

Mercy #1653;

Matt. 5:7; *Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.*

Mercy as defined in the NT; To show compassion or to extend help for the consequence of sin, as opposed to being hardened. Biblical compassion is defined as to feel deeply or affecting the emotional rather than intellectual part of us that is, an inner feeling. But as we see in the definition, this feeling is not enough to be considered among the compassionate. We must also act on these feelings, **Luke 10:30-37; *Jesus replied and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite also, when he comes to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the inn keeper and said; "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you." Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into robbers hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." And Jesus said to him, "go and do the same."*** This is a very familiar verse, even to those who do not claim to be Christian, because it speaks to many issues that we have allowed to form our own attitudes and values, one of them being a prejudice heart. What we must realize as we read this parable is that Jesus intended this parable to be just as applicable today as it was when we spoke it. I think that when most of us read this parable we look at it as observers, like we are in a theatre going to see a one act play while Jesus narrates. But as I study this verse I think that what Jesus really had in mind was for us to think of ourselves as being either the priest or the Levite; He was pointing out that this is how He sees us reacting in similar situations and hence how we must change and the Samaritan is how He desires to see us when He says, **"go and do the same"**. It's easy for me to read this parable and like the Pharisee pick out who is the neighbor, because I'm not involved in this scenario right now and it doesn't take any initiative on my part to be the Samaritan. It's kind of like saying I am grateful that I'm not a sinner like those Pharisees! But if I'm actually involved in a scenario like this parable, how do I really react. Do I in my mind and heart "pass by on the other side when my enemy (or any other stranger) has a need, but for appearance sake "do the right thing"? Each one of these characters in this parable are named for a specific reason, so let's expand on this verse so that we can pick up on all of the critical points of this verse that our Lord is trying to teach us: *Jesus gave this answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?" A certain person from the higher region of Jerusalem was traveling to the lower region of the Jordan Valley to the city of Jericho , and he fell into the midst of those who deprive you of your*

property, and they stripped him of his clothing and inflicted blows upon him, and departing from him they abandoned him leaving him in a state of being half dead. And coming upon this situation by coincidence of circumstance there was also this one certain person that was a Jewish priest, from the higher region traveling down from Jerusalem on that road; and when he looked upon him, he turned out of his way and away from the sight of the wounded and half dead man. Also, likewise, a man who was one of the posterity of Levi, a minister and servant of the priests who performed menial duties at the temple, also, when he came upon the spot in the road and came across this situation and looked upon the man, he turned out of his way away from the sight of the wounded and half dead man. On the other hand another man, who was considered a man of reproach and contempt by the Jews, because he was a Samaritan, which caused severe animosity among the Jews because the Samaritans were thought of as being a mixed race, was on the road in the course of a journey and looked upon the situation of the wounded man, and when he saw him, he had an inner feeling of pity and compassion on him, but he did not turn away from the wounded man, but instead approached him, and he bound up his wounds, and he infused a lotion of olive oil and wine over the wounds, and mounted him upon his own private beast that was used for riding, and lead him away toward a caravansary where caravans stop for the night to loosen their belts, sandals, and the saddles or the harnesses of their animals, and there he took care of him. And on the next day he brought out two coins each equal to one days wage and gave them to the innkeeper of his own accord and with good will and spoke these words to him, "Sir, have concern for and take care of this incapacitated man; and whatsoever more you spend besides, when I come back, I will restore to you." Now, which, from the premises of these three men, does it seem to you, proved to be a Christian neighbor to the person who met up with the persons depriving him of his property?" And the Pharisee replied with these words, "The one person who manifested active compassion with the man." So in addition to the words that Jesus previously spoke to the Pharisee He said these words, "Leave here and conduct yourself in an equal manner."

The general meaning of mercy is to have compassion or mercy on a person in an unhappy circumstance, implying not merely a feeling for the misfortunes of others involving sympathy but also an **active** desire to remove those miseries. When the lawyer asked Jesus to define the word "neighbor" I get the sense that the lawyer got more than he bargained for, but was Jesus' answer intended solely for the lawyer? If that were the case, this one man's issue would've never made it into the Bible. But how many of us, when we are trying to excuse our self from doing the righteous thing have asked the same question, "is he or she my neighbor; am I bound to help?" When the man that hasn't bathed in months or hasn't changed his clothes in the same amount of time asks us for a quarter, how many of us have asked the same question? What is my moral responsibility as a Christian to this man? Is he considered my neighbor? Do I have a right to set the circumstances and conditions of determining when I'm going to be compassionate and when I'm not, or do I have a right to determine what

appearance my mercy is going to take on? I have asked myself this question several times and have several times regretted not giving him anything of myself, because I prejudged the person to not be trustworthy of what I could have entrusted to him. What does that say about me? This I know; God judges my heart and my intentions; when it comes to my heart He is not concerned about what happens to my contribution after it leaves my hands and neither should I. His only concern is the knowing of what it was that motivated me to give or not to give. What I should be concerned about is having compassion toward someone who is less fortunate than I at that moment; how he got this way or what he does with what I gave him is none of my concern. That is strictly between God and the other person. Jesus' teaching is intended for more than just this one particular lawyer. If we truly believe that Jehovah is our Sustainer and Provider and money we have is not our money, why wouldn't we give him everything that we have? If we truly do believe that God does not lie and we can trust in His word that tells us to not worry about tomorrow and He will give us enough to sustain us for the rest of the this day. Does this maybe sound a little like the "rich young ruler" teaching?

In these verses we have a man who is a complete stranger traveling down the road and approaching the spot of the crime. And this man is even much more considered an enemy by the injured man, but he sets aside *all* of his prejudices by doing an act of kindness, mercy, and benevolence to one in distress. This man has done more than a person from the same country and religion who take no notice of the injured man. It is not a stretch to consider that Jesus also had in mind to teach us to think about the condition we are in, by the fall of Adam, before He came along to save us where He showed Himself to be our best neighbor and trusted friend; having compassion us He stopped His heavenly routine to give us life.

"This certain man" may represent mankind falling in Adam from a state of happiness, into a state of sin misery. Human nature was originally in one man, because one man was created at first, and he had all of human nature in him, and was the representative of mankind. He was made upright, but sinned, and fell from his uprightness, and all mankind fell with him.

He may be said to have gone down from Jerusalem, which signifies peace, and the vision of it. It was a city compacted together beautiful and well situated. It was a place where the worship of God took place and was considered to be where His presence was. He left this city to go to Jericho, a city that was cursed by Joshua and a very wicked place in the time of Jesus Christ. Man, by sinning against God, departed from his happy and peaceful state, from a place of peace and tranquility with God abiding with the holy angels, and even with the beasts of the field; and also from the peace and serenity of his own conscience as well as communion with God. He also departed from his pure worship and service, to a sensual, earthly wicked and cursed state. This place where the traveler fell among thieves on the way to Jericho was a place

called Adomin, which signifies “bloods,” because much blood has been shed there by the frequent incursions of thieves and robbers.

It was about a four hour journey from Jericho and by his falling among the thieves may express mankind’s coming into the hands of Satan and sin which are robbers that steal, kill, and destroy. Ever since then these have robbed man of his honor, defaced the image of God in him, deprived him of the glory of God and were murderers of him from the beginning. This injured man was stripped of his clothing which is what thieves and robbers did in this day which symbolizes the loss of mankind’s original garment of righteousness by way of sin. This was a covering to mankind which made it possible for him to appear before God and was very ornamental to him, being pure and perfect in its kind, though it was still only a creature’s righteousness thus a created one which made it natural and lovable, as the parable demonstrates.

So hence man has nothing to cover himself with thus making him naked and exposed to the law, justice, and the wrath of God. Mankind is now destitute of righteousness and in addition he cannot work out a righteousness that will stand up justly in its place or justify him before God. Man is mortally wounded if he does not receive the urgent care of a healer. He goes henceforth in a mortal and diseased condition that sin has infected him with from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He is full of wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores. This condition in itself is mortal and incurable by any except the Great Physician of souls, our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet when a man of Christ sees a person in such a condition, we are insensitive and unconcerned to his condition and pass him by. So we depart from his presence leaving him half dead or near (spiritual) death. His soul which is dead in trespasses and sins, while the body is still alive, without intervention, is headed for spiritual death which is where all men are headed and exposed to because of their sin. And although this is his sentence he is not yet executed and so in certain terms is considered to be only half dead. Yet mankind can still recover through the healing process of the Great Physician and the balm of God’s mercy and grace.

This parable mentions that a certain priest who had been at Jerusalem to take his turn teaching courses and was now returning to Jericho. This is where the stationary men of the synagogue were, to which he belonged. For it is said in the law of former prophets that there are appointed 24 courses and for every course there was a station, of Levites, Israelites, and priests, at Jerusalem. And when it was your turn to go up, as a priest, the Levites and priests went up to Jerusalem. So it is not uncommon to hear of priests and Levites passing to and from a place on this road. Nor was this a matter of chance with respect to God, by whose providence all things are ordered, directed and governed. This verse only signifies that eventually a priest saw the man naked and in a bloody condition. He may have taken him to be already dead and

therefore crossed over away from the path on purpose, lest he should in any way touch him and be defiled by him, and in so doing break the law and incur a penalty; as is mentioned in ***Numbers 19:16, Anyone who is in an open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days;*** or maybe he had a weak stomach and just didn't want to look upon such a horrible sight as this man presented to him. Or was it just plain hardness of heart and lack of compassion!? Sometimes in my own life, when my fellowship with God leaves something to be desired, it's not hard for me to find an excuse to exclude, compassion, sympathy and empathy from my repertoire of attributes.

And likewise a Levite passed by where the poor man laid in a deplorable condition. He came and looked at him and that was all. He never spoke a comforting word nor administered any kind of relief for him. He gave the man no assistance whatsoever. And just as the priest had done before him, he just passed him by, as if he were just another stone in the road or a weed that yields no potential good. In our analogy the priest represents the moral law and by the Levite the ceremonial law. And so by both they together represented the whole Law of Moses. This parable intimates that no mercy can be expected from either of these laws. The law makes no lessening in its demands nor any allowance for the fall and weakness of man. And it does not become anymore less demanding under the Gospel dispensation. It will not accept an imperfect, even though sincere obedience, where a perfect one is required. The law is deaf to all repentings, cries, and tears and so no relief for a naked, wounded, and near death of mankind. There is no robe of righteousness to cover his naked soul. For by the law there is an acknowledgement of sin, but not a justifying righteousness by deeds of it, because the deeds of the law, performed by sinful mankind, are impure and imperfect. And if they were pure and perfect they would still be unprofitable as far as being justified of our former sins in the sight of God. Righteousness cannot come about by the law which leaves mankind naked as he is found to be, nor is there any healing for a wounded conscience. There is no pity that comes from the law, no justification by it, no pardon through it; nor expiation or atonement of sin by obedience to it. There are no words of comfort spoken by the law, no hope of eternal life, only the ministration of the condemnation of death.

We will notice that the parable states that a "certain Samaritan" journeyed down this same road, in the analogy of this parable Jesus Christ could be meant as the Samaritan. Not that Jesus really was a Samaritan, because He was a Jew coming from the line of David, according to the flesh. But He was called a Samaritan by the Jews and was treated as such by the Jews, ***John 8:48, The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"*** And since the object of the parable is to show that he that does acts of kindness and mercy to persons in distress is a neighbor in the truest sense, Jesus

takes on the role as a Samaritan who was above all men hated by the Jews through their own prejudices.

“As he journeyed,” these words of the parable can be portrayed as His assuming a human nature, which is expressed elsewhere as His coming from His position with His Father, by His descending from heaven, and coming into this world that we live in, where the murderers and thieves reside. These phrases about His incarnation intend to carry the idea of His journeying, His descent from heaven and also His ascent into heaven as in ***Matt. 25:15, and to one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.*** And while He was here on this earth He was a stranger, a pilgrim, as a sojourner and a traveler as He preached the gospel message and disciplined His followers. He put Himself in a position as being one of us, one of us who are under the law. He became their surety for hope of the future from eternity and clothed Himself with their nature. Taking upon Himself their sins of the world as their representative before the Father and fulfilled the righteousness of the law on their account, bearing their penalty for their iniquities.

“And when he saw him” could represent the fact that when Christ saw His elect after the fall, as they were chosen in Him, and given to Him, and brought into all of His glory. Seeing them He loves them and delighted in them. But when He came to redeem them He saw them as Scripture describes us, as lost, weak and strengthless, wicked, the worst of sinners, ungodly enemies, children of wrath by nature, but it did not change His love for us and He still delighted in seeing us redeemed. We were His enemies yet he shed His blood for them and washed them from their sins so that He might present them to Himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle.

“And He had compassion on them” in His tender mercies and by assuming their nature as well as the tender mercies of the Father who gave them redemption in His love for them and also in their regeneration and conversion, all of these things that He has done and is doing are as a result of His compassion or mercy.

Verse 34 says that the Samaritan “went to him and bound up his wounds;” in the continuation of this analogy these are the wounds that sin has made; the wounds of a corrupted heart. It is the work of Christ to bind these wounds of the broken-hearted, to heal wounded sinners, and to restore comfort to the mourners.

This He does by “pouring in wine and oil.” This is the blood of Christ applied to the conscience of the wounded sinner. This ointment, His sacrificial blood, cleanses from all sin, heals all wounds and diseases of sin, cheers and revives fainting spirits, and gives ease, peace, and pleasure, which makes this ointment exceedingly valuable and precious. In this case the oil represents the grace of the spirit of God and by the wine could be representative of the

doctrines of the Gospel. These doctrines teach us of the free justification by Christ's righteousness and pardon through His blood. When this salve is applied to distressed minds it causes joy and gladness and the sinner forgets about their sorrow and they have no memory of their misery anymore.

The "pouring in" of this ointment may denote the plentiful infusion of Christ's blood and the riches of His grace in the application of it. This remedy can only be applied by Christ for it is beyond man's capacity to prescribe this treatment. It was the common thing to do for the Jews to mix oil and wine together for the healing of wounds and was a common ointment applied after circumcision and the occasional sore.

"And he set him on his own beast" which could mean the red horse of Christ's humanity, ***Zech 1:8; I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel, and white horses behind him.*** He uses this beast to unite all of His people. He is their representative and still bears them in His heart. Or it could be the white horse in ***Rev. 6:2; and I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering and to conquer.*** This horse is known for its strength, swiftness, and usefulness in battle and for its purity of its doctrines, and also the joy and peace it brings and the victory it obtains. This is the beast that Christ Himself rides and shows His glory and goes forth in conquering and to conquer. He sets His people on this beast and His people are out of reach of the devil and men who try to destroy them.

True Christians are not at home here on earth, they are merely travelers, and sojourners which brings us to the next words of this verse; "and brought him to an inn;" the inn represents the church of Christ, where the gospel directs and guides men and carries saints. These travelers need refreshment while on their way to their final destination and they find it in His church. It is large and it has room enough for as many as wish to come in and it is well stored with provisions. This is where Christ brings His weary travelers whom He saves and calls into service. It is His will that they be brought to such a place and it is their great privilege to be there.

The verse goes on, "and took care of him," Christ clothed him with His righteousness, fed him with His choicest provision, and gave him reviving love, refreshing promises, and continued protection and preservation from all evils.

Having taken care of him all night, and putting him into a comfortable way, the Samaritan leaves the traveler, trusting that he has left him in good hands. This is how we should treat our brothers and sisters in the Lord; we should learn to live by faith and trust in Him.

The Samaritan paid him with two denarii, which seems to be an insignificant thing at first glance to mention, but by now we should know that nothing of God's word is wasted or insignificant, and in this case we use the two denarii to represent the old and new covenant. Both inspired by God and dictated by the same Spirit. Both denarii bear the same impression and are alike, just as the covenants do, and they agree exactly as the two denarii do and are given to the ministers of the gospel to handle and make good use of for the good of the saints. These are jointly necessary to make a man fit for ministry or service, and are given for the benefit and advantage of the Lord's people, in an exalted way by Christ, on His departure from earth, when He ascended on high, and received gifts for men and gave them to them.

The masters (or innkeepers) of the gospel; who are the pastors of the church, the innkeepers of the spiritual inn, have the provisions of God's house under their care, and it is their business to invite travelers in, giving them spiritual food to set before them and to welcome them to life as the Bible describes life. The Samaritan requested that the traveler be taken care of, which is the work of Christ's ministers to do, by feeding them the word of God with sound doctrine. We as ministers should keep a close watch on those whose welfare we have been put in charge of, by faithful administration of the gospel, both in respect to principle and in practice, and speaking to them what they, in their own situations and circumstances need to hear that will heal whatever ails them.

"And whatever more you spend," ministering to someone in spiritual need takes time and takes time away from what we desire to spend the time on. Faithful ministers have a lot expense over and above time and money. They usually spend a lot on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control. They spend a lot on prayer to God, diligence in the searching through scriptures, and improvement of their own spiritual gifts; all at the expense of probably not receiving any thanks or demonstration of gratitude for it. But we must take our pride and selfish desires out of the equation and not lose focus on the One that preceded our coming at an even greater expenditure of anything that we have paid, and He will come again to recompense His ministers. He will more than reimburse us for our toil, labor, care, and expense. He will bid them as good and faithful servants and invite them into His joy. And when we have received what he has freely given us, in the way of grace, we shall shine as the brightest stars forever without end.

Now, which of these three persons can be defined as a neighbor? The priest and Levite passed by, obviously not willing to spend the cost, like it was mentioned above, of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. A better question might be; which one of these three are we? Which one of these three does our own practical life bear us out to be? We really have absolutely nothing to lose unless we make the wrong choice.

Grace has been described, by some as, mercy in action. Without God's mercy there could not be any grace. This brings us to the second part of the definition; *"to extend help for the consequence of sin."* All of us are in need of God's mercy, without it we would all have the same destination of judgment, that is, as condemned sinners. But His mercy and love provided the grace as a means for our salvation in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Mercy that we received from God is not given for anything meritorious that we have accomplished, nor wages for services rendered, for not one of us, as sinners, would then qualify, but it is a free gift given to us as an active demonstration of God's love for us as His children. In the parable of the "Good" Samaritan at least three people had an opportunity to extend mercy and in that extension to pass on to someone else what they have experienced from God having given to them in the form of grace and mercy. God gives us opportunities to experience the pleasures of blessing someone just as He has experienced in blessing us as a manifestation of His love for us. When we reject these opportunities we bring distance between what is God's will for us and our conduct, which is an outward expression of our heart condition. When we embrace these opportunities and do what we know God will do in these circumstances, then we truly have a heart of God and for our brothers and sisters in Christ and we will become an extension of His good will toward man. Just as a teacher, who really embraces his teaching and his students, he will strive to have his students see him as a role model; in a sense, when we have a heart for God and embrace Him as our teacher we too will have a heart like God and will want to see Him as our role model.

A characteristic of God is that He is merciful and compassionate, ***Ex. 34:6; Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness and truth (or faithfulness)". Neh. 9:17; "And they refused to listen, and did not remember Thy wondrous deeds which Thou hast performed among them; so they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in (their rebellion to) Egypt. But Thou art a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness; and Thou didst not forsake them. Ps. 103:13; Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. 2 Cor. 1:3; Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Eph. 2:4; But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.*** In these verses it is very plain to see that our God chooses to be a God demonstrating His love toward us rather than His anger or judgment, which He would be perfectly righteous in doing. Let's take a deeper look at the words in Eph. 2:4; *But our true God, the Trinity inclusive, is also One who is continually overflowing in active compassion, on account of His passionate love toward Christians with which He finds joy.* God is rich in mercy; mercy is a perfection of the divine nature and it is intrinsic to the nature of God. It can be either the object of many in general, extended to all men or dispersed in a special way reaching only to some in the way of grace. For though mercy is in His nature, yet the display

and extension of it toward anyone is an act of His will. And mercy, with all of its blessings and benefits, is only exhibited in Christ Jesus.

God is said to be rich in it because He is the free and liberal dispenser of it and the effects of it. He dispenses it to a large number of people in great variety and by various ways in great abundance and various ways and in diverse instances. This is demonstrated, for example, in the covenant of grace, in the mission of Christ, in the redemption by Him, in the regeneration of our spirit, in the pardon of sin, and in eternal salvation. Yet it is inexhaustible and perpetual. This sets forth the excellence and glory of it. The love of God to His chosen people is very great, if we consider who it is that projects this love; God and not man. The One who is infinite, unchangeable and a sovereign Being. And His love is like Himself for God is love. It has heights and depths lengths and breadths that are immeasurable. His love has neither variation nor alteration. It is altogether free, arising from Himself, and not from any motives and/or conditions in men. This is almost incomprehensible for us if we consider the objects of this love, that is, mankind, sinful mankind, who are unworthy of any divine notice or regard. These objects of His love are loved personally, particularly, and distinctly, nakedly, not for anything of value found in us or done by us and not withstanding our multi-various sins and transgressions.

This characteristic showed itself very clearly in Jesus Christ who, being God, became man and demonstrated the various forms of mercy that God has towards man ***Matt. 9:36; and seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed (or harassed) and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Matt. 14:14; and when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick. Luke 7:13; And when the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."*** It is my conviction that whenever I am moved to have compassion for someone it is God's mercy and grace flowing through me as His new creation and nothing of my own initiative, for a sinful man cannot be merciful. Because in my sinful nature I would not feel anything for them; my self-centeredness, which would cause me to spend time only myself, would be my priority.

We will notice in all of these reference verses that the word "compassion" is used, so let's listen carefully for the definition of that word as we amplify Luke 7:13; *And so when the Master and Teacher looked upon the woman whose son had died, He felt moved by His mercy to take action by His grace to alleviate her suffering, and spoke these words to her, "Do not shed tears nor express your grief."* In this case, knowing that she was a widow and had lost her only son, He said to her "do not weep." In these brief words that He spoke to her there is probably more said without using words. He was saying that He would help her, which He did without being asked to do it, which was a normal response for Him and should be for us if we truly are born again. If it takes being asked into action, when movement is obviously needed, then we are probably not operating under compassion and/or mercy, although this is not a definite

statement, it probably is a true general statement, because there is something else besides compassion prompting us to take action, like fear of repercussions, such as guilt, harm to our reputation, or regret.

The most striking demonstration of divine mercy is God's great act of salvation in saving sinners from the just consequences of their sins and giving them forgiveness and eternal life, ***Rom. 2:4, or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance. Rom. 11:32; for God has shut up all in disobedience that he might show mercy to all. Titus 3:4-5; But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 2:2, 3; like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*** When we look at the verse in 1 Peter we notice that he compares the word of God, or the Bible, with milk for new-born babies. Milk is their sustenance, it what keeps them alive and allows them to grow on to maturity. The Bible is the Christians milk, young Christians, that is those who are new to the Christian faith no matter what their age, need the Bible for spiritual sustenance and, as Peter says; once you taste this milk you will grow in respect for all that God has done for your salvation. It is impossible to grow to love God and not love Him. So let's take a deeper look at this verse in 1 Peter 2:2, 3; *Be like a newly born babe from the womb, earnestly desire for yourself the undiluted spiritual milk of God's reasoning expressed in human speech, so that by means of it you may increase up into preservation from destruction, if indeed you have tasted the sweet and smooth good natured, kindness and gentleness of the Lord.* The term "new-born babes" is an expression that refers to our regeneration or the new birth; we are born again children of God. This verse, though, does not apply to only new converts who are still in the condition of babes who are therefore only to be fed milk and not solid food. Paul's work in Galatia and in the province of Asia had been done many years ago, and Peter is speaking to all of these earliest of converts. Peter wants all of his readers, whether they are beginners or veterans in the new life, to act as new-born babes in regard to their longing to be nourished with the Word.

The point of Peter's figurative language is this; as a new born babe longs for nothing but its mother's milk and will take nothing else, so every Christian should take no spiritual nourishment except from the Word. By calling the Word "pure" milk Peter is stating its nature, that is, the milk belongs to the divine or the purity of the Word. By adding pure he brings out the thought that this milk is unlike any other found in any other source of learning or teaching. It is free from the pollution of the authors own opinions that may mislead or deceive. Any other human teaching or dogma is not pure, as much as it may be the intention of the author to present it as pure, we are all still coming from a point of being less than pure, at the very least

less pure than the Word itself. This divine Word is pure; the purity states the moral quality of the Word-milk. It is perfect for babes to take, although, they, having been just born, have no ability to be careful as to what they drink. Peter tells us to “long for this milk.” The implication is for us to long for *this* milk and none other.

Even we, as mature Christians, can at times, feel the allurements of teachings that appeal to our flesh and can grow tired of the simple, wholesome, saving Word, which is manna to our soul. To cease longing for the divine milk is a sign that should sound an alarm in our spirit, because to continue in this attitude could lead to eventual spiritual death. A starved baby will soon grow pale and eventually die. Thus, by longing for this divine milk, the exhortation of Peter is to grow unto salvation. This does not mean that he is telling us to grow from babes to men. We will forever be babes, in the context of Peter’s teaching, longing for this divine milk and growing unto salvation. Peter is counting on the fact that his disciples have met the Lord and found Him to be kind, bestowing on them only what is wholesome and pleasant. He is alluding to Psalm 34:8; ***O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man that takes refuge in Him.*** Peter is not quoting directly; he is simply appropriating the psalmist’s statement to express his own thought. What is true of Yahweh is also true of Christ. Having tasted that the Lord is kind does not make the Lord the milk. It would be very strange to conceive a picture of the Lord as milk. Neither the psalmist nor Peter says that we must taste the Lord but that we are to taste that He is good, taste what comes from Him. It refers to His being kind and beneficent in bestowing this precious milk of the Word upon us, in making us grow unto salvation. What we taste is His merciful kindness which we experience in His Word. “Taste” seems like an appropriate word for both milk and benevolence.

Even in the rituals of the OT, the sinners were dependant entirely on God’s mercy for their acceptance with God. It was God’s mercy, not their own religious acts that saved them. For this reason God’s throne was called the mercy seat. It was the place where God symbolically sat and where He mercifully accepted repentant sinners into His presence ***Ex. 25:21-22; “And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I shall meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.” Heb. 4:15, 16; For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who had been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.*** Sometimes it may be hard for us to comprehend that when God, through Christ, became human, that He was like you and me, tempted by the same things that we are tempted by, the exception being that because of the fact that He was begotten by the Father, He did not sin. He did not allow, because of His special relationship with the Father and

obedience to Him, His temptations to conceive and eventually birth sin. We can't think of Jesus as being different than us in His human make-up, especially when we are trying to excuse our sin, but the truth is that He was just like us. So let's take a deeper look at these verses in Hebrews and see if we can expand our wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of Him: *We shall be master over our profession of Christ Jesus as the Son of God because we do not have a relationship with a great priest that made blood sacrifices for sin but who cannot be compassionate with our physical causes of weakness, but on the contrary, as compared to the priesthood of Aaron, He is One who was in His flesh, solicited to sin after the manner of all things as we are, except for our appeals to our fallen nature, He had a real human body and a true human nature, yet remained separated from departing from the truth of reality and thus had no sinful nature nor need to repent. Let us therefore come to God, who has removed all of our guilt, with freedom in speaking all that we please and think, in prayer, sacrifice, worship, and devotion of heart and life, to the Sovereign God of favor, goodwill, and benevolence, so that we may actively take from Him compassion and active pity and may obtain favor in our time of needing His help.* These verses tell us that Christ is our great high priest; there were many high priests in the OT Scripture but none was called "great." This title sets Him above all previous human high priests. He is the great resource of His needy people, able to keep them from falling. As our great high priest the emphasis is changed from scrutinizer to Sympathizer; when the Word has thoroughly exposed who we are we can go to Him for grace and mercy.

No one can truly sympathize with someone else unless he has been through a similar experience himself. As man our Lord has shared our experiences and can therefore understand the trials and testing which we endure. He was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin. The Scriptures guard the sinless perfection of our Lord Jesus with jealous care, and we should too. He knew no sin, **2 Cor. 5:21; He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** He committed no sin, **1 Pet. 2:22; who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth,** and there was no sin in Him **1 John 3:5; And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.** It was impossible for Him to sin either as God or man. As the perfect man, He could do nothing of His own accord; **John 5:19; Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.** He was absolutely obedient to the Father and certainly the Father would never lead Him to sin.

To argue that His temptation was not meaningful if He could not sin is fallacious. One purpose of His temptations was to demonstrate conclusively that He could not sin. If you put gold to the test, the test is not less valid because the gold is pure. If there were impurity, the test would show it up. Similarly it is wrong to argue that if He could not sin, He was not a perfect human. *Sin is not an essential element in humanity;* rather it is a foreign intruder. Our

humanity has been marred by sin; His is perfect humanity. If Jesus could have sinned as a man on earth, what is to prevent His sinning as a man in heaven? He did not leave His humanity behind when he ascended to the Father's right hand. He was impeccable on earth and He is impeccable in heaven.

So He extends this gracious invitation to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. Our confidence is based on the knowledge that He died to save us and that He lives to keep us. We are assured of a hearty welcome because He told us to come. The people of the OT days could not draw near to Him. Only the high priest could approach Him, and then only on one day out of the year. We can come into His presence at any time of the day or night and obtain mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. His mercy covers who we should have been from the beginning and His grace empowers us to do what we should do but do not have the power to do.

Those who claim to be God's people, and followers of who Jesus Christ is, must also be merciful and compassionate if they truly are to follow Him, **Luke 6:36; Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 10:36-37; "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into robbers hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him, "Go and do the same (or likewise)." Col. 3:12; And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 1 Pet. 2:10; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.** Luke puts it very simply, if you want to be one of Christ's, a Christian, then we have to embrace Christ and the Father including all that they stood for. We can't just simply stand around from a distance and admire Him for who He is and what He has done and is doing for us; we must "take up His cross and follow Him." Col. 3:12 gives us a starting list, but we must keep in mind that these are not mechanical behavioral changes that He is commanding us to make, these changes all are birthed by a result of a change of the heart. We must take out the trash before the house can be declared clean. So we pray and invite into our heart the only One who has the power to change our heart, to have full access to our heart, the Holy Spirit; **John 16:8; and He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.** Let's take an amplified look at the verse in Colossians: *As children of the Light are supposed to live their life, that is, those who are effectively called for service and unto salvation by God, those who accept the Lord's terms for both salvation and service, truly obedient, set apart, sanctified, consecrated and regarded with strong affection by God, you should furnish your body, mind, and soul with the power of these qualities of incorruptibility and immortality: pity and sympathy for the suffering of others, goodness, a deep realization of unworthiness to receive God's mercy, mildness, able to avenge yourself yet refraining from doing so.* In previous verses of Colossians chapter 3 Paul tells us that as followers of Christ there are some behaviors of our old life that must go. These things he

considers the make-up or at least a part of the “old man” that is, our old life, the life that Christ wants us to put to death, that He wants us to crucify with Him. These things are as he has listed them in verse 5; any sexual sin, lust, inordinate desires, vicious appetites, plans of fraud and extortion. These things must go because they amount to idolatry and some will say they amount to spiritual adultery because they make us unfaithful to our God.

Then he goes on later in verse 8 to tell us or more things that must go; thoughts of angry outbursts, passionate anger, violent motions or passion of the mind, not only doing evil but being evil, verbal abuse, wounding someone’s reputation. Some of us have enough residual of pride left in us that we exclude ourselves from all of these sins on the list or at least some of who are described by Paul here. But the truth is that at some time in our life, we were all of these persons with no exceptions.

And finally, in verse 9, he tells us to not lie to one another. None of us likes to admit that we have or had any of these immoral tendencies, but the truth is that all of us at one time have had them in one degree or another. Now Paul is teaching us to put on a new man or begin the process of returning to being more like the image of God, the image that He had first created in man. We need to take on the character of the Person whom we follow, the Person that has chosen us as His own children, that is, to exercise the various mercies of the Triune God. These clothes that Paul is teaching us to put on are not robes that make us righteous or have salvation value, but they do match up with what we are professing to believe in when we say that we are obedient to the doctrines of Jesus Christ, without which we would be dressed just as the pagans, or non-believers, adorned themselves.

These characteristics that mark us as Christians carries with it a responsibility of good works, since we are chosen into holiness and good works these are what God has fore-ordained us to walk in, especially in a mindset of and acts of mercy. This is as a response to the realization of the great act of mercy that has been shown to us in our salvation. As we begin to change our values and attitudes to be more in line with what God desires in us, He sees us as holy, not by birth, because by our very nature we were unclean and filthy, conceived in sin and shaped by our fleshly lusts. Nor are we considered holy by baptism, which takes away neither original sin nor actual sin, but leave men as God found them. But we are made holy in Christ, as He was made of God, unto sanctification; and by Him efficaciously, by virtue of His blood, righteousness, and His sacrifice by which He sanctifies men. This result is born of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the work of our regenerate heart.

Since God has shown us so much of His love we also ought to love Him and our fellow man and “put on mercy.” Mercy being a sympathizing spirit with saints that are in distress, weeping with them when they weep, suffering with them when they suffer, being touched as

their Savior is touched with a feeling of their sorrows and weaknesses. This kind of mercy denotes an inward compassion to those in distress and the tenderest of regard for those experiencing misery. This action of mercy should not be a pretend kind of mercy filled with hypocrisy and deceit, but a true feeling that comes from the heart of a person. If we are to imitate our Lord in this fashion of mercy it should be boundless reaching out to multitudes of people and on a daily public display for anyone and everyone to see without shame. Such a spirit is a very beautiful one and Paul says that the innermost of this garment should be “kindness.” This could best be described as mercy in action, *doing* good acts to all men and especially to all Christians, helping with the necessities of life that a fellow brother or sister may have need of.

The second layer of this garment should be “humility,” seeing ourselves as the chief of all sinners, just as Paul did, the least of all the saints. We don’t boast about the gifts that the Holy Spirit has blessed us with, but instead we humbly use our gifts, then give praise to the Lord that we could be of service to Him and to our fellowman. We lift up others with encouragement and promote the gifts of others through the grace of God, while keeping silent about our own. We do our works without bringing attention to ourselves, complaint, or desire to be recognized. We quietly submit ourselves to God and patiently do what is pleasing to Him enduring insults, reproaches, and indignation with calmness.

Then next on the list comes the last layer, “patience.” We patiently bear up under evil words and actions of others spoken to us, allowing them to take the credit for work or words that we have done. We assume a spirit of calmness and contentedness knowing that our work is not done for the glory of men, but for the righteousness of God.

Jesus Christ represents not only the exact image of God but also the image of who He wants us to become. This means more than that Christians should have pity, i.e., mercy, compassion, and concern for others. They must actually do something, ***James 2:15-16; If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace be warm and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 1 John 3:17-19, But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him.*** It has been taught that love is a verb or an action word. Our love, if we genuinely have Christian love, should move us to action when we see a need in another person. Far too often we pass off our responsibility of love by merely saying “I’ll pray for you.” In some contexts this can mean the same thing as “don’t bother me with your problems;” if we have the means to help but choose not to. When John tells us to love in deed and truth he is telling us to help with a physical need by doing

something and helping in a spiritual need by being a purveyor of the truth, the gospel. **Matt. 18:33; “should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I have had mercy on you?”**

In particular Christians should give help to those in our society who are liable to be disadvantaged, such as orphans, widows, aliens, the persecuted, the afflicted and the poor, **Rom. 12:6-8; And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. James 1:27; This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.** Earlier in the study it was mentioned that *grace is mercy* in action; these two verses show us that we can not merely be by-standers or observers when we see someone in need. True born again Christians should be moved to action when they see someone in distress, in whatever form it may take. To standby and do nothing is revealing the disposition of your heart, which is the place where Jesus Christ wants to metaphorically dwell. We would never consider having a Lord that merely stood by and watched while we were hurting or had a need; not showing the least amount of compassion. That’s not the kind of Christ that we serve and it’s not the kind of person that is Christ-like. Let’s take a closer look at the verse in James 1:27 so that we can have an attitude adjustment if it is necessary: *This is how our Triune God and Creator, Preserver, Governor of all men and things that watches over them with a paternal love and care defines the kind of worship and outward service to God that is clean of any pollution or guilt of sin and has nothing in it that defiles itself in a spiritual sense; to look after, tend and take care of those of little esteem, the neglected and those who wander in obscurity and darkness; and also the widows and bachelors in their tribulations; and also to keep safely, preserve, and maintain oneself in righteous moral conduct free from the present world that is opposed to the kingdom of Christ with its transience, worthlessness, and evil, both physical and moral being the seat of our temptations.* I thought it was interesting how this verse defines unpolluted worship; basically it is to take care of what we might refer to as the “throw aways” in our society. Now, probably no one is going to admit to having an attitude that considers anyone a “throw away,” but let’s check our conscience and see how we look upon those people listed in the amplification of this verse; those of our society that are low esteemed, neglected, wandering about aimlessly with seemingly no destination, the uninformed spiritually, widows and bachelors that our having a tough time making ends meet or socializing, the persons who seem to be just taking up space and using up oxygen with no purpose. How are we *actively* involved in their lives; by wishing them well, by mentioning to them that have made the top ten of your prayer list? Pure and undefiled religion shows its pureness and its undefiled state by *the use of proper fruits.*

James mentions two; the first is to make yourself available to comfort and care for those who don't seem to fit into the masses of our society. Those people who we are afraid to approach because if we offer any benevolence to them we might obligate ourselves to them longer than we intended or it may cost us more than we anticipated. Or it could be that these people are the ones that we allow our society to put into a warehouse and hand off the responsibility of caring for them to the hired caretakers in the facility; that is, the mental institutions, rest homes, or shelters. These people, by the way, are mentioned quite often in the Bible as being under God's special protection. To visit the least of these brethren of Jesus is to prove oneself a true slave of our Lord Jesus Christ, ***Matt. 25:40; Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.***

This verse has a strong indication of what our relationship with our Lord should be like; the relationship that no one can see is made visible by how we treat each other. This is a sample of the love which is the true fruit of faith. The Lord has given us plenty of opportunities to demonstrate visibly our relationship with Him.

Another part of a true Christian's life is evidenced by our guarding ourselves from the temptations of the world. "The world" is here designated as the ungodly, unbelieving mass of men. The world is vile and foul; to guard oneself unspotted means that none of this uncleanness lodges itself permanently in our hearts and in our souls. It means that we attend to frequent and constant cleansing, by way of confession and repentance. If the first sample of true worship and service is a work of love then this one is surely a work of faith.

Believers should show mercy even to those who annoy or oppose them, ***Luke 6:35; "But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Rom. 12:20; But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so you will heap burning coals upon his head. Eph. 4:32; And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*** When we look at Rom. 12:20, which is a reference to ***2Kings 6:22; and he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."*** and ***Prov. 25:2; if your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.*** When we read these verses out of context, unfortunately a lot of us Christians believe, because of the literal reading, that the motive behind feeding and giving water is to accomplish a righteous way of taking revenge on our enemy, using God's word as a weapon, which would be a contradiction to all of Jesus Christ's teachings on vengeance and the verse which precedes this one. ***Rom. 12:19; Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord."*** If your

motive for feeding and giving water to your enemy is a way to find a righteous way to kill your enemy, I'm afraid the Holy Spirit has a lot of work left to do in your heart and this kind of act of compassion, of course, could not be considered an act of mercy. Let's amplify this verse in Rom. 12:20 to get the full context of what Paul is teaching us and let's see if we can find the mercy in the "burning coals;" *Therefore if we are being obedient to the Lord we will provide food to those we consider adversaries of the Messiah and let them come to us if they are famished, and also let them come to us if their mouths are dry and give to them of your own accord and good will a drink; because in continually doing so you will excite in them feelings of painful regret.* When we keep verse 20 in context with verse 19 we may think that an enemy is so incorrigible that punishment is the only thing that is left undone in his life. But how do we know, without a doubt, that the person is beyond hope and do we as citizens of His Kingdom, have a right to make that judgment and condemn anyone? We can never know the answer to who is saved and who is not and what's more why would we want that responsibility?

According to **1 Cor. 13:7**, "**love hopes for all things**" to the very end. Despite our human impatience, God's restrains His wrath beyond our patience, not only with our enemies but with us also! Paul reminds us of our active obligation as Christians; we are not to merely endure the wrongs done to us, we are to seek to change our enemy, if possible, to bring him to repentance. Of course it is the Holy Spirit's ministry to convict us all to repentance, but as a Christian we avail ourselves to Him to use us as He sees necessary. This act, I may add, is not only for the benefit of the one we consider an enemy of Christ, but for our good also. In this, we have the opportunity to humble ourselves and see God's mercy and grace at work and thus it encourages us to continue on the path of offering mercy and grace to others.

If we look at the Greek as it was intended to be read in this verse it actually comes closer to saying "morsel him if he is hungry" as morsels are fed to a baby and "cause him to drink." These examples of breaking bread were chosen perhaps because this form of hospitality meant so much in Biblical times. It always meant safety if you were a stranger or an enemy.

Food and water are considered the barest of necessities, so I believe that what Paul is teaching us is that at the very least the way we should respond in our responsibility is to consider offering at least the barest of necessities to our enemies. This is a place to start and as we mature spiritually so should our acts of mercy toward our enemies. Which begs the question; do our acts of kindness, grace and mercy correspond to the level at which we see ourselves in our spiritual maturity? Our idea of charitableness does not go far enough, unfortunately, in most cases we only consider doing the least that we can do instead of the most just so that we can feel good about ourselves.

"Heaping coals of fire on the head" is also a Biblical traditional figure of speech. These coals are not God's wrath or a Christian's vengeance. Some consider this a way of shaming an

enemy; a way of causing an enemy to suffer pain and shame for past acts. These coals were perceived more as a crown from a friend; that is as one who would be truthful and honest causing the enemy to want to repent. "Coals in the heart" and "fire in the liver are of the same sort." This teaching of showing kindness to enemies and against private revenge is very contrary to the dictates of our fallen nature, tainted by sin. Once again we find ourselves at a crossroads, which path do we take? There is really only one path that leads to life, and we should pray for the strength and endurance to continue on the path of mercy, the path of righteousness; which is the straight and narrow path.

Jesus' parables and other teachings is a constant reminder that God takes notice of the way that people treat others. God promises that He will have mercy upon those who practice mercy to others **Matt. 25:34-40**; ***"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in; naked and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."*** These verses speak clearly to me the truth of the church being one body with Jesus Christ as the head. No matter what our social status it is of no concern to God, He is not impressed by our worldly accomplishments, only in our believing heart which transverses (Covers all sides side to side) all human boundaries. Let's take these verses apart and see what nuggets may be hidden in this teaching: *"Then, at that appointed time, the Messiah, Jesus, will divide men, some to be on His right and some on His left and He will declare to the persons that he has on His right side which is the side to which He gives a preference, 'Come to me as the choice of the first fruits, you who are the ones that My Father has acted upon and provided a blessing, and possesses as friends of God; you are granted admission to His kingdom and its attendant privileges that has been appointed for you from the absolute beginning of the arrangement of the universe. This is the reason and cause for the separation; at the time that I was starved you gave to Me of your own accord and with good will something to eat; My mouth was dry and you gave to Me of your own accord and with good will a drink; I was a stranger from another place and you gave me hospitality and protection; I was ill dressed and you put clothes on Me; I was suffering from disease or the consequences of disease, and you nursed Me; I was in custody at a prison, and you came to Me. At that time those who have conditioned their lives by the standard which is not theirs but God's, will take this occasion to answer Him in reference to the preceding statements, uttering these definite words, 'Lord, at what time did we perceive that You were starving and nourish You, or have a dry mouth and give You a drink?"*

And, also, at what time did we perceive You as a stranger from another place and give You hospitality and protection, or ill clothed, and put clothes on You? In addition, at what time did we perceive You to be suffering from a disease or the consequence of a disease, or in custody at a prison and come to You? Then the Messiah will take this opportunity to answer them in relation to the preceding questions and uttering these words to them, "In all truthfulness I say this to you, to the measure that you continue do these things on the behalf of one of these members of the community of My brethren, even the least of them you continued to do it to Me." We are getting a glimpse of what will take place in the Throne Room when judgment for mankind takes place. It should communicate to us the importance of the teaching of James when he tells us that "faith without works is dead faith." Our fruit of our faith should be practical, which requires a "doing" something, exerting ourselves for the good of another and dying of self. This will be, on the one hand, a dispensing of royal grace and favor and on the other hand a dispensing of justice.

When the King addresses us as "having been blessed by the Father" it is very significant. In the Greek we understand this blessing to be an act that occurred in the past and its effects continues on to the present. When God blesses He does more than just pronounce a couple words of praise, as we do when we bless Him. He bestows His grace with all of its gifts upon us and thus making us persons that were blessed and still are. Some of these people died in His grace and thus after being raised from the dead, they are those "who have been blessed." In this position they are invited to enter upon their inheritance. They have been, up to this point, minor heirs, the inheritance was held for them, but they did not assume possession of it and its enjoyment. What is their inheritance? We inherited the Kingdom of God. They have been, up to this point, crown princes; they are now to be reigning kings.

"The Kingdom is what we call the kingdom of glory, namely heaven, and its rule of glory and blessedness as distinguished from a kingdom of grace here on earth, by which we are made heirs through grace. The King adds the statement that this kingdom "has been made ready for you from the foundation of the world." In His eternal and infallible foreknowledge God beheld all of us before we were born, and beheld us as all that His grace would succeed in making us. So this kingdom and rule is already awaiting us; it is not something in progress; construction is finished. The King's judgment and His awards are now fully established as being just.

We have to be a little bit careful as we move on to the next verse; this seems to be a listing of works that allows entry into His Kingdom. There can be a dispute over this list being an inference of what's required, like a check off list; or this can merely be a way of making clear to us how Christians respond in certain situations. It would seem from my perspective that this list is all inclusive, in the sense that these situations have probably been or have played a part in everyone's life. For example we all have awareness of people that are hungry, thirsty,

homeless, not able to adequately dress themselves, sick, or in prison. These persons have been with us, it seems, since the history of mankind and are mentioned frequently in the Scriptures. I believe that this verse is an inference of how a true, born-again Christian will respond when confronted by these situations. Thus we can be judged by our works, because our works are an expression of our heart condition and evidence of our relationship with a compassionate God. **Rom. 2:5, 6; but because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to every man according to his deeds. 2 Cor.5:10; for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body (of Christ), according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Matt. 16:27; for the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.** These works are decisive in the final judgment, that is, they play a role in how we will be judged, not because of an inherent meritorious quality, but because of their evidential quality. The evidence of faith is used, namely the works which faith alone is able to produce. At this point every sham and every deception will fall away forever. The significant point in the six works here named is that all six refer to the King Himself: "I did hunger, thirst, etc." Each work is thus personal as having done to and for the King. That makes plain most clearly the inner motives that prompted these works, love for the King, the love that springs from faith in the King. Having received His saving grace by faith, our gratitude responds by works that are intended for Him.

The next significant point is the fact that all of the mentioned works are of the humblest kind. Not one grand work is listed; this is a glaring contrast with the claims made in **Matt. 7:22, 23; Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform miracles. And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.** The list of accomplishments in Matt. 7:22 are grand indeed, by the world's standards, but as we see in the verse preceding Matt. 7:22, the King is looking for humble deeds, ones that will not necessarily bring attention to ourselves in this world. The correct translation in verse 36 where the word "naked" is used really should be translated "insufficient clothing." We seldom see anyone, in his right mind, walking around town naked, but how many people are seen or do we see, pretty easily, that do not have sufficient clothing. Insufficient can range from clothes that are worn out, don't fit properly, or are dirty, to lack of warm clothes during the cold months. Any help or comfort, ever so slight, offered by believers in these circumstances would really be a confession of Christ and thus in the highest sense a work of faith.

What we commonly call charity, namely the works done from humanitarian impulses are ruled out. The works of faith are far more than this kind of charity, they are confessional. Then we read that the "righteous," that is, those on His right, ask Him when did we see You this

way Lord and do what You say we have done? It should be noted here that the six works that we count are actually only a doubling of three. This sacred number “three,” which refers to Christ, is emphasized by each work being doubled by another that is similar to it. But when they now note infinite glory as their inheritance on the grounds of such little works seems impossible to them. They have not kept any record of their works, that would’ve been counter to their true intention of the works, they trusted only in grace and the works became inconsequential to them. This is the truth that Christ is bringing out by these questions. It is further evidence to show how just and righteous the award He gives is. These least of works, doubly least because they are often done to the least of Christ’s brethren, the humblest of followers who had nothing what so ever to distinguish them, except that they were believers in Christ, are great in the King’s eyes. Since they were done for His sake, He rightly regards them as being done to Him. He practically identifies Himself with the humblest of brethren. The least of the brethren are mentioned merely because of the kindness done to them would not be highly regarded among men. Does this mean that the same works done with the same attitude to great men are nullified? No, but if He had mentioned the works done to the greatest of men, (which do, in reality, have the same value) we might have mistakenly imagined that it was the greatness of the men that made our works precious to Him. By naming the least brethren the King includes all brethren and leaves out the possibility of being and getting rewarded by the great men.

Those who show no mercy to others will receive no mercy from God in the Day of Judgment, ***Matt. 18:21-35; Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.” And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him his debt. But the slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, “Pay back what you owe.” So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, “Have patience with me and I will repay you.” He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?” And his lord moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he***

should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each one of you does not forgive his brother from his heart. Luke 16:24-26; And he cried out and said, "Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame." But Abraham said, "Remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us there is a great chasm fixed in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us." James 2:13; For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

The parable about the master and the slave really points out the attitudes and values that we should have concerning mercy. In this parable we should think of the Master as being our Lord and we are the slave. Notice as we go through this parable that the slave was much more indebted to the master than the fellow slave to the first slave. So we will amplify Matt. 18:21-35: *At this time Peter, one of Christ's disciples, had heard Jesus Christ tell a few parables, and He came to Him and spoke these words to Him to learn more about mercy and forgiveness, "Master, how many times shall my fellow Christian participate in a wrong towards me, and I continue to let go of the offense? Would as long as seven times be sufficient?" Jesus responded to Peter's question by saying these words, I definitely do not approve of seven times as being the sufficient limit, but as many as seven multiplied by seventy (using the number seventy times seven only to indicate that it would be a large number). Now, as to what we have discussed throughout our discourse this is why the Royal Dominion of the residence of God can be as such likened to a human king who wanted to reckon accounts with his attendants. When, at the time when he had begun to take up the matter with his attendants in order to resolve them, there was brought before him, in order to conduct this transaction, a servant owing him money, about ten thousand dollars in silver content but worth much more in buying power. However since he was unable to do what was necessary in fulfilling the expected obligation, his master set into motion a provision for him to be sold in another land, accompanied by his wife and children and everything that he possessed in order to be recompensed for his debt. His attendant there upon fell down to prostrate himself as one does that he sees as being superior to himself and showing reverence and homage while imploring aid before him saying these words, "don't give up on me but instead endure me patiently and I will fulfill my obligation to you by reckoning every one of my accounts." At that time the master of that attendant took on an attitude of Christ by having an inner feeling of compassion and pity and relieved him by dismissing the repaying of the loan. But now that attendant immediately left the place of his master and lit upon one of the servants that served the same master who was in the same condition as he was, owing him one days wage and he had power over him, becoming master over him by force and he began to choke him, saying these words to him, "Resolve what you are expected to pay." And so his attendant who served the same master prostrated himself before him and began to call upon him saying*

these words, “don’t give up on me. But instead endure me patiently and I will fulfill my obligation to you by reckoning every one of my accounts.” However he was not only not willing to forgive the debt but decided to press on to take advantage of the law and departed impulsively to dispose of him into the custody of prison until the time that corresponds with the time that he has reckoned his debt by fulfilling the expected obligation. But at the time other attendants, who attended the same master, perceived what had just taken place, they were greatly grieved and came to the place of the master and made fully known to him everything that had taken place. At that time his master bid the first attendant to come to him, and his master said these words to him, You are a morally evil attendant, I gave you freedom from your obligations of every one of your debts to me because you called upon me for aid in your debt. “Ought you have done the right and proper duty and had compassion on your fellow attendant who was in the same condition as you were when I had compassion on you?” Then, his master, provoked with anger, delivered him over to the one who applies torture continually until the time he should perform his oath concerning everything of debt that was obligated of him. So shall My heavenly Father in a corresponding manner likewise do to you, if every one of you does not willingly let go of debts owed by a member of his fellowship. This parable is a good one for those of us who are struggling to find forgiveness for an offense perpetrated against us. We should try to realize that the offense that we have perpetrated against our God is “seventy times” worse than any offense committed against us and we were forgiven without even a single minute second in time of thought.

When verse twenty-one starts out with the word “then” it is so that we can connect the previous verses or thoughts that preceded this verse. Here we can ask ourselves, “Why did Peter ask this question about forgiveness and what is the connection to the previous verses?” The grammar of the Greek intimates that there is a slight pause during which Jesus dismissed the children that he had been holding and using as a prop, **(Matt. 18:2; And He called a child to Him and set him before them)**. Jesus seems to have struck a chord with Peter while He was teaching about a brother sinning against another brother and he wanted to know what his legal rights that he could implement, and remain righteous, while he was dealing with other brothers. The brother against whom another has sinned and who is to go to rebuke the sinning brother, will he be able to do this properly, will he be able to forgive properly the wrong that has been done to him, **(Matt. 18:15; “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother”)**. He may have even had someone in mind at the time or he may have been thinking like I have thought sometimes, how far can I go with something before it becomes a sin? It’s kind of like the rationale of when my mother tells me, as a child, not to eat the pie; can I pick off the crust around the pie without being disobedient?

It seems as though Peter understands the facts, but like in our society, he is also looking for loop-holes. But as is always the case Jesus Christ knows our hearts. When we talk about

forgiveness our heart should want to follow the example given to us by Christ Himself. Forgiving means to let go and *never* take it back, live as though the event never took place. In our depravity this is much harder to accomplish than it is to teach. We must at once forgive every wrong, whether the wrong doer repents and makes acknowledgment to us or not. If we can do that, we have done our part; we are relieved of any accountability for what transpires after that. We, at the same time, hold nothing against the man who wronged us. But now he has to settle the sin question with our God and that is between only him and God unless he invites us into the process. This reasoning is to cause him to get the help he needs to settle his sin with God, so that God too, will dismiss his sin.

Before we come down too hard on Peter we should recognize that he was at least willing to forgive someone seven times and we have all been in situations where finding forgiveness seven times for the same offense can be very difficult. Actually the Jewish teaching was that three times was adequate and they had Scripture to stand on, ***Amos 1:3: Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment. Amos 2:6: Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment.***

So Peter doubles this limit, from 3-4 to 7 times, and in so doing shows the Lord that he has progressed under His teaching. But, Jesus says to Peter, “no not seven times, but seventy times seven times.” When Jesus says this He is not putting an absolute amount of times that we must forgive someone, but He is giving Peter a huge number signifying that the amount of times could never be attained that would make it sufficient to not forgive. If we were to keep track of the number of times that we have sinned and needed to ask the Lord for forgiveness, 70x7 would fall way short of being adequate for a lifetime. This lesson in a nut shell is that we must forgive every time, infinitely, that we are offended no matter how many times we are offended, even for the same offense. In the case of Jesus Christ this is what it means to be Christ-like, when it comes to heartfelt forgiveness; He will forgive us an infinite amount of times. Jesus never implies that we will scarcely ever have a situation where someone will ask us to forgive them for the same offense seven times and practically it probably will never happen, but He does not want to give us the notion that there is a limited or set number of times that will suffice to forgive. There is no such limit that He has put on us to ask Him for forgiveness and to be Christ-like is to carry with us that same attitude, as hard as it may be. Instead, He wants to take the limited notion away from Peter and He takes Peter’s breathe away by calling for no more than seven times seventy remissions as a number that would suffice; a number so great that keeping count would almost be impossible.

The emphasis in His teaching is that we are to forgive all wrongs done to us, no matter how many there are. Because it seemed almost unbelievable to Peter that Jesus should

demand that he forgive four-hundred-ninety times, Jesus makes the whole matter clear by means of His finest parables. Since He is speaking to only His disciples He gives this parable to them to know that by instilling it in their heart and since they have, He gives them more of the teaching by not only answering the question but by additionally giving them a parable to help them keep His teaching in context, both in their heart and in their mind. Jesus gave Peter an answer that he was not expecting, instead of giving him approval, this is the reason that the kingdom has been made to be what it is; it only allows entrance to those who desire to be Christ-like. Every time Peter has any doubts regarding the number of times he is to forgive, he can bring back to mind the teaching of this parable and all of the figures involved; then all of his doubts and hesitation will disappear, as it will with anyone who can fully appreciate the mercy of God. The “kingdom of heaven” that Jesus is referring to is the rule of God’s mercy and grace on earth through Christ. Wherever God exercises His grace through Christ, this is where you can find His kingdom in all of its power. The point of the whole parable is that the king came to a decision to “settle up” with his debts owed by his attendants who owed him money. Our King will at an appointed time settle His debt with us also, for the Christian this will not be a fearful time, because Jesus Christ paid our debt and we have been forgiven many more than four-hundred-ninety times.

The very first attendant who appears in the parable owes his king a great sum of money and the king is very much interested in reckoning this debt. It is like a sinner who is brought face to face with all of his sins by the awakening of his conscience, this of course occurs through the vision of Christ and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. In the providence of God such hours of awakening come to us and shake us to our inner soul. Sometimes we are asked by God to make great changes in our life, changes that seem to be impossible, at the time, to make. As we state our case and try to convince God that it is okay to hang on to these “debts” God presents His point of view and instructs us as to what is best for us and little by little chip by chip we begin to see things His way as the process of sanctification begins its course. Sanctification, here, means being separated for a special holy purpose.

Sins, in the Bible, are often referred to as debts, ***Matt. 6:12; And forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors.***” This great debtor was brought before the king in the sense of being summoned and conducted into the royal presence. There he was called to render an account of all of the revenues due to the king. Of our own accord the sinner will never come face to face with his reckoning God. In our false security we love to go on piling up the debts, just as our lusts of this world would like to keep piling up the debts as if there were never going to be a day of reckoning. But we are blessed to know that He does call us to make an accounting before it is too late, that is, confess our debts to Him and ask for His forgiveness. He has given us His Holy Spirit as a Helper to convict us as soon as we are willing to turn our lives over to His care and direction.

The debt that the attendant owes is more than any man has the capacity to repay, it is an enormous amount. How he incurred such a debt is immaterial for the purpose of this parable. But the fact that he owed it and was unable to pay it is essential. During these times Jewish debtors were often sold into bondage and these debtors were often tortured as a desperate attempt to make an accounting for the debt and also as punishment for allowing oneself to be in such a despicable position. The fact that the debtor's family was also to be sold into bondage doesn't need to surprise us, for they were considered the man's property according to Roman law. We should not think of the revenue that was made from the sale as being equal to what the attendant owed as we stated previously, no man could repay what was owed. In a case of this sort, historically, the proceeds from such a sale merely went into the king's treasury. The total inability to pay the vast debt pictures man's spiritual bankruptcy before God. His sins are the debt, and they are so great a number that he has literally nothing to pay. While in this parable the number of sins is stressed, every single sin is beyond human payment. This king is not being represented as a tyrant; he is just acting according to strict justice. He has been lenient by not demanding payment sooner, and later in the verse he shows his royal grace. So his act pictures divine justice regarding the sinner and his sins. The guilty sinner is cast out from the presence of God and through his own guilt lands in the bondage of Satan. We don't like to consider divine justice, that is, what God has as a perfect right to do with us while still maintaining His holiness. And this parable brings home the fact that God is just and visits the iniquities of the sinner upon his head. We also see something that most of us miss in this parable; one sinner *can* draw others into his guilt and his punishment by being charismatic and a false role model. Thus the warning in **1 John 4:1; Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

When the attendant hears the verdict that goes against him, the man breaks down completely. He does not deny that he owes the debt, he even admits it. He is overcome and crushed when he realizes the error of his ways and the enormity of the consequences. He throws himself at the feet of the king and pleads for a postponement of the sentence. These are very good intentions, but they are not produced by his repentance, but by the king's just reckoning. *"Before the king drew him into account, he had no conscience, does not feel the debt, and cared nothing about it. But now that the king reckons with him, he begins to feel the debt. So it is with us. The greater part does not concern itself about sin, goes on securely, fears not the wrath of God. Such people cannot come to the forgiveness of sin, for they do not come to realize that they have sins. They say, indeed, with the mouth that they have no sin; but if they were serious about it they would speak far otherwise. This servant, too, says, before the king reckons with him, so much I owe to my lord, namely thousands of talent; but he goes ahead and laughs. But now that the reckoning is held, and his lord orders him and his wife, his children, and everything to be sold, now he feels it. So, too, we feel in earnest when our sins are revealed in*

the heart, when the record of our debts is held before us, then the laughter stops. Then we exclaim: I am the most miserable man; there is no one as unfortunate as I on the earth! Such knowledge makes a real humble man, works contrition, so that one can come to forgiveness of sins. (Martin Luther).

It is a correct mind-set when Jesus lets this debtor beg for time and promise to pay his vast debt. This is the first thought that comes to the sinner. He does not at once realize the enormity of his guilt and, as Luther says, cannot think that God will actually forgive it all but imagines that he must pay for it and in his fright promises to do so.

God is just and *must* confront us, because His character will not allow Him to do anything else, with our sins; but He is equally compassionate and full of grace and ready to forgive us of our sins; also because of His character. The moment that the sinner realizes his sin, confesses it, and turns away from those sins and turns to God, God pardons the guilt. When we talk about God's compassion it can be compared to the verses in ***Matt. 9:36; And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed (or harassed) and downcast (or thrown down) like sheep without (or not having) a shepherd. Matt. 14:14; and when He went ashore he saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick. Matt. 15:32; And Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, "I feel compassion for the multitude, because they have remained (or are remaining) with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not wish to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.*** This compassion is defined in the Greek as *"a pained feeling at sight of the sinner's plight, coupled with a strong desire to help them."* Compassion is the inner motive of God from which pardon flows. And this pardon is at once complete. The king "released" the debtor and cancelled the order to his officers to sell the debtor and all that he had. And in the same instant he forgave the loan to him. The verb "forgave" is the most significant part of this teaching; he forgave the debt, which literally means, "he dismissed it and sent it away," ***Ps. 103:12 "as far as the east is from the west; Micah 7:19; "and will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."***

We can take comfort in knowing that God does not wait until He hears a perfect contrition from us. If that were the case He would still be waiting to forgive the repentance that He had heard thousands of years ago. He does not keep us on an anxious bench, He remits the sin the instant it is possible for Him to remit it. And the entire debt is remitted, not only a part. It would be impossible for Him to forgive our sin only in part because in the spiritual realm to forgive and to forgive only partially are mutually exclusive terms. The debtor, as a sinner, pays nothing; in full truth the debtor *can* pay nothing. The change that takes place is in the man's heart in his repentance and this is ushered in by the conviction of the Holy Spirit who reforms a repentant heart. God on His throne declares the sinner righteous and free from guilt, as free as though he had never incurred guilt. This state comes about through His pure mercy and grace.

We as sinners do not yet fully realize it all, but we will soon enter into a full realization when our repentance is made more perfect and we see what we have escaped and when we see what has been granted to us.

But now we have a different scenario; the attendant leaves the king's palace, feeling pretty good about himself, maybe even thinking that he was disappointed to find out what a soft touch the king is and how easily the king was willing to forgive his debt. He figures he is on a roll, he believes that "karma" is finally seeing things his way, and decides to take this opportunity to make himself feel even better by collecting the debt owed to him, even though the debt that he owed was much larger than any debt owed to him. So he finds a fellow attendant, not only of the same nature but the same profession of religion and in service to the same merciful king. He gets a hold of him in a violent manner and treats him with great indignity. He took him by the collar and shook him and gripped his hand so hard around his neck that he almost strangled him, (my opinion). Notice the contrast in how the first attendant was treated by his king compared to how this same attendant treats his fellow man. After the second attendant repeats, almost word for word what the first attendant said in asking for forgiveness, the first attendant is only interested in his money and has no mercy on him. One greatly offends his King the other minutely, comparatively, offends his fellow man. Both have a legal right for justice, to one who has a hard heart he stands firm on his rights and only retribution will bring satisfaction, the other seeks only a gentle solution and only an opportunity of a manifestation of His love will bring satisfaction. One will receive only a temporary insignificant reward for his stand here on earth, the other an immeasurable eternal reward in heaven. Our choice seems obviously clear.

Just as the first attendant had done, his fellow attendant fell at the feet of the first attendant in the most humble and submissive manner and repeated word for word the same plea for patience and a promise to pay all of the debt that the first attendant had done successfully before his master.

But the first attendant would not have compassion on him and sent him off to prison until his debt could be paid. He brought him before a proper officer, proved that this debt was owed to him and won his case. This of course proved that it was not the money he was after as much as taking vengeance, for he put him in an impossible position to pay the debt. This can be compared to a person that proclaims to be a Christian, but in certain situations loses control of his senses, begins to get angry and focuses only on getting revenge at any cost, even while the Holy Spirit is at work full-time convicting him that having and getting revenge is the way to condemning judgment and that having compassion is the way to Christ, who is also the One whom he is supposed to be representing to those who are witnessing the accusations and punishment.

So when his fellow attendants saw what had been done, the ill treatment and hard heart of their fellow attendant that the poor attendant had met with, they felt compassion toward him. They were greatly grieved and troubled by the treatment of one of their own, by one of their own. They reported all that they had seen and heard that had transpired to their master and were especially troubled knowing that the first attendant had just been forgiven his debt. There is no excuse for our lack of mercy, with the exception being ignorance, and in forgiveness toward our fellow man we ought to be considering that at some time in our existence we will be able to see how much greater was the forgiveness that we received from Jesus Christ as compared to those we were unwilling to forgive for much lesser offenses.

So the first attendant was called before his master to give an accounting for his actions. At that time the master identified him as being wicked, cruel, and hard-hearted toward his fellow man. His action demonstrated his lack of gratitude toward the master for all that he had done for the attendants and it was obvious that all of the good that the master manifested toward him had not made an impression on him nor did it have any effect on his character. It would seem that all of the kindness that was shown toward the attendant merely aggravated his wickedness.

It is reasonable, even to most of the hardest of hearts, that when one receives mercy that he would become more merciful; when he experiences the joy and gratitude of being forgiven that he would want to be an inspiration to others to experience that same joy and gratitude. When our Lord shows us His compassion by forgiving our debt, which is much larger than any debt we have incurred, He doesn't expect us to have the ability to demonstrate such great and gracious mercy as He had toward us, but that we should at least have a desire to demonstrate partially that same mercy. While we know that the grace He demonstrates toward us is perfect, perfectly grace-filled, that is not tainted or influenced by sin and that position is a position that we cannot attain on this side of heaven, it is still the bar or the goal, and as long as we set the bar high we will continue to grow in this area.

Verse 34 tells us that the Lord is justly provoked at such inhumane treatment of our fellow-man and we will be judged for our actions. These actions are a demonstration of the condition of our heart. Just as the attendant was eventually cast into prison until his debt was paid, he, like us in our sin, was in an impossible position. He was in an impossible position to repay his debt because the prison does not provide for a means to repay; just as hell does not provide a means of forgiveness.

It is certain that sin, once pardoned by God, is gone forever and there is no punishment for forgiven sin. He forgives us of all of our trespasses, though they are many and He remits the whole debt. It comes through an absolute satisfaction for sin made by His Son and therefore it would be unjust to punish us for it. To punish us after our sin had been forgiven is tantamount

to having some sort of sadistic need to see someone suffer. God's character is not of this type of sadistic revenge. This spiritual insight causes me to believe that God's forgiveness, for a person who has truly repented, has more than merely the affect of our freedom from debt; it is also intended to have the effect of changing one's heart. After all, a person really can't show mercy and dispense grace without a regenerated, Christ-like heart.

What comes into question here, considering the outcome of this parable, was the veracity of the intention of the first attendant. Was his asking for forgiveness of the debt sincere, or just words spoken out of fear, trying to avoid the justified consequences? Did he intend to use the extra time that he was asking for to arrange to pay the debt, or was he plotting to use the time to find a means of escape from his master? He may have already had contingency plans knowing that sooner or later he was going to have to reconcile his debt, but in the meantime, live life with a devil may care attitude. God provides forgiveness of sin to everyone ever born, if they will accept it. The proof that they have accepted it, I believe, is in their attitudes and values that they manifest toward their fellow human beings. So if the first attendant was plotting some maniacal plan of escape from paying the consequences of his debt, he will soon learn that there is no escape from God's justice.

The bottom line in this teaching is that mercy, like all other blessing from God, are gifts from God freely given to us as a result of the great love that God has for us. When we humbly receive these gifts, I believe that they are like seeds for a garden, meant to be planted, not to be put on shelf where they cannot germinate and reproduce, nor used at a time when they do bloom intended to be shown off to others just for the purpose of attracting attention to ourselves, or to be admired from afar. The best way to plant these seeds of mercy are to pass them along to others that we encounter and give to them freely the gift of mercy that God has freely given to us. We must give these gifts as free gifts, not as personal investments expecting instant results, or with strings attached where we then expect something in return. A gift must be given without expectation of return or it is no longer a gift, but a bribe. We should not worry about cutting ourselves short by the giving of these gifts because our supply will always be renewed by God Himself. When Our Lord says that you can tell His disciples by the way they love each other, He is obviously referring to something that people can see, so we must put these gifts into action, as a result of our love for each other, which is an expression of our benevolent heart and evidence of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This power has taken our hardened heart and made it soft or fleshly, as the Bible puts it, so that it can receive what God is giving to us. Gifts of seeds cannot be planted in earth that is hard as a rock, it must be made soft and fertile, or else it is swiftly taken away, ***Matt. 13:18-23; Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places,***

this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one whom seed was sown among thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty. In order for us to bear fruit in our faith, we must be mature enough to reproduce. An immature fruit tree will not produce fruit. So we must ask our Lord Jesus Christ to give us the desire to embrace Him and His teachings which will lead to what Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit.” This fruit (and it is the singular fruit) which is made up of nine components, is found in **Gal. 5:22, 23; But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control, against such things there is no law.** Without allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our lives we cannot possess this fruit, some have tried to use an imitation for their own gain, but it soon the façade falters and fades away and the true identity is revealed.