Mercy Over Sacrifice

To begin, I would like to offer a quick praise report. Last week, I had the most edifying Sabbath I have had maybe ever. This praise report is not about me, but what The Lord let us share at our young adult study. It was illuminating to be in the presence of these precious young folks who are genuinely seeking God in their lives. Spiritual growth, forgiveness, and edifying one another were at the core of the discussion. An hour and forty-five minutes flew by. My sincere thanks to Frank, Sage, and Nor! Their demonstration of God's word and love emphasized Matthew 22.

Matthew 22:37-40- "And Jesus said to him," 'You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and greatest commandment; And *the* second *one is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

It is a privilege to be a part of what God is doing in their lives amidst the trials we all face.

That being said, we can now put the man-made holiday of Christmas to rest for another year. Albeit there will be the post-holiday sales, inventory clearances, and the year-end blowouts. All this will test and try our perseverance. We can all be eternally grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ for His grace and *mercy* upon us He has brought us through another season.

We all know what Christ's mercy was and is. He died for all of us while we were yet sinners and through His sacrifice, our sins can be continually forgiven when we fail (if we repent).

Romans 5:8- "But God commends His own love to us because, when we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

What about our mercy and our sacrifice? What is mercy? What is sacrifice? Is one more important than the other?

Mercy is defined as *compassion* or forbearance or an act of divine favor. To emphasize the meaning, compassion is sympathetic consciousness of another's distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

When we see someone in need that is struggling or in despair, how do we respond? Even if they are a perfect stranger, would we not reach out when possible? Why would we overlook anyone in our own family? It gets really uncomfortable standing in front of that mirror all alone. God forbid we should ever have to look inward at ourselves. Do we demonstrate the love of God and compassion by showing mercy?

Genuinely loving your neighbor as yourself flows from our fellowship with God in Jesus Christ. It involves displaying mercy and compassion to those who may be outcasts and yes, even to those who have sinned against us. God will not tolerate a double standard or being cold-hearted from those who profess to follow Him.

James 1:27- "Pure and undefiled religion before God and *the* Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Sadly, there are those in the church who tend to be judgmental towards sinners and can be blinded by their own perceived goodness and pride instead of demonstrating the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 6:14-15- "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew 18:33-35- "Were you not also obligated to have compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had compassion on you?' And in anger, his lord delivered him up to the tormentors, until he should pay all that he owed to him. Likewise, shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each *of* you does not forgive his brother's offenses from the heart."

Jesus spent time in the company of sinners. He welcomed those who repented and wanted to follow His way. He was criticized for it by those who thought of themselves "religious," the Pharisees.

Matthew 9:11-13- "And after seeing *this*, the Pharisees said to His disciples, "Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, "Those who are strong do not have need of a physician, but those who are sick. Now go and learn what this means: 'I desire

mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus said that He desires mercy and not sacrifice. Jesus was repeated what was said in Hosea.

Hosea 6:6- "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

In Hosea, God was rebuking Israel for focusing on the letter of the law while forgetting the spiritual intent of the law. This means God desires love, mercy, and faithfulness from His people more than their ceremonial religious practices and observances of the law. The reference to "sacrifice" signifies that all of their rituals and practices were empty of His spiritual intent. They were sacrificing the love God intended to be included for their own prim and proper practices. Jesus was reminding the Pharisees they had become just like their counterparts centuries before. While they may have been correct in their observances, they lacked compassion and love for those sinners in need.

Jesus again quoted Hosea in the Book of Matthew when the Pharisees criticized Him for His disciples plucking grain as they walked through a field and ate them on the Sabbath. They accused Him and His disciples of breaking the law pertaining to the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:1-8- "At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath days; and His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat *them*. But after seeing *this*, the Pharisees said to Him, "Behold, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on *the* Sabbath." But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he himself and those with him were hungry? How he went into the house of God, and he ate the loaves of showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but for the priests only? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbaths the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? But I say to you, there is *one* here Who is greater than the temple. Now if you had known what this *means*, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day."

Once again, we see the "religious" imposing their beliefs on God's word. Control freaks with fancy robes. These religious hypocrites had turned the

word of God into an unjust list of rules according to *<u>their interpretation</u>*. Remember, the Bible is of no private interpretation.

2 Peter 1:19-21- "We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and *the* morning star arises in your hearts; Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone's own *private* interpretation; Because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by *the* Holy Spirit."

The self-righteous Pharisees were the consummate religious examples, at least in their own minds.

Luke 18:9-14- "And to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, He also spoke this parable: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself in this manner: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers—or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week, and I give a tithe of everything that I gain.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not

even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat himself on the chest, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' I tell you; this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled; and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted."

How arrogant. Coming to a state of self-awareness that afforded them the "privilege" of looking down on those about them never once realizing they were blinded from God's truth by their own pride.

Proverbs 16:18- "Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

We see this so often in church today. Lack of self-reflection, twisting scripture, adding to it, or taking away from it. Deviation from God's truth and His instructions will only lead to the grave.

"Sacrifice" is best defined as something given up or lost, to renounce something for an ideal or a belief. The Pharisees did not heed Christ's instructions He had given them earlier as they still missed the spiritual intent. I always think of the Catholic celebration of "Lent" where they give up

something before they would celebrate Easter. I remember catholic friends would give up something like knitting or bowling on Thursdays. All just as meaningless as Lent was. True sacrifice was three nails and a crown of thorns.

From the creation, God intended the Sabbath to be a day of worship and rest. The Pharisees tried to improve what God had established by making it "more holy" their own way. Man has since changed it into his way of worshipping God on the incorrect day of the week. Christ is still Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).

Sadly, just like the Pharisees, the religious and self-righteous minded of today fail to see their need for God and His mercy. No one can ever expect to come to this realization without an intimate relationship with God Almighty through Jesus Christ. It is that simple.

Hebrews 13:15- "Accordingly, let us offer *the* sacrifice of praise continually to God through Him; that is, *with the* fruit of *our* lips openly professing *our faith* in His name."

The sacrifice of continual praise for all God does, has done, and continues to do for us is what He seeks. He desires us to have the proper heart, love, and devotion to Him and Jesus Christ our Lord. However, all of the sacrifices in the world will not change us within if we have not unified with God in our hearts. When we are at one with Him and He is truly our first love, we are healed, filled with His love, we are changed through His forgiveness and Holy Spirit. Our mercy towards those in need and our righteous efforts and sacrifices are no longer empty acts, but sincere spiritual contributions. Our lives will change in the direction He desires for our continued spiritual growth. Kindness and edifying one another will be the norm but it must be a two-way street. We will become a living sacrifice.

Romans 12:1- "I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and well pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service."

When God says, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," He is calling for the inward change of our hearts. The Pharisees failed to see the significance of the personal relationship with God as do most "religious" minded people today.

Romans 2:29- "Rather, he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

We must go beyond the obeying the letter of the law and always include God's spiritual intent within our hearts. <u>If God truly does not have our hearts, He does not have us at all</u>.

Hebrews 13:20-21- "And *may* the God of peace, Who raised our Lord Jesus from among *the* dead—that great Shepherd of the sheep—through *the* blood of *the* everlasting covenant, Perfect you in every good work in order that you may do His will; accomplishing in you that which *is* well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom *be the* glory into the ages of eternity. Amen.

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