

5:7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

Mercy and grace often have the same meaning, but when they differ, the difference is this: Grace is a loving response when love is undeserved (Carson, 23). Mercy is a loving response to someone who is in misery or helpless (Carson, 24). Grace deals with sin and guilt itself. Grace extends pardon. It cleanses and reinstates. Mercy deals with what we see of pain, misery, and distress (the results of sin). It extends relief. It cures and heals. It is compassion for those in need (Stott, 47). Both grace and mercy treat people in terms of what they need rather than by what they deserve.

Jesus is telling those who want to enter the Kingdom that if they are not merciful, God will not show them mercy. The person who is unmerciful fails to see his own need is like the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 and John 8:9-11, or the evil slave in Matthew 18:23-35.

Jesus is not making God's mercy contingent upon ours nor is He saying that men can buy God's mercy by being merciful; rather, He is saying that those who recognize their own need of mercy and the mercy of God in their own lives will be merciful to others.

Those who are not merciful to others don't feel they need mercy from God. Therefore, they do not seek it, nor will they receive it. Nothing moves us to forgive more than the wondering knowledge that we are forgiven. Nothing proves more readily that we are forgiven than our readiness to forgive (Matt 6:14; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). To be meek is to acknowledge that we are sinners. To be merciful is to have compassion on others, for they are sinners too (Stott, 48).

5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

It is the believer's hope that someday he will see God face to face, stand in His presence, wonder at His glory, and enjoy Him forever. Yet, it is clear that only those who have pure hearts will.

"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully." (Psalm 24:3-4).

The Bible assumes that as true believers the thought of fixing our hope on Him will motivate us to live holy lives. John says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1 John 3:2-3)

Likewise the writer of Hebrews tells us, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." (12:14)

Although we know this, most can identify with the words of Solomon all too well: "Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?" (Proverbs 20:9)

In the Bible, the heart is pictured as the center of the personality. Elsewhere, Jesus' assessment of the heart is not encouraging. He says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (15:19; cf. Jer.17:9,10; Ro.1:21; 2:5). In spite of this, He also says that a pure heart is an indispensable prerequisite for fellowship with God (Ps. 24:3-5; Deut. 10:16; Heb.12:14).

Purity of heart should not be confused with conformity to rules (Isa. 1:10-17). Even good deeds that don't come from a pure heart do not find God's favor.

The pure in heart will be blessed by seeing God.

"Virtually, all of our spiritual sight in this life is mediated to us through the Word of God or the work of God in providence. We "see" images and reflections of his glory. We hear echoes and reverberations of his voice. But there will come a day when God himself will dwell among us. His glory will no longer be inferred from lightning and mountains and roaring seas and constellations of stars. Instead, our experience of him will be direct. His glory will be the very light in which we move (Revelation 21:23)." (Piper)

One day the Kingdom of God will be consummated. In that day there will be a new heaven and new earth and righteousness will abound. The Christian will be set free from the desire to sin. John says that the believer should begin to prepare for that day by purifying himself now (I Jn. 3:2, 3).

Although a believer will never completely cease from sin while alive on this earth, his values are expected to be the same as those of the Kingdom. His desire should be to be pure.

There is a progression of thought from verse 3. The one who enters the Kingdom is the one who sees his own sin (v.3), grieves over it (v.4), hungers and thirsts for righteousness (v.6), and having recognized that he has received mercy, extends mercy to others (v.7).

At the same time, anyone who reads the Sermon on the Mount should sense how much we fall short of the standards of a perfect and holy God. This makes us realize how spiritually bankrupt we are and drives us back to the beginning of the Sermon. We cannot generate merciful and pure hearts until we are first broken people.