

# Understanding God's Mercy

by Casey Head

The vast majority of people have one of two views of God and His gift of salvation: either they feel that God owes them and every decent person salvation or they understand that what they actually deserve is eternal punishment. Some will become angry, and even hostile, when we discuss God's justice and wrath and show that there is only one right way to heaven. They will scream, "God won't send good, sincere people to hell!" Others will humbly acknowledge that they have sinned, which means that they deserve hell, and that no amount of goodness and sincerity will earn a person the gift of eternal life. Which position is correct? Obviously the position that accentuates the mercy of God. The more we understand the mercy of God, the better equipped and more willing we will be to serve Him.

First of all, what does it mean that God is merciful? Mercy is defined as "the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of Him who shows it. It is used of God who is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4)." In other words, when God delivers sinful man from the punishment that he deserves, He has acted mercifully. Grace is another marvelous quality of God, and it works concurrently with mercy. It is often defined as "unmerited favor." When we piece these two qualities together, we learn that God delivers us from the punishment we deserve and allows us to receive the reward of heaven that we do not deserve. What a wonderful God we serve!

Let us further the point that the Lord is merciful. Paul says in Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." God chose to send His Son into a condemned and unrighteous world. It is not as if God looked down upon man and said, "Hm, they are righteous enough, so I'll send My Son as a sacrifice, just to help them out a little." It would have been just for the Lord to destroy the world and end it then, but He chose not to- He chose to be merciful. It wasn't our own works that saved us, for our works were evil, but rather it was by the mercy of God. Christians are also told in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Clearly, we serve a God of abundant mercy. While we have earned the wages of sin, which is eternal death (Rom. 6:23), God has freely given us eternal life, a gift that we do not deserve. We will never deserve it!

Some people may still misunderstand the mercy of God, assuming that mercy overlooks sin and allows wicked people access to heaven, but this is not the case. Mercy provides a way to escape the condemnation we deserve, which means that we must respond to God's call and obey His commands to obtain the gift of His mercy. In Luke 1:50, for example, we are told, "And His mercy is on them *that fear Him* from generation to generation." Mercy is available to all, but only those who fear God and obey Him will actually receive the benefits of it. The same is true of grace. Paul says in Galatians 5:4 that we can fall from grace, and in Romans 6:1, the point is made that we cannot "continue in sin that grace may abound." We cannot live wickedly and expect God to overlook our sin and be merciful towards us. This goes back to the "God owes me" attitude that many people have. God doesn't owe us- we owe God.

What is your attitude towards the mercy of God? Do you feel that you are basically good enough and moral enough and that God owes you salvation? If this is your attitude, repent! God will only accept the humble (Jam. 4:6, 10), but will reject the proud. Recognize your dependance upon the Almighty God, and appreciate His character and His gift.