

## **BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR MERCY MINISTRY**

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Feb 5, 2010

[Adapted from Tim Keller's \*Ministries of Mercy\*](#)

Mercy ministry is working to alleviate the burdens of another person, it is meeting their real or perceived needs through Gospel driven deeds. Mercy Ministry is kingdom ministry. It incorporates all of the effects of the coming of the kingdom of God and thus is a visual, viable representation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, through whom all things are redeemed, first partially in the old covenant, then really and more fully in the new covenant, and finally and completely in the kingdom to come. This kingdom principle and God's own pattern of "mercy ministry" can be traced throughout Scripture, beginning at creation and continued through these last days.

In creation, God demonstrates his concern for mankind and the world in establishing the principle of dominion, through which man is called to rule the earth as God's viceroy, for man's good and God's glory. In the fall, all of man's relationships are shattered: with God (a theological destruction); with himself (a spiritual destruction); with others (a social destruction); and with nature (a physical destruction). God mercifully sets out to heal all of the destruction wrought by man in the fall, and we see this story of redemption unfold throughout Scripture. Mercy ministry primarily seeks to redeem physical and social destruction, but is often carried out as a window to spiritual and theological redemption.

God's first act of mercy toward man occurs in Genesis Chapter 3, when He provides Adam and Eve coverings to avert the shame caused by their recognition of one another's nakedness after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their first act of disobedience. This is the first act of mercy recorded in all of human history, so the Father's provision of covering is in fact the paradigm of mercy followed by the rest of the Old Testament Scripture (and that we are called to follow as well): in Job we see a pre-mosaic representation of mercy in his providing for the needy; in the law, God requires social and moral righteousness from his people; and through the prophets mercy to the poor is represented as evidence of faith, God's people are judged as covenant breakers for failing to show mercy to the poor, and the Messiah is characterized as one who will show mercy to the poor.

The incarnation of the Son of God is the most complete illustration of mercy that we are given in Scripture. Jesus Christ is the true Adam, who subdues all creation to God causing it to bear fruit for God's glory; He is the great high priest who extends mercy and forgiveness to all in need; and he is the great deacon who identifies with and pours himself out in costly service to the poor. Through his preaching and miracles, Christ demonstrates how the kingdom of God restores all of creation and how the effects of sin are healed under His rule. The incarnation ultimately illustrates God's mercy in that Christ humbles himself in many ways and to great depths in order to alleviate the burden of sin. Jesus Christ is described as being mighty in word and deed and we are called to follow him as our example.

In these last days, the church represents Christ to the world, following his preaching and example by working to heal all the effects of the fall, thereby manifesting the redemptive kingdom of God. The internalized reality of the gospel is the primary (original and foundational) motivation for Christians to show mercy. If we truly know and comprehend fully that we were enemies of God saved by mercy alone, we are both open and generous to the outcasts and unlovely. Christians are clearly called to follow Christ's example in humble service by each of us setting aside ourselves and considering others first. Jesus clearly teaches in Matthew 25 that we will be judged not only based on our profession of faith but also on our deeds. The call to mercy is not only to the individual Christian, but to the church corporately. The church is called to show mercy through the calling of Deacons who are ordained to care for the needs of the people (this is one clear indication that mercy is not only suggested to but required of the church).

As to the scope and scale of mercy, in order to answer the question "Who is my neighbor?", as posed by the teacher of the law in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and, "To what extent should I serve God and help my neighbor?", as posed in this parable and the Parable of the Rich Young Ruler, our Lord makes it clear that our neighbor is not only our fellow churchman (although there is an emphasis throughout scripture on ministering first and foremost to those to whom we are most closely bonded in covenantal relationship), but anyone with whom we come in contact with, and to him we should minister fully until his needs are met. The question then arises, how do we handle ministry to the unresponsive, slothful poor? Keller recommends offering assistance freely to all in need at first, as the gospel and mercy of our Lord is offered freely to all men, but then let mercy limit mercy: as the mercy assistance works to aide someone in rebellion and disobedience, the assistance should be removed (similar to how a person in open unrepentance and hostility to Christ and His church should be disciplined) with the hope of bringing about repentance.

### *Scripture References - Biblical Basis for Mercy Ministry*

The Biblical basis for Mercy Ministry is in many ways a paraphrase of Timothy Keller's *Ministries of Mercy* P&R Publishing, 1997.

**II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.**

In this passage we note the extent of our Lord's sacrifice to bring us grace. The Lord made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down his inheritance in heaven in order that you might take it up through faith. As Moses forsook the treasures of Egypt to lead Israel from bondage, how much more did Jesus Christ set aside his rightful place at the right hand of the Father to give his children his identity and bring you as brothers into his Father's house.

*The word became flesh and made its dwelling among us ...*In the incarnation, Jesus Christ set aside the glory he had from the beginning and came to earth to die on a tree. For whom did he die? He died for you. He is your Lord. Why did he die for you? Were you comely? Hardly, you were ugly, overcome with sin. Were you good, alive to him, obeying his commands? No, you were wicked, dead, running from Him. Were you his friend? Not so, but his grievous enemy. What then compelled him to humble himself for your sake? Nothing. Nothing save his sovereign mercy and the love with which he had loved you from before the foundation of the earth. To what end did he love you? So that he might be glorified and feared for his great mercy, so that you might share in his inheritance as a son of the most high God, and so that you might do the good works that he prepared in advance for you to do.

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...* Though he set aside his glory, he gained it back again through the cross. The most profound act of service, humiliation and suffering won the most high prize. He has humbled and been exalted. He has humbled that you might be exalted together with him. Therefore, humble yourself by faith and submit to his commands. Serve your neighbor in need, that he too might be exalted to reign together with Christ for eternity.

**Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not loose heart.**

In this passage, Paul encourages us to persevere in service, assuring us with a sure promise that our work is not in vain. First, this passage clearly demonstrates that the life of Christian service is truly *hard work*. Only the man that strains under his load is in danger of growing weary. The sluggard has early fallen by the wayside and only the one who perseveres in doing good remains. Second, we are assured that Christian service is *altogether good*. Do not let your physical weariness or fainting heart convince you otherwise. Your work of loving your neighbor is good, in fact, *because of* (not *in spite of*) its cost to you here on earth, you will surely reap your reward in heaven. Third, we have a promise: *our good will bear a harvest* in due season. What greater hope do we have to bear us through today's weariness than this sure promise from our God? As

he promised the land to Abraham, as he promised a Redeemer to Israel, indeed as he has promised to carry on to completion His work in you, He too will carry on to completion His good works through you in due season. Last, He will carry on if you *persevere in faith* and do not lose heart. For faith is being sure of what we hope for and confident of what we do not see. Even if we are not allowed the pleasure of seeing the fruits of our labor today, we know that they will ripen in time, because He is faithful, He will do it.

### ***Biblical Framework for Mercy Ministry***

**Creation** - Genesis 1:27-31 The principle of dominion

**The Fall & its effects** - Genesis Ch. 3

- Man at enmity with God - Gen 3: 22-24, Ex 19:20-25
- Man at enmity with himself - Gen 3:7
- Man at enmity with man - Gen 3:12-13
- Man at enmity with nature - Gen 3: 17-19

**Redemption, conquering the effects of the fall**

- Man & God reconciled - II Cor 5:18-19
- Man & himself reconciled - Col 3:10
- Man & man reconciled - Mal 4:6, Phil 2:1-4
- Man & creation reconciled - Rom 8:21
- Physical & Spiritual nature of the coming of the Kingdom of God  
Luke 17:17 - 19 - The leper's faith makes him well, and Jesus healed that God might be glorified.

### ***Scriptural References with notes in order***

**God the Father's example of mercy - Gen 3:21**

**The righteous mercy of Job - Job 29:16-17**

**The necessity of mercy as required by the Law**

- Ex 23: 10-11 the principle of gleaning is established
- Deut 15: 8-15 open your hand wide to the poor
- Deut 14:28-29 a portion of the tithe goes to the poor

**The judgement of mercy - the Prophets**

- Amos 2:6-7 God's people have broken the covenant in not giving to the poor
- Isa 1:10-17 Giving to the poor is evidence of faith
- Isa 61:1-3 The Redeemer will have compassion for the poor

**The Incarnation of mercy - Jesus**

- The incarnation - John 1:14, Phil 2:5-9
- Jesus is the true Adam - Romans 5:14-21, Heb 2:5-8
- Jesus is the great High Priest - Heb 4: 14-16

- Jesus is the great Deacon - Mark 10:35-45, 2 Cor 8:9
- Jesus is mighty in word and deed: Luke 24:19

### **The Church's call to mercy**

- The task of kingdom work - Matt 28:16-20
- The Church as the restored Adam, the call to redemption through spiritual warfare - 2 Cor 10:5
- The Church as a priest, the call to sacrifice - Heb 13:10-16
- The Church as a Deacon, the call to service - Matt 20:24-28, Gal 6:10
- The effects of the gospel – 1 John 3:16
- The example of Christ held up as a model - 2 Cor 8:9, Rom 5:10
- The call to humility in service - Phil 2: 1-4
- The office of Deacon established - Acts 6:1-7
- Judgment for the church based on mercy - Matt 25:31-46

### **Examples of mercy**

- The Good Samaritan - Matt 10: 25-37
- The Rich Young Ruler - Mark 10: 19-22

### **Covenantal nature of care for the needy**

**Care for brother first: Lev 25:25, 1Tim 5:8, Gal 6:10**

**Conditional nature of mercy - Matt 18:15-17, 1 Tim 5:3-10, 2Thess 3:10**