

The Statesman Stands in Awe of God's Mercy

There is one aspect of the character of Almighty God that should cause us to fall in love with Him. It is His mercy. Mercy means to receive forgiveness that one does not deserve. We all recognize that:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

The result of that sin is that we are separated from God, our Creator, which has eternal consequences if we do not recognize our need for mercy and avail ourselves of God's offer:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Without purposely attempting to disobey God, whenever we take our focus off of Him, and make our own decisions without Him, but using the best wisdom we can, we inadvertently partake in an act of disobedience. We know that our human wisdom is not the same as God's wisdom. As God has told us:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways... For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Hence, any action based on our own understanding alone is an act of rebellion against our Creator. Disobedience requires repentance and a turning away from the attitude and action. However, there can be no reasonable expectation that the offending party should be forgiven. We can only truly understand mercy when we understand the perfect holiness of God. It is entirely up to the offended party to offer forgiveness for the offense. That is the mercy of God. Consider these appeals to God for mercy:

LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger; do not discipline me in Your wrath (Psalm 6:1).

LORD, hear my prayer; listen to my plea for mercy (Psalm 86:6).

And then this acknowledgement of having received the requested mercy:

I love the LORD because He has heard my appeal for mercy (Psalm 116:1).

Understanding the need for mercy is not just for the religious or those who are powerless. It is also for those with responsibility for governing the population. The two requests for mercy above were expressed by a king, King David. In this case, it is a request for himself, personally, as an individual, as a private citizen. Do leaders need the capacity to receive mercy? There is the argument that the larger the authority and power, the more potential for damage resulting from errors in judgment. Hence, it is inevitable that the leader should understand the need for mercy.

We know that the mercy God extends is based upon the payment for our sins that He as Jesus Christ made with His sacrificial death and resurrection. One way for understanding God's extending mercy is through an illustration I once was told. A small town had a judge whose son was brought before him for an offense. Being a just judge, he had to declare the son guilty and impose sentence, knowing that his son was unable to pay the penalty. Then, the judge took off his robe, stood beside his son and paid the fine for him. That exemplifies mercy as God has provided for us.

God's promise is available to everyone, whether religious or non-religious, commoner or king:

"Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of Hosts (Malachi 3:7).

Therefore, the LORD is waiting to show you mercy, and is rising up to show you compassion (Isaiah 30:18).

Hence, as leaders, we understand the need for mercy from God for ourselves in our personal capacity. It is necessary that we understand the need for mercy, and then that we be eager to receive mercy. I, in my own journey, like the Apostle Paul, initially rejected God's mercy. Paul's journey expresses my own:

one who was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I received mercy because I acted out of ignorance in unbelief.... But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate His extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life (1 Timothy 1:13,16).

Mercy is offered to us, but we must recognize our need for it and choose to receive it. In 1830, George Wilson was convicted of murder and robbery by a U.S. court, and sentenced to be hanged. Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, granted him a presidential pardon – a legal expression of mercy. Amazingly, Wilson rejected the pardon, and insisted that it was not a pardon unless he accepted it. The American legal system was young and relatively undeveloped so that the question was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Chief Justice John Marshall wrote the following decision:

A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must hang.

George Wilson won his point. He rejected mercy and was hanged. My fear is that one of my friends would reject God's offer of pardon — a pardon that would free us from an eternity of hell. That rejection would be extremely tragic.

This is a truth that needs to be applied personally. Let us apply this truth as King David did when he prayed:

Be gracious to me, God, according to Your faithful love; according to Your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. Wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. Against You— You alone—I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight. So You are right when You pass sentence; You are blameless when You judge (Psalm 51:1-4).

King David went on to describe the mercy he received from God:

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and rich in faithful love.... He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our offenses. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His faithful love toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him (Psalm 103:8-13).

Let us do as this king and stand in awe of God's mercy and benefit from it.