me you'll acknowledge that there have been times when you've not taken the opportunity that you've been given to provide for the needs of another—especially their spiritual need. For any number of reasons, we can be just like the priest and the Levite in Jesus' parable—we can pass on by without showing mercy. We've all failed at this and likely will again. It's important that we do not miss the importance of what Jesus is teaching us. That the parable should point us to the ministry of Jesus could hardly be missed. He's the only one who's perfectly obeyed every command of God, including the command to "love your neighbor as yourself." (10:27) He's the only one who gave himself completely to rescue sinners from a life of hopelessness and helplessness. If you're a Christian it's only because of the amazing grace of God in Jesus. The 'wisdom of redeeming grace,' shows us that, because Jesus has shown us love, mercy and compassion, we should desire to show love, mercy and compassion to others. This is really the ultimate point of the parable. God has shown perfect grace to undeserving sinners in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10).

Shortly before his death, John Bunyan, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress," wrote these penetrating words: "There is nothing in heaven or on earth that can so awe the heart as the grace of God." Going back to the parable, listen to the words of Jesus from verses 36-37: "'Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go and do likewise.'" Recapturing a biblical perspective on mercy must begin with the gospel. It's only because of the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ that we will ever show mercy to anyone in a way that's pleasing to God—i.e. from a transformed heart. Our motivations can often be tainted by being self-centered and works-centered (i.e., a social gospel expressed by; 'I'm loved

by God by means of my external acts of obedience and service'). True mercy always points—away from ourselves and toward Jesus. We love because he first loved us. We can show mercy because mercy has been shown to us by our Savior. Jesus is the only one who ever gave of himself completely without any selfish motive. The parable of the Good Samaritan is ultimately a story of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

It's important that we recognize that this parable is not teaching that we're accepted by God connected to our external acts of obedience and service to others. We're accepted by God, only in Jesus and because of that we're blessed to be able to love and serve others in his name. Christians should 'love our neighbor,' not so that we will be accepted, but because we're already accepted in Jesus Christ!

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