

The High Cost of Mercy



David Wilkerson August 4, 2008

“Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*” (Luke 6:35-36, my italics).

Throughout the Bible, a powerful theme rings out: “The Lord thy God is *a merciful God*” (Deuteronomy 4:31, my italics). This theme of mercy is at the very core of the Old Testament. We read it again and again in Deuteronomy, Chronicles, Nehemiah and Psalms: “The Lord your God is gracious and merciful.” Likewise, we see the same theme of mercy in each of the Gospels and throughout the New Testament: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

The Scriptures tell us something of what God’s mercy to a sinful world cost him.

The Lord did not give up on this sinful, godless, lust-consumed world. When he looked down at the outbreak of debauchery on the earth, he didn’t turn away from his creation. Instead, he sent his own Son into our midst. And, in his tender mercy, the Lord offered up his Son as a sacrifice. He laid on Christ the iniquities of us all.

Think of the high cost of mercy that Jesus paid. The weight of such a price simply cannot be calculated. No one can measure Christ’s pain at taking upon himself the sins of the world. Yet Scripture does give us clear details about the cost Jesus paid for the mercy he ministered here on earth.

First, Jesus was rejected by the entire religious world. The leaders of his day turned on him with outright venom. Moreover, he was mocked and despised by rich and poor, educated and illiterate alike. And his message was refused by all but a few.

According to the Psalms, Jesus’ name became a song of drunkards. Finally, the whole of society spat on him, abused him, nailed him to a cross and killed him.

As the beneficiaries of God’s mercy, you and I know something of the cost to Jesus for extending such mercy to a lost world. His tender mercy found you personally in your sinful bondage. He heard your heart’s cry and delivered you. He changed you, opened your eyes, filled you with his Holy Spirit. And he made you a vessel of honor to proclaim his gospel.

Make no mistake: it is a costly mercy you have received. We preach that God’s mercy is free, that it is unmerited and therefore of no cost to us. The price for it was paid in full by Christ’s shed blood. And, indeed, all of this is true. God is fully satisfied by the price Jesus paid to bring us his mercy. And now we have received heaven as an inheritance. His mercy provides assurance of eternal life to every true believer.

Yet there is a price on the human side — our side — of God’s mercy. What is the cost to us? It is the *high cost of becoming a true witness to the power of the mercy we have received*. The fact is, offering the same mercy that has been given to us will cost us dearly here on earth. It is a cost we can expect to pay in our everyday life.

You see, Jesus commands us, “Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 5:36). And, as Christ showed by example, to be merciful as the Father is merciful is very costly. Jesus paid the price of that mercy in his flesh. And you and I can expect to pay the same price. Like him, we will face total rejection. As messengers of the gospel, our words will not be accepted by the world. In fact, the more Christ is exalted in our lives, the more we can expect God’s mercy to be ridiculed and rejected.

The first cost of mercy to Jesus was his heavenly position. Mercy moved him to come to earth to take on human flesh. And ultimately, the mercy he offered to the world cost him his life. Yet Jesus’ example of mercy is a model to all who would follow him. He tells us, in essence, “Let my life show you the cost of mercy. It is total rejection by this world.”

Paul paid the same high cost of living out God’s mercy that Jesus paid on earth.

Jesus warned us, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). The apostle Paul testified to this truth: “(We) labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring [scum] of all things unto this day” (1 Corinthians 4:12–13).

What are we to make of this rejection? Jesus answers us: “Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold, your reward is great in heaven” (Luke 6:23).

This is a difficult truth to swallow. How can we rejoice and be glad at harsh persecution? Beloved, it is all part of the high cost of mercy. As it was with Paul, who was seen as scum, so it is for Christ’s body, the church. There is a price we all must pay when we preach Jesus and his mercy.

Yet this high price isn’t only rejection by an unbelieving world. It is not only the disapproval and rejection of the atheistic liberal media. We also face denunciation and condescension from *the compromised religious world*. Jesus warned his disciples: “Men shall hate you, and...they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake” (Luke 6:22). Everything Jesus describes here happened to him *at the hands of the religious system of his day*.

At one time in his life, the apostle Paul had been a powerful force of such persecution. Indeed, the more he harassed “Jesus people,” the more the religious leaders heaped praises on him. With every believer Paul cast into prison, those leaders applauded him and his reputation grew.

His name was Saul at first, and he was a young and powerful zealot. He was without a fault according to the Jewish law and enjoyed the praises of high officials of the synagogue. What is our first glimpse of this upstanding man in Scripture? We meet Saul as he stands by, approving the brutal stoning of Stephen. Saul was known throughout that region of the world as the number-one persecutor of Christ’s church. He was determined to wipe out Jesus’ name from the face of the earth, to snuff out the church in its infancy.

But the day came when mercy shone on Saul. I picture the zealous Pharisee at the beginning of that special day. He had asked for an audience with the high priest: “The young man who persecutes the Jesus crowd wants permission to take his crusade to Damascus. He vows to jail them all. He thinks he is able to put out this ‘Jesus fire.’”

With the blessing of the Jewish rulers, Saul rode out of Jerusalem with his band of men toward their next mission. Imagine the scene as they were cheered by the high priest and all the scribes and Pharisees. But then, just outside the township of Damascus, mercy shone upon Saul.

How did mercy act upon this lost, misguided man? It did not try to confound him. It did not accuse him. It did not try to destroy him. Instead, the fully paid, free mercy of the Lord laid Saul face down on the ground. And a voice spoke to him, saying, “Saul, Saul, this is Jesus. Why are you persecuting me?” (see Acts 9). Christ’s message to this zealot was clear: “It is me you are touching, Saul. With every Christian you have jailed, you have done it to me.”

Saul was overwhelmed by this revelation. Temporarily stricken blind, he was led to the home of a praying, Spirit-filled man in Damascus named Ananias. In a small room there, Saul called on the name of Jesus. Ananias explained to him the high cost of the mercy he had received: “Now, Saul, you are going to suffer for his name’s

sake.”

Think of the costly mercy Saul received that day. With his conscience pricked, he surely thought back to Stephen's stoning...recalled every believer he had thrown into jail...saw again the faces of all he had abused. Oh, the costly mercy this man received.

Renamed Paul, the apostle spent the rest of his life preaching and writing about God's mercy. And he testified continually of the high cost of living out that mercy in a wicked world. For two millennia, Paul's writings have reminded the church of what Jesus said to us: "Men will hate you. They will withdraw from you. They will reproach you and cast out your name as evil. But that is the time to rejoice and leap for joy!"

Satan fears, loathes and hates the power of God's mercy.

It is mercy, pure and simple, that has decimated the devil's kingdom on earth. Satan never thought he could lose his power over the addicted, the hopeless dregs of humanity. But mercy has brought release for multitudes he once held captive.

Now Satan realizes we are at the end of the last days. And he is determined to narcotize an entire generation, to numb them to their need for God's mercy. He wants to erect barriers in the minds of young people so God's mercy won't touch them. So he has unleashed demonic hordes of drug growers and producers to bring about this evil.

When I first came to New York in the 1950s, the plague was mostly marijuana and prescription drugs. Heroin didn't have the grip it came to have later. In recent decades, Satan brought in crack and then crystal meth. Now he has introduced new drugs that have greater power to addict: strains of cocaine and heroin from Mexico, Iraq, Colombia and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the devil has unleashed an ocean of alcohol upon young people. College and high school campuses have been flooded by a party spirit, with barrels of beer, wine and liquor fueling drunken sprees. Teenagers by the droves are entering secular rehab clinics, while others remain bound by addiction. All of this is the devil's last-ditch effort to enslave masses and "immunize" them to the mercy message of Jesus.

But the mercy of God has amazing power to deliver.

Mercy has broken the chain of all addictions, translating multitudes from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ.

There was a time, with millions throughout the world narcotized, that Satan thought he had prevailed. Indeed, word spread throughout the world that once the devil binds you, you are forever hopeless.

But in every generation, God sends his Holy Spirit into the highways and byways. And he goes directly to the heart of Satan's territory: into city slums, into crack houses, onto rooftops wherever addicts lay in stupors. And mercy has shone upon the weakest, the offscouring, the most drug-crippled, those forgotten and cast aside by society as hopelessly lost.

The first heroin addict to be saved and delivered through the Teen Challenge ministry was Sonny Arguinzoni. Sonny now serves as bishop of more than 600 churches worldwide made up of former addicts. At last year's conference of these churches, 1,000 former prostitutes formed a choir to sing God's praises for his delivering power.

Nicky Cruz, the famous former gangster and graduate of Teen Challenge, has preached the mercy gospel to multiple millions around the world, with multitudes being set free and delivered.

The whole world ought to arise and thank God for his saving deliverance, for restoring those once lost and abandoned by humanity.

At the very least, society should thank God for saving drunkard dads and reuniting them with their wives and children. But, I assure you, it will never happen. In every generation, the world has rejected Jesus' power to change lives, even when faced with clear evidence to the contrary. I saw this happen time after time in the early

days of Teen Challenge.

Years ago I was invited to a medical conference in New York City, when Nelson Rockefeller was governor. His multimillion-dollar drug program had failed to bring about a cure for drug addicts. I took with me to the conference some graduates of our Teen Challenge program. They had been clean for over two years and were attending Bible school or studying to go into social work, so they could help others just as they had been helped. Two of the young men gave their testimony to that gathering of doctors and experts, telling how Jesus had set them free and that they had no desire for drugs.

The psychiatrist who stood up next spoke as if he had ignored everything my young men had said. His first words were, "After everything we've done, we know there is no known cure for the drug addict." A nonreligious doctor sitting next to me was astonished at this. He whispered to me, "Was that man not in the room when your young people spoke?"

The fact is *the world will never accept Jesus as the answer*. If Christ is the origin of all liberating mercy — if the mercy of the Cross is the cause of miracles — it will always be cast aside as rubbish.

Moreover, we are to beware those powers of the world that come whispering, "Let us help." In many cases, worldly offers to assist ministries can be Satan-inspired. Help may be offered through government funds or programs. It's dangerous for any Christ-centered ministry to be dependent on government funds.

Ultimately, when a ministry relies on the world's resources, it ends up just another charity, lacking the power of Christ to truly set free. Moreover, government funds eventually dry up, shutting down a work that began as the Lord's but became dependent on the world to operate.

I offer a warning to every Christ-led ministry: be prepared, because the pressure is going to become furious. Every soul-winning outreach and disciple-making church will soon come under persecution and defamation. The world is going to call your work a fraud.

But you are to remember what Jesus told us: "When they reproach you, rejoice and leap for joy, because your reward is great in heaven" (see Luke 6:22-23).

Living out the Lord's mercy will cost you a life-changing confrontation concerning the body of Christ.

God has been dealing with me concerning his spiritual body. And here is what he has shown me: *the way most Christians live and do ministry today proves we don't fully understand Jesus' relationship to his body*.

Imagine Saul's anguish at Damascus when Christ confronted him with the reality of his body. The Lord told Saul, "I am Jesus. And you are persecuting *me*." Saul had thought he was simply dealing with individuals, doing God's work to root out Jewish heretics. He didn't know he was attacking the Lord's own body when he went after the church.

Now Saul was jolted with the truth: "*Jesus has a spiritual body*. He is the head, in heaven. And his body — his children here on earth — are connected to the head. It is one body, made up of believers who are flesh of his flesh. And anyone who comes against one of them is actually coming against him." Every "Jesus person" whom Paul had persecuted and imprisoned — everything he had said and done against them — was felt personally by Christ himself. Saul's confrontation with this truth changed his life.

As Paul the apostle, he grew to understand how deeply God loved his church. He came to see that, in the Lord's eyes, the church was a costly pearl. It was also a spotless bride for his Son — one corporate, invisible body made up of blood-purchased children from every tribe and nation on earth.

I am convinced we do not take this truth as seriously as we should.

If we fully understood this truth about his body, it would mean the end of all grudges in the church...the end of all bitterness...the end of all prejudice, fleshly competition, pride, gossip and division.

Right now, the world needs a living example of the costly mercy of Christ. Tensions have never been greater. For decades in African nations, tribe has warred against tribe. These tribal wars have brought about poverty, disease

and broken families, and have bred raging hatred in new generations. Meanwhile, in Europe and the United States, racial tension is sweeping through society, even creeping into churches.

Do not be deluded into thinking a president can take care of these problems. The costly mercy that's needed throughout the world can only come from those who have tasted and received such mercy for themselves. And that is the costly calling of the church of Jesus Christ. It is to offer a mercy that lays down self for the sake of a brother or sister — and, as Jesus demonstrated, even for an enemy.

I exhort you to stop here and confront this truth.

Go no further in your life or ministry — stop all your plans and good works — until you confront the implications of being a member of Christ's body. The Lord declares of his church, "This is my pearl of great price, the bride for my Son." Think of what a miracle it is to be a part of such a body. Think too of the great calling of this body to show mercy to an unmerciful world.

When Paul famously wrote to the Corinthians, it was to a church that had turned against him. Yet, as Paul thought of this church in Christ's body, he wrote, "You have become very dear to me. You all have my heart. I love you and appreciate each of you."

Simply put, mercy looks beyond faults and failures, beyond self-justification. If we truly believe we wound Christ personally whenever we wound a brother or sister — that what we say and do against a single member of his body is, as Jesus said, "against me" — we would work night and day to make everything right. And we would not stop until we were clear of it all.

Yet, the truth is, we can mistreat others. We can separate ourselves from a brother or sister. We can wound and hurt someone. We can say and think racial words and thoughts. We can easily misrepresent others. And we think it is "just between God and me." So we confess it to the Lord and repent, then go our way thinking all is well. Yet we never give thought to how we have wounded Jesus — or our brother — in the process. We've not only wounded a brother, we have wounded *the Lord*. Indeed, we did it to the whole body, because if one hurts, all hurt.

Yet here is the revelation we are given: "I belong to the body of Christ! And so does my brother, my sister. We are all one. That solves all gossip, all tension, all grudges, because we are connected to the head."

I leave you with the same message Paul delivered to his fellow workers.

- "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:3–4).
- "I beseech (you)...be of the same mind in the Lord" (Philippians 4:2).
- "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:12–14).

Here is how Paul sums it all up. Indeed, here is mercy lived out in full: "Because ye (are) dear unto us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). I ask you: are all your brothers and sisters in Christ dear to you? As the life of our head flows to us, the members of his body, we begin to love not only each other but even our enemies.

Lord, let us be merciful, as you have been merciful to us!

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