

SEEING GOD AS HE IS

LESSON 4: A God of MERCY

I. Mercy defined

A. Biblical words for mercy:

1. Chesed (Hb.) – translated ‘mercy’ or ‘loving-kindness’; used nearly 250 times in scripture; examples – Gen.24:49, 32:11, 47:29, Ex. 20:6, 34:6-7; Joshua 2:14; 2 Sam.2:6, 15:20; multiple times in Psalm 136 (the Hallel Psalm); Hos. 2:21

2. Racham (Hb.) – translated ‘love deeply’, ‘to yearn’, ‘be compassionate’, ‘have mercy’; used 46 times in scripture; examples – Deut. 13:7; Ex. 33:19; Psalm 102:13; Psalm 116:5; Isa. 49:13; Hos. 2:23; Zech. 10:6

3. Eleos (Gk) - translated ‘mercy’, ‘pity’, ‘compassion’; used 170 times in the OT and 43 times in the NT; examples of its use in NT scriptures - Matt. 9:13; Matt. 12:7; Matt. 23:23; Luke 1:58,78; Rom. 9:23; Eph. 2:4; Titus 3:5; James 2:13; I Peter 1:3

4. All three words convey a loving and compassionate attitude, but compassion put into *action*; mercy forms the foundation of forgiveness and the expression of grace – it is best shown by God’s pardon of human sin through the sacrifice of His son, Jesus (Eph. 2:4-5)

B. The dictionary defines mercy as forbearance or compassionate leniency to an offender or to one subject to one’s power; a better Godly definition is that of being a *mission performed to relieve suffering*; being merciful is just an innate quality, but also the action, combined with forgiveness, and driven by love and compassion, that relieves that suffering

1. Mercy is in the very nature of God; as we are created in

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His image, He has given us the ability to bestow mercy on others

2. Mercy is the power which fuels forgiveness, thus allowing the expression of grace to the undeserving

3. The ultimate expression of God's mercy is His desire to remove the curse of eternal spiritual death on mankind, brought about by sin (Titus 3:5)

II. God's mercy reveals many of His qualities:

A. We see all of God's characteristics embodied in the exercise of His mercy: *love, compassion, patience, forgiveness, faithfulness, wisdom, and power* (Lam. 3:22-23; James 3:17))

1. From our limited intellectual and emotional viewpoints, we usually think of showing mercy as simply *withholding punishment*, or choosing to *overlook or excuse wrongdoing*; this fits the technical definition of the word, but not God's definition

2. In reality, mercy can be manifested in many ways, by both God and man (does the following list seem familiar? See Gal. 5:22-23)

a. It can be shown as *kindness*

b. It can be shown as *forgiveness*

c. It can be shown as *grace*

d. It can be shown as *gentleness*

e. It can be shown as *compassion*

f. It can be shown as *patience*

g. It can be shown as *peace*

h. It can be shown as *faithfulness*

i. It can be used to *instruct* others

B. What are the characteristics of mercy?

1. *Godly mercy* – perfect and appropriate

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- a. Always based on love and compassion
- b. Generally unconditional when given; can be conditional, but always with clear expectations
- c. Continuous, full & complete – Lam. 3:22-23
- d. Without a hidden agenda
- e. Never used to gain an advantage on mankind
- f. Always given honestly to mankind for his benefit
- g. Always freely given – never under constraint
- h. Administered patiently
- i. Persistent in its offer to men

2. *Human mercy:*

- a. May be based on love and compassion, but often just from expediency
- b. Usually conditional, and often based on poor criteria, such as emotion
- c. Incomplete – sporadic, situational, partial, variable, and temporary
- d. Often given under constraint and not willingly
- e. Often misused – to gain an advantage over others, or given with evil motives; often hypocritical
- f. Sometimes even used falsely to try to impress God

C. How can we learn to be more merciful like God?

1. Ways to develop merciful tendencies:

- a. Be *patient* with the quirks and weaknesses of other people (Col. 3:12-13)
- b. Be alert so as to help anyone around you who is *hurting* – *look for opportunities* (Eph. 5:16)
- c. Give people a *second* (or third, or fourth) *chance*

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(Micah 7:18)

d. *Do good* and be kind to others who *hurt* you or *offend* you (Luke 6:35-36)

e. *Build bridges* of love to others, even the unpopular and lonely and neglected (Rom. 14:19)

f. *Pray* for others, no matter their faults, weakness, or sinful tendencies (James 5:16)

g. Learn to be *humble* (Luke 18:13)

h. Learn to *value relationships* over rules (Phil. 2:3-5)

2. We must always remember: ***we must be merciful to receive mercy!!*** (Matt. 5:7)

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The meaning of *compassion* is to recognize the suffering of others and then take action to help. It is more than feeling concern for the distressed or caring about others' misfortunes. There is action associated with mercy, and that action is *mercy*

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