

Merciful receives mercy--*Matthew 5:7*

It seems clear that the purpose of this 'beatitude' is to encourage mercy. We need to understand the difference between grace and mercy. To receive grace is to be awarded an undeserved benefit (deserved benefit is salary). On the other hand, to be contemplated with mercy is to not receive a deserved punishment, a negative consequence of what was done. Part of the importance of this 'beatitude' derives from the fact that the opposite is also true: whoever is not merciful will also not receive mercy. Consider.

In Psalm 18:25, which is a copy of 2 Samuel 22:26, the correct translation would be this: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful." In Hosea 6:6, which is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7, we read: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings". Consider also Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does Jehovah require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" But in Luke 6:36 the Lord Jesus sets the standard at the highest possible level: "So be compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate!" Attention, thinking that a goal or standard is beyond our reach does not invalidate that standard—any standard set by God is independent of human capability.

In James 2:12-13 we read: "Speak and act as being those who are about to be judged by a law of liberty 13 (the judgment will be without mercy to the one not showing mercy).¹ *That law exalts mercy² over judgment.*" This agrees with the description of Himself that Jehovah gave Moses on that rarest of occasions: "Jehovah, God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7). He keeps mercy to the 1000th generation, He punishes to the 4th; the proportion is 250:1. Hence the importance of mercy in our behavior.

The statement made in James 2:13 is terrible: "judgment will be without mercy to the one not showing mercy." I believe this applies mainly to those who have received mercy. The parable inserted in Matthew 18:21-35 is relevant. The king forgave a terribly large sum to the first slave, who in turn did not want to forgive a paltry sum to a fellow slave. In verse 33 the king addresses the first one like this: "Were you not obligated to have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?" The fact that God has forgiven me obliges me to forgive others.³

¹ Even though inserted as an aside, this is a very serious bit of information!

² Perhaps 20% of the Greek manuscripts have 'mercy' in the nominative case, making it the subject of the verb (as in most versions), but some 80%, including the best line of transmission, have 'mercy' in the accusative case, making it the direct object (which to me makes much better sense).

³ In Luke 9:52-56 we find a negative example. The "sons of thunder", James and John, wanted to destroy the village, but Jesus immediately rebuked them.