

## Let's Not Forget Mercy

by Ward Fenley

Recently, in an interview with [Relevant](#) magazine, a prominent Seattle area pastor stated:

*"Some emergent types want to recast Jesus as a limp-wrist hippie in a dress with a lot of product in his hair, who drank decaf and made pithy Zen statements about life while shopping for the perfect pair of shoes. In Revelation, Jesus is a prize fighter with a tattoo down his leg, a sword in His hand and the commitment to make someone bleed. That is a guy I can worship. I cannot worship the hippie, halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up."*

Obviously I disagree with this person's description of the hippie Jesus, but equally repulsive and dishonoring to God is this erroneous perspective: *"Jesus is a prize fighter with a tattoo down his leg, a sword in His hand and the commitment to make someone bleed."*

When Jesus tells us about His judgment, I don't believe He is calling us to view Him with carnal tattoos or calling us to revel in watching Him destroy others. Why? First, we do not have omniscience to see inside of hearts. Paul was as apostate and murderous as any example we have today, if not more, being the Pharisee he was. But God had mercy on Him. Along the same lines God destroyed Pharisees just like Paul. Why? His good pleasure in Paul's salvation. Under the New Testament Jesus tells us:

Matthew 5:44 but I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you;

Luke 6:27-28 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

That seems like a far cry from desiring God to "make them bleed." Unfortunately this is the type of rhetoric (and worse) used in some churches. They will know we are His disciples by our love, not by our desire to watch them bleed at the hands of the Almighty.

I am thankful that God made His Son bleed for me so that I wouldn't bleed. And I hope and pray that God has done the same for everyone to whom I preach the Gospel. They are no worse than I am. They lust, I lust; they struggle with pride, I struggle with pride; they struggle with self-worship and greed, I struggle with self-worship and greed. If I want them to bleed, I should want myself to bleed. Why would we want to go to a "church" where the pastor loves to watch people bleed at the hands of the Almighty? It's one thing for the eternally wise God in all of His secret decrees to fulfill His will. But He has not given us revelation of that secret will. Instead, I believe God calls us to speak that which we know.

Unfortunately hate-mongers are doing violence to the testimony of the church with this kind of verbal and spiritual abuse. What the world needs is a kingdom of Pauls and Barnabases to preach Christ and Him crucified and declare, "We are men of like passions as you are." The world needs to hear that. They need to see that we are no different--that the pleasures of this world are enticing to us as well. Imagine Paul saying, "We want to watch you *bleed*." Again, this type of rhetoric is incompatible with the Gospel. The world needs the Gospel. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

and...

"For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It's all there--the judgment and the mercy.

The pastor says, "I cannot worship the hippie, halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up."

But Jesus said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."

Sure, God is described as wrathful and just, proclaiming "vengeance is mine." But the Bible also uses these words to describe God:

compassionate  
weeping over His people when they stray  
full of mercy  
tender

By the way, the word "tender" is from the Hebrew word *racham*, which literally means *to cherish the fetus*.

Psalm 69:16 Hear me, O LORD; for thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender [*racham*] mercies.

Perhaps God is not calling us to crave seeing His wrath upon people (since we do not know His mind), but rather to tenderly care for others (as a mother cherishes her fetus) and pray for the mercy that has been bestowed upon us. Even Paul said "I wish that I were accursed for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Consider the weight and context of this passage:

Luke 19:41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, (42) Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. (43) For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, (44) And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

Some would say, "Oh, but He is weeping over believers or those who will be believers." Is that what the text says? He describes those over whom He is weeping as:

Having had truth hidden from their eyes  
Those whose enemies would surround them...  
lay them and their children upon the ground  
And not leave in them one stone upon another because...  
they knew not the time of their visitation

To my recollection, preterism exults in the passage which speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem as a fulfilled event (Matthew 24:1-34). At the beginning Jesus says of the Temple, "Not one stone shall be left upon another." He is speaking of the destruction of the Temple and the slaughter of the Pharisees who killed Him (Matthew 21:33-41).

Jesus weeps over them. "Learn of Me," Jesus declares.

I used to be caught up in the "make them bleed" mentality, but God brought me out of that by a series of tremendous immoralities and pitfalls, showing me that I am no different than those who are outside of faith or those who are inside the faith. Obviously we do not serve a Jesus we can beat up. But Jesus laid down His life (got beaten up real badly, I might add) by some for whom He prayed. In His sacrifice for us He tells us to be willing to do the same: be meek, kind, tender, winning hearts by our love.

I leave you with these passages, the first of which is God speaking of the self-righteous Pharisees:

Isaiah 65:2 I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; 3 A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick;4 Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; 5 Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

God says that those who say, "I am holier than thou," are a smoke in His nostrils.

Perhaps that is why He also says:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Contrary to the "holier than thou" mentality, this is heavenly wisdom which comes from above:

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

If the wisdom comes from above, then it is from God. Do we want to show this attitude toward unbelievers, that is, an attitude full of mercy, peaceable and gentle; or do we want to show them that we want to see them bleed?

Of course I believe in the absolute sovereignty of God. I am a committed and convinced supralapsarian. Some such as the pastor quoted above would argue after the Calvinistic fashion, "But it is God's sovereign will that these men bleed. Therefore we desire it." Yet, if these men fall into immorality, and it comes into the eyes of the public, would they say, "I desire falling into immorality because it was God's sovereign will?" As Calvinists and believers in the absolute sovereignty of God, they couldn't deny that their fall was the will of God. Yet I can hardly believe that after such a fall they would say, "I desire falling into immorality because it is God's will." Rather, God bestows mercy upon whom He wills, yet He tells us to have mercy on those who hate us. God says "I hate those who sow discord among the brethren," yet God tells us to love our enemies. God says, "I will curse them who curse you," yet God tells us, "Bless them who curse you." God obviously does not want us operating on what He sovereignly executes out of His eternal and incomprehensible decrees. Rather, God wants us to operate based upon what He has revealed to us. Some might argue, but the Psalmist says:

Psalm 139:21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?

But Jesus offers an interesting New Testament interpretation:

Matthew 5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

1 Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

It seems to me that some who claim the kingdom of God and declare that they give all glory to God have forgotten what God has required of us: "He has shown thee, o man, what is good and what the Lord requires of thee: but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." In forgetting this command, perhaps they have forgotten God. For, to forget love is to forget God, for God is love. What does God say of those self-righteous Israelites who forgot Him, and yet thought by their great sacrifices they were honoring Him?

Psalm 50:16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? 17 Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. 18 When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. 19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. 20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. 21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

Let's not forget love. Let's not forget mercy:

James 2:1 My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. 2 For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing; 3 and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool; 4 Do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? 6 But ye have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgment-seats? 7 Do not they blaspheme the honorable name by which ye are called? 8 Howbeit if ye fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: 9 but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all. 11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy: mercy glorieth against judgment.

Again, let's not forget love. Let's not forget mercy.