



The preamble of UN Charter states that “the peoples of the United Nations are determined...to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.” Imagine what the world would be like if jurisprudence was perfectly executed at all levels of international and civil society. All lawbreakers would be caught and treated fairly. Justice. Everyone who wronged you would receive the appropriate consequence. Justice. And every time *you* wronged someone else.... Do you still want justice? We appreciate the administration of true justice until we personally need some mercy and compassion!

The Romans Empire at the time of Jesus espoused four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage. Mercy was not included. Unlike righteousness (and the inherent justice) advocated in the 4th beatitude, mercy seems incompatible with superpower status. It is possible to have such a passion for righteousness that there is no compassion for those who have not achieved it! Sanders says, “Righteousness can be cold and hard. Our fallen natures are geared more to criticism than to showing mercy, but it must not be so in the Kingdom. Mercy can be exercised only to the undeserving. If it were deserved, it would not be mercy but simple justice.” And that would be acceptable except in the instances when *we* need mercy!

In the 5th beatitude, Jesus makes this a cardinal virtue of the Christian life, saying, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” If we show mercy, we will receive it. James 2:13 states, “judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. *Mercy triumphs over judgment.*”

Forgiveness is inextricably linked to Mercy. God forgives us because of His mercy (Titus 3:5) and God is merciful because of His love (Ephesians 2:4-9). But forgiveness for the guilty is not the only expression of mercy. Acts of *compassion* for the suffering and needy are additional evidences of mercy.

So, what is mercy? It has been defined as “the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it. On a practical level, AT Pierson says “It is the forgiving spirit; it is the non-retaliating spirit; it is the spirit that gives up all attempt at self-vindication and would not return an injury for an injury, but rather good in the place of evil and love in the place of hatred.” Mercy means the ability to get right inside the other person’s skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings. If we made this deliberate effort, Barclay notes that “it would save us from being kind in the wrong way” and “it would make forgiveness and...tolerance ever so much easier.”

1. How would you describe mercy? What would be the opposite of mercy?

Compare and contrast Matthew 18:23-27 and 18:28-30.

What was the result? (18:31-34)

What are the implications? (18:21-22; 18:35)

2. What is the relationship between justice and mercy? (Matthew 23:23, Micah 6:8)

3. In what ways did Jesus show mercy to others? (Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 6:27-38)

4. In what ways can we show mercy to others? (Luke 6:36; Colossians 3:12-13; Ephesians 5:1-2; Jude 17-24)

5. Jesus was more merciful than anyone (Hebrews 2:17), yet he was *not shown mercy*. Instead he was crucified. What does this suggest about the apparent promise that the merciful “will be shown mercy?”

*“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)*