

A Balanced Testimony & Judgement

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Date: 21 May 2017

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[0 : 00] Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at different aspects of the ministry of mercy. It's been a little bit like looking at a beautiful diamond that has different facets and different sides to that diamond, each showing something really very beautiful and each side essential for the whole diamond to be what it is.

And today is no different. We're going to look at another side of the ministries of mercy that is essential for us to tackle and to understand.

Now, hopefully so far, you have gotten a handle on the fact that as Christians, we are to be involved in helping the poor, the marginalised, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, the immigrant.

It's mandated that we do that. We have seen this by looking at the call of mercy, at the character of mercy. Last week, we looked at the motivation of mercy.

And yet there's another facet that might have been niggling at you, at your heart and mind, right from the very beginning. And that is, how do I determine who I help and how do I help them?

[1 : 28] Now, I'm pretty sure if I took a survey of everybody here, we would get very, very different answers to that question of who do I help and how do I help?

Now, depending on your family background and your view of helping people, how you've been brought up, depending on your theology and what you think is the place of evangelism, whether evangelism was presented as the number one thing that we have to concentrate all efforts on as a church, depending on your personal views as to whether a person deserves help or doesn't deserve help, will depend on your personal efforts of how you might show mercy.

All of these will influence how you respond. I mentioned all of this might be niggling at your heart and mind, and that is a good thing if it has been, because both need to be engaged in the area of mercy ministry.

It isn't easy to determine who we help. Now, we saw in the parable of the Good Samaritan that we need to love our neighbours.

I think that we're getting there. We put it in front of you all the time that we need to love our neighbours. But the Samaritan really went way beyond his comfort zone, didn't he?

[2 : 59] He actually got his hands dirty, we might say. He sacrificed time. He sacrificed his own personal safety, his own money. He looked after the medical, the social, the financial needs of the chap on the road.

Did he expect to get something in return? No, he didn't. Did he place conditions on whether he would help or not help?

No, he didn't. He saw a need and he had the resources to help that need. Now, obviously, we might have limitations on what our resources are.

We might not be able to do exactly what the Samaritan did. But that is no excuse for not helping those in need. I was brought up with a very negative view about helping the poor and the marginalised.

Only some, this is what I was taught, only some deserved a coin or two into a charity box, but definitely not all. I was brought up to believe that charity starts at home and that there are many who are in a destitute situation, but they're there because they chose to be there and so we leave them alone.

[4 : 29] The really strange part of all of that in having that upbringing is that our family, my family, were recipients of the mercy of neighbours.

When my parents, who had gambled money away and had no money to feed four children, the neighbours actually showed mercy to us by giving us money for bread and for milk.

So there is a weirdness that in my upbringing of don't help but receive it. Now, Scripture does tell us that we do need to look after our families first.

In 1 Timothy 5, it says, Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents for this is pleasing to God.

Might I mention, that's actually what Candida is doing. So there is a condition in Scripture that we do support our family first. But the Scripture, there's another condition that Scripture puts on us and that is that we need to work.

[5 : 50] That's a mandate that has been given. And the fourth commandment says, Six days shall you labour and then we rest on the seventh day. There's an expectation that we work. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3, If a man will not work, he shall not eat.

That particular verse is about just continues not to work, does not have any desire to work. And he has no incentive to actually make a living for himself.

And the thing is, I mean, I knew a person who failed to work because he was given a financial allowance.

He was given housing actually also. He was given housing, very lovely housing. He was also given financial assistance every week. And so there was no desire for him to go and work.

Why would you work when you're living in a very plush house and you're being given an allowance? There are no bills to pay. Why would you not work? This wasn't actually mercy in that scenario.

[6 : 56] What it was, was foolishness. It was foolishness on behalf of the person who was giving the financial allowance with no expectation of doing anything, any work.

And it was foolishness on behalf of the person receiving the money because he was just taking the easy road out. Now, we can only understand the seeming contradictions in Scripture about there are some conditions that are given on how, what people have to do.

And yet we look at the Good Samaritan and that was totally unconditional. And so we've got this contradiction that is happening. But we need to actually look at the grace and the mercy of God to understand and put those two into some form of balance.

God's mercy to us, we've already said, was totally unconditional. We had no desire for God of our own being. We were enemies of God, and yet God loved us and reached out to us.

That's what the Romans 3 passage is saying. There was nothing in our words, in our eyes, in our deeds, nothing we did deserve God's love.

[8 : 11] And yet he still loved us unconditionally. God's mercy comes to us freely and without condition, and yet it proceeds, it moves forward with some conditions because we need to grow.

Once we receive this mercy and love from God, God is wanting us to grow. He doesn't want to keep us in the condition that he has found us in.

He therefore demands us to cooperate with the mercy that he's actually given us. This, you will know, is called sanctification, if you want a big word to give it.

But we grow day by day to be more and more Christ-like until Jesus returns. We never arrive at that position until Jesus returns.

But we are active in that process. We gather for worship together like we're doing today. We read our Bible, we pray, we serve, we encourage each other.

[9 : 22] We are very active in moving forward in the process once we've received love and mercy. So too it is with showing mercy.

The goal isn't to provide spot relief or stop suffering. Our real purpose must be to restore the whole person.

Mercy must have the purpose of seeing God's lordship realised in the lives of those that we help. Scripture supports this principle of restoration.

In Deuteronomy 15, we read, If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go.

And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor, threshing floor, and your winepress.

[10 : 25] Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

For us today, we don't have slaves, but this might mean something like we provide for those that we are actually helping or where we are putting our money, something like counselling or encouragement or education, or it might be job training, or it might be grants to start a little business for somebody so that they can move out of the scenario that they're in.

All these are ways in which we can help and develop the poor. Our mercy must have as its goal the rehabilitation of the whole person.

Now, working here at the church office, we often get people who come asking for money. Generally speaking, the money is for train tickets, and so it's just a little bit of money that people wish to actually collect from us.

Now, over the years, and I've been here a long time now, over the years, we've done lots of different things. We have actually given the train ticket money sometimes. Other times, we've gone down to the station and bought tickets, and I remember ever so clearly one woman, I walked down to the station and I bought the ticket, and she was furious with me that I bought her a train ticket.

[12 : 01] So that didn't go down so well, that situation. And Dave Lawrence, who used to be on our team, the general manager for St Paul's at one stage, there was one chap who would regularly come here to St Paul's.

His name was Mark. And over time, we did give him little bits of money. And so Dave decided that what would be a really good thing to do is to spend more time with Mark.

So he would spend time with Mark. He'd chat to him. Sometimes he'd read God's word to him. He prayed with him. And he said to him, because Mark always said, I'm wanting to get a job.

And so in the end, Dave decided that what would be a really good idea is to give him some odd jobs around here, just little jobs. And then he would give him his train ticket money, and that would actually be a great thing to do.

It's happened once, and we never saw Mark again. You see, many people are rebellious against what the Lord wants, and of their own volition, they will stop asking or stop coming if we are not giving in the way that they are wanting.

[13 : 21] So that's actually very tricky, but it was the right thing that Dave actually did, I believe, to try and put worth into this chap who didn't wish for that to happen.

So we must give mercy, and we give it unconditionally. That is what we keep repeating. But eventually, we have to call the whole person to Christ.

This might take a long time to do that, to get to the point where we can share the gospel with somebody. But it is our aim in showing love to our neighbour.

That must always be the overarching. Paul actually mentioned it with Anglicare, that that's the overall arching aim. You see, if we truly understand the gospel, we will know that Jesus is going to return, and there is a heaven, and there is a hell.

And when we die, there is only two choices, heaven or hell. So if we are actually only giving a Band-Aid solution to help somebody that is not going to actually speak life words of salvation and the gospel into a person, then we are not loving them at all.

[14 : 42] Really hard thing. But we want to actually think of the bigger picture. More thought needs to go into any situation that we come across.

And that's where our mind has to come into it. There are times when we may need to stop giving aid. So it's not an unending task.

We can cut off aid if it is unmerciful to continue. Sometimes a person needs to feel the full consequences of his own irresponsible actions, if there are some.

I would call this tough love. It's more loving to stop than to continue. Sometimes the mercy needs to be withdrawn, and we set new guidelines.

Maybe you can talk to, if it's an individual that you're talking to, talk to a person and try and encourage them to actually change their position. Maybe do something that is going to move them towards changing their position, taking some responsibility.

[15 : 59] And until such times they take some responsibility, that's when you can actually assist again. But you might continue to meet with them, to pray with them.

You might meet with them and just chat with them and be a listening ear. But sometimes withdrawing aid is a good thing and a right thing to do.

We had a situation of a pastor friend in the Philippines one time when we were over there on mission, and the pastor was very poor. I have to say most pastors in the Philippines are poor.

But he was very poor. He had children. He wasn't succeeding in feeding his children, and yet he was trying to grow a church as well. So we decided that we would actually send him a bit of money.

Now, \$20 to us is not much, but in the Philippines it's a massive amount of money. And so we sent some money over. I can't remember how much. And that was specifically for him to look after his family.

[16 : 59] And then a little while later we get an email to say, with the money that you sent, praise God, I was able to go and get a loan and buy a motorbike because in the Philippines for a pastor to have a motorbike, it's very prestigious.

And it looks as if you've arrived, so to speak. I've been up to buy a motorbike, get a loan, get a motorbike, but unfortunately I'm unable to pay the repayments.

Can you send some more money so that we can pay, you know, sort of to pay the repayments? Well, of course, I got the job of contacting this particular pastor to say that money was to feed your family because your first call from God is to actually feed your family, to look after your family first.

And so the money that we are sending will be stopped and you need to take that motorbike back to whoever you bought it from and until such times we know that has happened, there will be no more support.

Now, that was a tough thing to do, but that was tough love. That actually had to happen because even then his family were not being cared for. That is not unusual, I have to say, unfortunately.

[18 : 22] Now, the Bible is very, very clear about the different causes of poverty and we need to get a handle on this so that we don't make a mistake in making different assumptions.

One cause of poverty is oppression or injustice and there's lots of Bible verses that go with all of this. But oppression is any social condition or unfair treatment that brings or keeps somebody in poverty.

It also includes, oppression includes delaying wages or giving unjust low wages or it might be a court or a government system that is weighted towards the wealthy and the Australian government is in question at this moment in time in exactly that sort of thing.

Or it might be high interest loans that are an example of oppression. Number two, cause is natural disaster or calamity.

Scripture shares many of those things. It might be crop failures, especially with our farmers. It might be disabling injuries. It might be victimisation by criminals.

[19 : 49] It might be floods, storms, fires. All of those sorts of things are natural things that can come upon a family or a person and they have had nothing to do with all those things happening.

And the third, poverty can be caused by personal sin. It might be a life of laziness. It might be problems with self-discipline.

It might be expensive tastes and luxury seeking can be a reason for economic trouble. Now, it's important to see the differences within these three categories so that you do not treat all situations the same.

It's equally important to see that many situations may encounter all three together. You do not want to be trapped into thinking that all poor are oppressed and therefore you don't see the importance of setting any conditions on caring and showing mercy.

But equally, you don't actually want to think that all poor are irresponsible because that's not right either. If we're to help, then we need to try and understand what the root cause of any situation is and discern what is really needed.

[21 : 14] What is needed? Is it food? Is it money? Is it counselling? Is it education? Various types of aids? Is it respect? Is it loving concern? Or maybe it's just a listening ear.

Now, in community groups this week, I'll give you a number of case studies for you to examine and for you to determine what type of help would be needed in these case studies.

And I didn't bring it up, but in this month's Eternity magazine, there is a fabulous example of a woman who was living in a car and she was shown mercy and just the transformation in that woman's life.

It's a great article. So it's out in the atrium if you wish to get it. What we need to remember in all of this is that grace is free, but it's not cheap.

Grace costs Jesus his life. Grace comes to the undeserving, you and me and everybody else, but its goal is to intercept self-destructive behaviour.

[22 : 31] Our love is not mere sentiment. It is active and it longs to bring about healing and change in the lives of the recipient under the kingship of Jesus.

Nothing less will satisfy it. Matthew 5.16 says, In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Mercy has impact. It melts hearts. It removes objections. It forces respect out of those who are even hostile to the gospel.

By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. The ministry of mercy within the Christian community is perhaps the most startling display of love for one another that is seen by the world.

The Roman Emperor Julian tried in the fourth century to revive paganism because paganism was dying because of the spread of Christianity.

[23 : 50] And as part of his plan, he ordered that hospices, hospitals for want of another word, must be established in every town to help the poor and give relief.

He said, it is disgraceful that while impious Galileans, that is the Christians, it's disgraceful that the Christians support their own poor and they support ours as well.

All men see that they lack aid from us, he says. So he wanted more hospitals set up. Christians in the early church, they were promiscuous.

I never thought I'd say that word in here and think it was a good thing. But Christians were promiscuous with their charity and the world paid attention. Can that be said of us today?

Let's return to the comment about ministry of the word and deed. It is inappropriate to ask whether evangelism or social concern is more important.

[25 : 07] They go together and should not be divided. They are both necessary ministries. Jesus went everywhere teaching and healing.

He came to speak and to serve. So the church is gifted to both speak and to serve. In 1 Peter it says, if anyone speaks he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

If anyone serves he must do it with the strength God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. There are many, many different there are many different points of view when we come to word and deed ministry.

And all of us will fit into one or a couple of these mixing. Peter Wagner discerns that there are five views concerning whether you do word or deed or evangelism and social concern.

One is number A teaches that the ministry of mercy and social justice is the only legitimate function of the church.

[26 : 15] B holds that social concern is the most important function but evangelism is part of the mission so we have to do a bit of that on the side.

C social concern and evangelism go hand in hand and deed and word are absolutely equal in importance. D evangelism is the primary function of the church and the ministry of deed is a ministry but it's secondary.

So let's put it to the side. And E states flatly that social concern is not the job of the church at all in the world.

We carry on only the ministry of the word. Now all churches will fit into one of them or they might mix over sometimes.

Even we as individuals if I really pushed you you will have a view of which one you think is right. So let me repeat it is inappropriate to ask whether evangelism or social concern is more important.

[27 : 28] They constitute a whole that should not be divided. Remember deed ministry like grace ministry is unmerited favour.

Our motive for any ministry must always be love. Where does that leave us then when thinking as a church and as individuals?

Well God commands both mercy ministry and word ministry. They are not options my friends. Both evangelism and mercy ministry both we are commanded as individuals and we are commanded as a church to be involved in both.

You might like to question if you are doing both of them. We cannot get away with saying that we can't afford to help the poor because Paul says in Ephesians 4:28 we work so that we have something to share with those in need.

Now our work and our pay packet surprisingly is not for us to plan holidays build houses and do extensions and buy lovely material possessions first.

[28 : 44] That is not why we get a pay packet. It's fascinating I found it fascinating that the Bible even addresses this. It is to support our families first give to our local church and to support the needy and after we've done those three then luxuries like holidays and material possessions come into play.

Now we just might need to adjust our personal giving so that it is in better biblical priority because that's not Debbie Gould just speaking that is what the Bible says the order of how money should be used.

And we must do the same as a church with what we support in the way that we minister. We must see that word and deed are inextricably united and inseparable.

We must minister to the whole person and depending on the situation at hand it might be meeting needs first and word later. Who knows?

Every circumstance must be treated on its own base and merit and there is no set pattern in how we do this and that's what makes it so tricky.

[30 : 06] But we must be doing it. You may need to reconsider or do some exploring into the ministries that you might already be supporting to see where they fit with deed and word.

You may also like to think long and hard as to what you support and how you support a need ministry. We've mentioned before our mission giving this month is for ropes crossing and whatever is over the \$10,000 mark will go towards grace ministry and ESL ministry.

These ministries are desiring to combine deed and word in different ways and in different timing ministries are all about.

It fits the mandate that God has given us. And you might also be thinking I cannot help every person that I see who is in need. Well guess what?

You don't have to. God actually says go and preach the good news to every person in the world. Do we do that? No because it's impossible for us to do that.

[31 : 22] But we can do a little bit in how we show mercy. What we are to have is to have a heart after mercy to help where we can and to be purposeful in what we say and do.

That is you cannot feed every homeless person that you might pass by on the street. But you might be able to help one of them.

You might be able to maybe give a little bit of money or maybe give a salad sandwich. You might be able to say hi one day and the next day make eye contact.

There may be a progression of how you help that person and who knows the Lord might just open up a whole avenue of something fantastic in sharing about Jesus with them.

It starts with a very small effort. mercy and evangelism are like smoke and fire. Where one is, the other must be near.

[32 : 33] Only when both are occurring will actual growth in the kingdom of God occur. And that diamond that we saw mentioned at the beginning, that's when we'll see the diamond shining very, very brightly.

bless you all in your endeavours.