

Mercy vs Religion

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much to Mitchell for leading us in worship. We turn now to Luke chapter 6 and to verses 37 to 42.

Mercy versus religion. Be merciful, it says in verse 36, even as your Father is merciful.

What kind of community do we want our church to be? One where all our sins are lit up with neon lights for everyone to see and every failure condemned?

Or a community where our failures are treated with compassion and our sins forgiven? Some time ago, Nate Taylor preached a sermon where he coined the memorable phrase, The church is a community crazy for mercy.

The church is a community crazy for mercy. This is the kind of culture our church wants to tend toward, to be a community crazy for mercy.

[1 : 14] Now, these verses are set within the context of conflict between the early church and the Jewish religious authorities.

Jesus defines for us the kind of community he wants his church to be. A community crazy not for judgment, but for mercy. He contrasts it with the kind of community the man-made religion of the Pharisees and the scribes produce.

Blind, self-righteous, and hypocritical. This whole passage is set by the words Jesus spoke in verse 36.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Jesus goes on then to describe two communities. In verses 37 and 38, a community enriched by the mercy of God.

A community enriched by the mercy of God corresponding to his church. And second, from verse 39 through 42, a community blinded by the religion of man.

[2 : 22] A community blinded by the religion of man corresponding to that of the Jewish religious system. And the question for us is this.

What kind of community are we? Crazy for mercy or crazy for judgment? Crazy for forgiveness or crazy for condemnation?

If we are to be merciful and compassionate, as our Heavenly Father is merciful and compassionate to us, then we long to be that kind of community which is enriched by the mercy of God.

And how we become that, it should be clear to us, is to remember how merciful God has been to us in refusing to count our sins against us, but through the blood of his Son, forgiving them all.

So, first of all, from verse 37 and 38, a community enriched by the mercy of God. A community enriched by the mercy of God.

[3 : 31] This section is dominated on one side by the words of verse 36, Be merciful even as your Father is merciful. And by the words at the end of verse 38, For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

We have mercy on one side, we have measures on the other, and between them we have four commands. The community we model ourselves upon is based upon the mercy of God.

Because this is who our God is. Because this is who our God is. The God we worship in song and in life. The God who is merciful. It's his nature to be filled with mercy and compassion.

It's in his nature not to give us what we deserve. How grateful we are for the merciful nature of God. Since we were children, we've sung the words of Psalm 130, verses 3 and 4, where David writes, The church must follow the example of God.

It is our basic instinct to tend toward mercy. Now we all know what it means to do something out of character. Someone who's normally calm.

[5 : 02] Loses their temper in public. Someone who's an extrovert and likes to talk suddenly becomes quiet and subdued. If the community of Christ is to act in character, its first instinct is to

show mercy, even as her Lord, Master, and Father is merciful.

God is merciful to the extent that he demonstrated his mercy in sending his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins and give us eternal life.

Not one of us deserve to be forgiven. And yet the Son of God gave himself for us. Not one of us deserves eternal life. Yet the Son of God demonstrated his mercy toward us by dying on the cross for us.

Mercy is not merely God's attitude toward us, although it is. It is his ultimate action for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Our existence as a community of Christians here is entirely down to the mercy of God. If it wasn't for that mercy, both in attitude and action, we'd all be without hope and all be without God in the world.

[6 : 22] So a community which is enriched by the mercy of God acts in character. It tends not toward judgment or condemnation, but forgiveness and generosity, just like our Father in heaven.

On the other side of the passage, at the end of verse 38, Jesus' commands are bracketed by the phrase, for with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. This phrase does not merely govern what's immediately come before, namely the way we give to each other, but to every command in this section.

With the measure we use, it will be measured back to us. In other words, if we judge one another, we shouldn't complain if we are judged by others.

If we condemn each other, we shouldn't be surprised when other people condemn us. If we refuse to forgive one another, we shouldn't complain when people refuse to forgive us.

And if we're tight-fisted toward each other, we shouldn't be surprised when people are tight-fisted toward us. I thought of entitling this point, we get what we give.

[7 : 36] We get what we give. If we want a judgmental, condemning, unforgiving, and tight-fisted community, then all we have to do is ourselves be judgmental, condemning, unforgiving, and tight-fisted toward others.

Makes sense, does it not? If you won't forgive me when I sin, but cast all my sins up against me, why should I forgive you when you sin? John F. Kennedy made a famous speech when he memorably said, ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. Let's make the church into a forgiving, merciful place by ourselves being forgiving and merciful. Well, all very good. But the biggest problem that someone in the church who judges, condemns, holds grudges, and is tight-fisted has isn't that others will treat them that way, but that this is the way God will treat them on the last day.

Notice the future tense at the end of verse 38. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. By whom? By God. A day is coming when God will give us back that which we used.

[8 : 59] If we were judgmental toward others, He will be judgmental of us. If we were forever condemning and criticizing others, God will forever condemn and criticize us.

If we were unforgiving, He will not forgive us. If we were tight-fisted, He'll be tight-fisted toward us. So you see, this wee section, this small section, has a past focus.

God's historical demonstration of His mercy toward us in the cross of Christ. It has a present focus, God's present attitude of mercy toward us, and a future focus, God's future mercy displayed toward us in our final salvation.

Here's our crazy-for-mercy community. Motivated by God's past mercy, moved by God's present mercy, empowered by God's future mercy.

But then we say, understand, that person's hurt me so badly.

[10 : 07] How can I give to someone who is so tight-fisted toward me? How can I give to someone who's so tight-fisted?

How can I forgive someone who's never forgiven me? No one's saying that it's easy to forgive that which seems unforgivable. But without being cliched, the path to showing mercy to others is first in understanding how much mercy God has shown to us.

The path to forgiveness lies in understanding just how much God has forgiven us. So it's at the cross we find the strength to forgive others because it was there God forgave us.

Between these two brackets of be merciful for your Father is merciful and for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you, Jesus gives us four commands.

The first is this, judge not and you will not be judged. Judge not and you will not be judged. The judgment Jesus has in mind here is the high-browed, self-righteous way in which the Pharisees judged everyone who didn't quite reach up to their standard of behavior.

[11 : 25] They judged the disciples for eating corn on a Sabbath. They judged Jesus for healing on a Sabbath. They judged Jesus' disciples for not fasting and praying like they would.

How careful we must be not to be self-righteous in the way we view others. Do we know their family situation? Do we know enough about them to make a definitive judgment?

Probably not. In fact, definitely not. Likewise, Jesus says, condemn not and you will not be condemned. The word Jesus uses here literally means to pronounce guilty.

Don't pronounce people guilty. How many Christians have been condemned for things they have said and done, written off without the full facts being known?

How grateful we are that though God knows everything about us, he neither judges nor condemns us as we deserve, but willingly shows mercy. These two negative commands are followed by two positive commands.

[12 : 34] The first is this, forgive and you'll be forgiven. This is perhaps the hardest command Jesus gives us in this section. Rather than seek retribution for a hurt we have received, our first inclination must be to forgive.

Jesus does not say here, be ready to forgive, nor does he say forgive if they ask for it. He simply says forgive.

And then finally Jesus gives us, Jesus commands us saying give and it will be given to you. The more we give, the more we receive, the more we empty our hands, the more God fills them.

Perhaps we can think here of giving love to others. It's hard to love others especially when we've been hurt by them before. But this is what Jesus commands us to do in black and white.

Give your love. Keep on giving love even when it hurts. You know what saddens us about this passage of scripture is by and large when normal people in the street think of the church, they think of it as judgmental, condemnatory, unforgiving, and tight-fisted.

[14 : 06] Let's be honest, we can be very judgmental toward the world while turning a blind eye to our own sins. How quick we are to condemn the world, how slow we are to condemn ourselves.

Surely that's not the kind of community we want to be. That's the kind of church that turns so many people away from church. The fear of being judged, the fear of being unforgiven, the kind of church culture that prompted the American Philip Yancey to write that book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*

Because he discovered countless ex-Christians, if there's such a thing, who had been members of churches which preached grace, but didn't practice grace.

The early church lived in days of conflict with the Jewish religion. What was Jesus' answer? Was it to fight fire with fire? Was it to become like the Jewish legalistic religion in its judgmentalism and lack of forgiveness?

or was it to love our enemies? To be merciful? To resolve never to break a bruised reed or to snuff out a smoldering flax?

[15 : 18] To leave the judging to God and to get on with loving here and now? Do we know anyone that's been at the rough end of the church's judgmentalism?

Perhaps they were bruised reeds because of difficult circumstances in their lives, their personal lives, their marriages, their mental lives, whatever. Rather than tenderly mend them, the church broke them.

They were smoldering wicks because of some affliction. And rather than fan the flame by its lack of forgiveness, the church extinguished it.

By contrast, do you know anyone who has personally experienced forgiveness, restoration, generosity from the church?

which of these two communities do we want to be part of? If it's the latter, and I'm sure we'd all like it to be, then let's ourselves become crazy for the mercy of God.

[16 : 23] Let's make it a reality by ourselves taking the first step to being a community enriched by God's mercy. After all, with the measure we use, even after the service today and the way we speak to one another, God will measure that out to us.

Good measure, shaken together, running over. A community enriched by the mercy of God. Well, from verse 39 to verse 42, secondly, and more briefly, a community blinded by the religion of man.

A community blinded by the religion of man. This corresponds to the kind of religion the Pharisees practiced. the kind which has already been self-evident in their condemnation of Jesus and his disciples and which will, in the course of time, condemn him to the cross.

He doesn't pull his punches, does Jesus. He calls it blind. He says they're hypocrites. Here we have human religion exposed by God. It doesn't matter over much whether it's Jewish or Christian. when our religion consists in obedience to a set of man-made laws by which we reach up to God, rather than in a loving relationship with a God whose mercy reaches down to us in the cross of Christ, it's really all much of a muchness.

[17 : 54] It's human religion which is dead set against Christ and his church. religion which despises the simplicity of faith in the gospel as the means of salvation rather than obedience to some law.

It is human religion which persecuted our Lord, crucified our Lord, and persecutes the church even up to this day. Human religion which we as Christians are in conflict with.

in this context, Jesus is speaking of the religion of the Pharisees but again as I say, all his criticisms can be fairly aimed at any human religion. Sadly, even our own hearts as Christians who owe everything to the mercy of God can be turned toward this human religion.

Even the most graceful Christians among us aren't immune from this disease. Call it legalism. Call it human religion. It's all the same. It's a fundamental denial that it's by God's mercy we stand as Christians.

It's by God's mercy we persevere in grace. And it's by God's mercy we have the sure and steadfast hope of heaven. Human religion is blind. Jesus refers to the Pharisees and the Jewish religious experts who both fall into a pit these Jewish religious experts are blind to the mercy of God.

[19 : 21] With our technology blind people can do far more than ever they could do in Jesus' day but there are still limits to their capabilities. But how can religious leaders who themselves are blind to the mercy of God and the cross of Christ lead others in spiritual things?

How can a man who has never spiritually lived in Christ lead others to spiritual things? spiritually live in Christ? Thomas Chalmers from Anstruther the founder of the Free Church was one such leader.

He was a minister for many years before he became a Christian. During those non-Christian years when the ministry was thought of as a respectable well-paid career he fed his people a diet of moralism and legalism from his pulpit.

he was spiritually blind because he himself had not come to realize his own personal need of the mercy of God in Christ. He thought he could work his way to God through his religion through his status his intelligence and his good works.

All the time he was standing with the Pharisees against Jesus and not with Jesus. it was only later that Chalmers became a Christian and then God used him powerfully to shape a church and a nation in the gospel.

[20 : 44] Nobody sitting under the preaching of a pre-conversion Thomas Chalmers was hearing the gospel of the love of God and the cross of his son. Nobody. For that reason there were no conversions and there was no true discipleship in the five congregation he served.

After all a disciple is not above his teacher. Right? All his congregation learned was how to be morally upright in the hope that by their good works God would save them.

If you want to become spiritually blind to the mercy of God sit under the preaching of a man who is himself spiritually blind to his need of God's mercy. There are many reasons why churches decline but the chief of them is this it stops preaching the gospel and starts replacing the gospel it should be preaching with a thousand other things.

So it becomes eco-church it becomes social church it becomes woke church it becomes just like the world around it but I've never yet seen a church which stopped preaching the gospel gospel grow its decline only accelerates questions are asked and the answer is to become even more eco more social more woke whereas the right answer is to get back to basics and start believing and preaching the gospel.

The problem is that in churches like that the leadership are often personally blind to their need for the mercy of God. That's human religion it always blinds us to spiritual realities.

[22 : 30] Human religion always gives birth to judgmental condemning unforgiving and tight-fisted communities always.

We've already seen how judgmental the Pharisees were toward Jesus and his disciples trying to remove the splinter in another man's eye but at the same time they've got a huge big plank in their own.

This is what happens when we have unmerciful unforgiving people who have no personal experience of God's mercy in our community. They're always criticizing everyone else for tiny wee things.

Nothing is ever right. Nothing's ever good enough. They find fault with everything and everybody but never once will they ever admit to their own faults.

Pharisees were forever criticizing others. Their eyes were turned outwards to see the tiny wee sins of others while at the same time ignoring the bigger sins in their own hearts of lovelessness.

[23 : 38] I'm sure we've all been at the sharp end of such criticism and nothing prepares us for it. It's hurtful. It's terrifying. It leads to exhaustion, disillusion, disengagement.

Nothing is ever right. Nothing is ever good enough. And often the people who are criticizing us for the small things.

Huge big planks in their own eyes which because they are spiritually blind to their need of the mercy of God they can't see. Legalistic religion saps the heart and soul out of a community.

That's why in Matthew 11 Jesus offers rest to those who are weary and heavy laden. Just so exhausted trying to keep up appearances. I'm so exhausted trying to meet the expectations of my religious leaders.

Jesus says come to me and I'll give you rest. And before we in the evangelical church say that we're immune from such legalism let's consider how activism as evangelicals can guilt us and disillusion us.

[24 : 52] If we're not at every meeting of the church if we're not doing everything the church leadership is telling us we should do we begin to feel guilty become disillusioned we burn out not serving God but by trying to meet the standards set by other people.

And all the time Jesus says to the Pharisees you're a hypocrite you're a hypocrite in the world of a day a hypocrite was someone who wore a mask so that who they wear on the inside was obscured their life was an act everything was for show the most important thing in a community dominated by human religion is not so much doing the right thing but being seen to do the right thing.

Conversely it didn't really matter how disgusting you were on the outside just as long as you weren't found out. Religious life is all about keeping up appearances not about the reality of who you are on the inside.

For the Pharisees the biggest sin wasn't to do something wrong. Listen carefully. For the Pharisees the biggest sin wasn't to do something wrong but to be seen to do something wrong.

Wo betide us if we should put our washing out on a Sabbath to be seen by others. Doesn't matter what we do just as long as no one else sees us do it. Religion's all about appearances according to Jesus it's all so much hypocrisy and it leads to communities tyrannized and dominated by judgmentalism condemnation unforgiving and tight fistedness.

[26 : 38] What community do we want our church to be part of? What kind of community do we want our church to be? A community where our sins are lit up with new lights for everyone to see and every failure that we have is condemned or a community where our sins are treated with compassion and forgiven.

Some time ago Nate preached that great sermon where he coined that memorable phrase the church is a community crazy for mercy. That's the kind of culture our church wants to foster.

A community crazy for this kind of mercy. If this is the kind of community we want our church to be it has to start with each of us as individual Christians.

Not with our relationships to others in the first instance but with our individual relationships to God. For if we want to be merciful people we need to appreciate just how much mercy God has shown to us in the cross of his son.

If we want not to be condemnatory people we need to understand how God has not condemned us. If we want to be forgiving people we need ourselves to experience the forgiveness of God in the cross of Christ.

[28 : 02] And if we want to be generous people we need first to appreciate the generosity of God toward us. And it all happens it all happens at the cross of Christ.

