



attributes of *God*

WEEK 16 — GOD IS MERCIFUL



JOHN FRAME

"God is a God who waits. He can accomplish his will instantly. He can bring final judgment on the wicked immediately. But he chooses not to do so. He has chosen to write a drama and spread it out in temporal sequence. So he tolerates evil for a time, waiting until later to judge it fully. Now we learn that God's decision to wait is not arbitrary, nor is it mainly in the interest of creating a more interesting story. Rather, it is a function of his love and grace. So he gives people time for repentance."

LAMENTATIONS 3 : 21 - 24

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

GOD'S MERCY

God's mercy is one of the more difficult attributes to classify and define.

ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE GOD'S MERCY

A. W. Tozer – "Goodness is the source of mercy."

Herman Bavinck – "God's goodness toward those who are in misery."

Wayne Grudem – "God's goodness toward those in misery and distress."

John Frame – "A sympathetic view of another's distress, motivating helpful action."

A. W. Pink – "The ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures. Thus, mercy presupposes sin."

A. W. Tozer – "Mercy is God's goodness confronting human guilt and suffering."

Mercy includes God forgiving sin and God showing compassion to those who are suffering.

Sometimes it is called God's compassion.

GOD'S MERCY IS SEEN THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

Exodus 33:19 – “And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

Exodus 34:6 – “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...”

Nehemiah 9:17-19 – “They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness.”

Psalms 103:8-13 – “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.”

Isaiah 63:7 – “I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.”

Jonah 4:2 – “And he prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”

Luke 1:76-79 – “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light.”

James 5:11 – “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.”

1 Peter 1:3-4 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you”

IMPORTANT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD'S MERCY

1. God does not have mercy, He is mercy

Psalm 116:5 - "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful."

"Mercy is not something God has but something God is." (Tozer)

"One fact about the mercy of God is that it never began to be. I've heard of men who were hard-hearted or careless, but they began to get stirred up and mercy blossomed forth. It never was so of God.... God's mercy is simply what God is – uncreated and eternal." (Tozer)

This means that God's mercy is an unchanging attribute.

2. The expression of God's mercy is subject to His will

Remember the unity of God. God's mercy does not act in isolation.

The giving of mercy is subject to God's divine will.

Romans 9:15-16 – "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy."

"It is not the wretchedness of the creature which causes him to show mercy, for God is not influenced by things outside of himself as we are..... Mercy arises solely from God's imperial pleasure." (Pink)

EXPRESSIONS OF GOD'S MERCY

1. God shows mercy in a general way to all of His creation

Psalm 145:9 - "The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."

Matthew 5:45 – "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

2. God shows mercy to people in distress

“God actively ‘compassionates’ suffering men – I like that wonderfully well.” (Tozer)

Exodus 2:23-24 – “During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.”

Matthew 14:14 – “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”

Matthew 15:32 – “Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.’”

Mark 6:34 – “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. “

3. God shows a special mercy to His own people

God’s mercy to His people is seen in the forgiveness of their sins.

Remember – God can only be merciful to sinners if He punishes the sin as His justice requires.
The sin debt must be paid.

Psalms 51:1 – “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.”

Psalms 78:38 – “Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.”

Ephesians 2:4-7 – “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved -- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

God's mercy to His people includes His presence, His covenant faithfulness, and His provision.

Nehemiah 9:19-24 – “You in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land...”

4. God's patience is an expression of His mercy

God's patience is “that power of control which God exercises over himself, causing him to bear with the wicked and forebear so long in punishing them.... The patience of God is that excellency which causes him to sustain great injuries without immediately avenging himself.” (Pink)

Exodus 34:6 – “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”

Romans 2:4 – “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

We should be very thankful for God's patience with us.

“Let us review our own lives. It is not long since we followed a multitude to do evil, had no concern for God's glory, and lived only to gratify self. How patiently he bore with our vile conduct! And now that grace has snatched us as brands from the burning, giving us a place in God's family, and has begotten us unto an eternal inheritance in glory, how miserably we requite him. How shallow our gratitude, how tardy our obedience, how frequent our backslidings! One reason why God suffers the flesh to remain in the believer is that he may exhibit his ‘longsuffering to usward’ (2 Peter 3:9).” (Pink)

MERCY IS A COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTE

Luke 6:36 – “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

Ephesians 4:1-3 – “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

1 Peter 3:8 – “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

1 John 3:17 – “But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”

“A great many people are very merciful in their beds, in their living rooms, in their new cars. They have compassion (a noun), but they never ‘compassionate’ (a verb).... They’re very compassionate – for a minute and a half – but they don’t ‘compassionate;’ that is, they don’t do anything about it.” (Tozer)

1 John 3:17-18 – “But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

“Lord, your mercies are new every morning. But I am so little like you – I show very little mercy to others, while I expect you to show your mercy to me all the time. Please forgive me for my lack of mercy. And forgive me for not being more grateful for the mercy you have extended to me in Jesus Christ.” (Rosemary Jensen)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Often mercy is described as simply “not getting what we deserve.”
Is that definition of mercy sufficient?
How would you describe God’s mercy in just one sentence?

2. God feels and shows mercy toward us when we are suffering or in distress.
Why then does He not always remove those trials?
How does He show His mercy to us while in the midst of trials and suffering?

3. Why do we want God to show us a lot of mercy, but then we are less willing to extend that same amount of mercy to others around us?

4. How should understanding God’s mercy impact how and for whom we pray?

5. Mercy is a communicable attribute.
How should that truth impact how we treat one another here at Gateway?

6. What songs do you know that describe God’s mercy and patience?

