

## **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."**

by Hendrik Joubert

Personality is formed early in our lives. Experiences cause us to have certain views of life and the things of this life; some become quite bitter, while others are rather pleasant. There is a spectrum of qualities we may discuss and associate as characteristics of this or that type of personality – things which just come *naturally* for each individual. *This is who I am...love me or leave me...*

In the sermon on the mount the Lord supplies us with the characteristics for one who desires to become a child of God. Depending on our personality some of these qualities come rather naturally, while others are just not *who I am*. Jesus is *not* announcing a potluck of traits for which each of us will receive some blessing or another, depending on who we are. Those who would be His followers have to develop these qualities or forfeit the kingdom of heaven.

The relevance of repentance becomes obvious when we consider those qualities which do not come naturally for us. We cannot continue with the idea that this *is just not who I am* – it is who we *need to be* if we are going to be saved from our sins. Those who resist with the idea that it is just not who we are will most likely be the ones who decide that the way God instructs us to worship Him is not the only way.

The qualities listed by Jesus are interconnected and one may strongly argue for succession in the order which the Lord announces them. The list is followed by a warning concerning that which those who dare to change may expect from others – opposition. This is followed by the reason why we must adopt these submissive qualities – Christians are to be living examples of the influence the gospel has upon sinners who desire the grace of God.

Consider firstly the essence and then also the position of the quality we want to discuss at this time: **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."** (**Matthew 5:7**) Among the synonyms for mercy are *compassion, pity, forgiveness, kindness, sympathy* and *understanding*. One which stands out is *forgiveness*. It is debatable whether the number of people who sin against us exceed the number we have sinned against; however every sin is first and foremost against God. (**Psalm 51:4**)

If God is willing to forgive, who can refuse? In **Matthew 18:21-35** Jesus answers the question as to how often we are to forgive our brother. Not what seems to be a generous seven times; rather multiply that by seventy. Just forget about doing the math and accept that it eliminates the idea of keeping tabs and be thankful that God did not limit the number of sins He is willing to forgive a repentant sinner of. (**Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 66:2**)

Consider the expression: *I will forgive, but I will not forget*. In the statement the Lord makes in **Hebrews 8:12**, specifically concerning the new covenant, He says:

**"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."** Notice the connection between forgiveness and mercy.

No one is able to express mercy better than the one who desperately needed to receive mercy. Reluctance in this regard suggests that one should start back at the beginning of the list supplied by the Lord. Only one who is poor in spirit is able to accept the level of wickedness God describes through His word without any degree of resistance. (**Romans 3:10-18**) I am not that bad? This attitude causes many to be superficial and limited in their expression of love towards God. (**John 14:15**) Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. (**Luke 5:32**) This ironic statement is expressed to shame the proud who consider themselves *not that bad*.

It is an appropriate level of awareness which reduces one to *mourning*, and causes one to be gentle towards others, but first and foremost towards the most gracious Creator who made it possible for us to escape the consequences of our sin. It is one who passes through these stages who would want to work on reducing thoughtless sin to *hunger and thirst after righteousness*. It is the one who progresses through these stages who becomes acutely aware of the mercy extended, and therefore develops the same attitude (with all its synonyms) towards others.

Change is a central message of the gospel. I cannot recall the exact words of a truism which expresses the attitude every sinner should adopt, however it says something like this: *Life is not about finding yourself, but rather creating who we want to be*. With this list supplied by the Holy God who created us we have the perfect source to start working on who we *need* to be. Those who consider themselves too good to change (repent) will suffer the consequences. (**Luke 13:1-5**)