

GOD'S MERCY

The Lord is merciful (Jonah 4:2). God's mercy is His kindness to a person in misery (Matt. 9:27). The apostle Paul wrote, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3). Notice the order. God is first the Father of Jesus Christ, and then our Father if we are in Christ. Christ has everything first, and we receive all from Him. He is the first Son, and we are sons. He is the first beloved of God, and we are beloved in Him. He is filled first with all grace, and we are filled from Him (John 1:16).

God must first be the Father of Christ, and then our Father through faith in Christ, so that He may be "the Father of mercies" to us. God's mercy must see God's justice satisfied. One attribute must not devour another in God (Ps. 85:10). God cannot wrong His own justice, but it must be satisfied by Christ (Rom. 3:26). Christ took our nature to die for us (Heb. 2:14, 17), so that God could be our Father despite our sins, for He has punished our sins in Christ, our surety (Heb. 7:22). Thus God, out of His heart of mercy, found a way that He might do good to us and bring together His mercy and justice. God is holiness; we are a mass of sin and corruption. But Christ died for us, and God is the Father of mercies to all who are in Christ. Since God's justice has been satisfied for sin, the obstacle is removed and the stream of God's mercy runs freely.

God is merciful by nature. The sea is not more naturally wet, the sun does not more naturally shine, fire does not more naturally burn, and gravity does not more naturally pull weights down, than God naturally shows mercy when His justice is satisfied. God's attributes, such as His wisdom and power, would terrify us apart from His mercy. But if we know Him as the Father of mercies, then all His attributes becomes sweet to us. His wisdom will plan good things for us. His power will free us from our enemies. His justice will vindicate us against those who wrong us.

God glorifies Himself in showing mercy. God is merciful before we are converted. He delays His wrath and does not punish the sinner immediately. God is merciful in forgiving all sin, punishment, and guilt when we trust in Christ. God is merciful in correcting some of the sins of His children (Heb. 12:6), while passing over many sins, and moderating His correction with gentleness and perfect timing. He is merciful in continuing our daily blessings. If we have comfort, it is mercy. If we have strength, it is mercy. His mercies do not fail but are new every morning (Lam. 3:22–23). Everything that comes from God to His children is dipped in mercy.

When God is severe with sinners in His justice, it is their fault. His heart is merciful (Lam. 3:33). He is good in Himself. We provoke Him to be severe in justice. But in His own nature, "he delighteth in mercy" (Mic. 7:18). Therefore He will be merciful to all who repent of their sins and take hold of Christ by a true faith. This is the name by which God wants to be known, "merciful and gracious" (Ex. 34:6). The Psalms tells us the same thing, again and again (Ps. 86:15; 103:8, 13; 111:4; 116:5; 145:8–9).

God's promises are promises of mercy. Whenever a sinner repents, regardless of how many or how bad his sins may be, God will forgive them all (1 John 1:7). The Bible says to the guilty soul, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7). We are vindictive, quick to be offended and seek revenge. Our thoughts of mercy are poor and narrow because we are so unmerciful. But God's thoughts are above our thoughts, and His ways above our ways (Isa. 55:7–8). God's mercy is infinite!

—adapted from Richard Sibbes, *Exposition of 2 Corinthians 1*