
“Come, Let Us Reason Together” About the Bible
What Is Salvation?
Bible Study Series

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18)

LESSON FOUR — Is Salvation By Mercy?

Estimated Reading Time: 7 – 8 minutes

When you hear the word **“mercy,”** what do you think of?

Maybe it reminds you of a courtroom scene where a guilty person throws themselves on the mercy of the court, asking the judge for leniency. Or perhaps you've seen someone in sports or play say, “I give up, mercy!” as a way of admitting defeat and pleading for the opponent to go easy on them. Sometimes in daily life, a person might say, *“Have mercy on me!”* when they're going through something hard or trying to catch a break.

In these everyday cases, *mercy* is about being spared from something you rightly deserve, usually punishment, hardship, or pain. It's the idea of kindness being shown to someone who has no claim to it.

That's how most people understand **mercy**, and that's not too far from how the Bible uses the word. But the biblical concept of mercy is much deeper and richer, especially in the discussion about **salvation**.

Consider what mercy really means, and how your salvation depends entirely on **God's mercy**.

The Biblical Definition of Mercy

In the Bible, **mercy** is compassion shown by God to those who are helpless, sinful, or in distress. It's His loving response to human misery, especially the misery caused by sin. While **grace** is God giving us what we *don't deserve*, **mercy** is God ***not giving us what we do deserve***. And it's always driven by His love.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word often translated as *mercy* is **“chesed”**, a word full of meaning. It describes **steadfast love, kindness, and loyal covenant love**. Another word used is **“rachamim,”** which speaks of deep compassion, even the kind a mother has for her child.

In the New Testament, the Greek word is **“eleos,”** which means **pity or compassion**, especially in action. It's not just a feeling, but a choice to act on behalf of someone's suffering.

Here's how the Apostle Paul described it:

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5)

That verse plainly explains **salvation is not earned, but it is the result of God's mercy.**

Mercy in the Psalms and Proverbs

The Psalms are full of praise for God's mercy. Repeatedly, the writers remind readers: God's mercy is the reason for hope.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.” (Psalm 51:1)

That's David speaking after his sin with Bathsheba. He knew he didn't deserve forgiveness but he begged God for mercy and God bestowed it.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” (Psalm 103:8)

“His mercy endures forever.” (Psalm 136:1)

That phrase, **“His mercy endures forever”**, is repeated **26 times** in Psalm 136 alone. That tells you how central mercy is to whom God is merciful.

In Proverbs, you can see that mercy is not only something God shows but something He desires from mankind:

“He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.” (Proverbs 14:21)

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged, and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.” (Proverbs 16:6)

God's mercy is the starting point of forgiveness, and all are called to mirror that same mercy toward others.

Mercy in Action: How God Has Always Been Merciful

God's mercy is not a new idea. It has always been part of His character.

- **Adam and Eve** sinned in the garden. God could have ended their lives on the spot, but He clothed them and gave them a promise of redemption (Genesis 3:15, 21). That is mercy.
- **The Israelites** repeatedly rebelled against God in the wilderness. They complained, disobeyed, and even worshipped idols. Yet again, God forgave them when they repented. That is mercy.

“But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.” (Nehemiah 9:17)

- **Jonah** didn't want God to forgive Nineveh, because he *knew* God was merciful.

“For I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness...” (Jonah 4:2)

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, God is described as **rich in mercy**, not because it is deserved, but because He is love.

Jesus Christ – The Ultimate Expression of God’s Mercy

Now here's where it all comes together: **Jesus Christ is the full and final expression of God's mercy.** All of God's acts of mercy throughout history were pointing forward to the greatest act of compassion ever shown which is **the cross of Christ.**

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...” (Ephesians 2:4–5)

Did you catch that? **“Rich in mercy.”** God didn't just show a little mercy, He poured it out abundantly through Jesus.

“Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us...” (Luke 1:78)

Jesus came as the result of **God's mercy.** He took punishment, bore sins, and died for mankind.

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Romans 5:6)

“According to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)

Because of **Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection,** you can now be **saved.** It is not because you deserve it. It is not because you've done enough. It is because **God has mercy.**

Without Mercy, There Is No Salvation

Stated very clearly: **If it were not for God's mercy, all would be hopelessly lost.**

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)

That's what mercy looks like, **your sin placed on Jesus** so you could be spared.

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13)

If you stood before God without His mercy, you would face **judgment and death**. But because of Christ, **mercy triumphs**. When you respond to that mercy with **faith and obedience**, salvation is possible.

God's mercy calls you to respond, not just with thankfulness, but with a changed life.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

Conclusion: Thank God for His Mercy

Mercy is not just a feeling, it's a gift. It's the reason you're alive, the reason you can be forgiven, and the reason you can look forward to eternal life.

Stated as clearly as possible: **Without the mercy of God, you could not be saved**. But because of His mercy, seen most clearly in Jesus Christ, you can be saved.

That same mercy is available to you today, if you'll believe in Christ, turn from your sins, confess His name, be baptized, and live for Him.

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Walk humbly—with a thankful
heart—for the mercy that saves.

Questions to Confirm Understanding

Estimated time to answer the questions: 4 - 5 minutes. With scripture lookup: 15 - 30 minutes.

Read and answer the following set of questions about this lesson, and circle your answer: “True | False” or “Yes | No”. Look up the scriptures provided to confirm your answers. Then compare your answers with the Answer Key provided after these questions.

1. **True | False** God's mercy is what spares us from receiving the punishment we rightly deserve. (Titus 3:5)
2. **True | False** In the Bible, mercy and grace mean the same thing with no distinction. (Ephesians 2:4-5)
3. **True | False** Mercy, in scripture, is often shown as God's loving response to human suffering, especially because of sin. (Psalm 103:8)

4. **True | False** According to Proverbs, God’s mercy is one of the ways by which sin is purged. (Proverbs 16:6)
 5. **True | False** David pleaded for mercy after his sin with Bathsheba, asking God to blot out his transgressions. (Psalm 51:1)
 6. **True | False** According to the Psalms, God's mercy is limited to those who have never sinned. (Psalm 136:1)
 7. **True | False** God's mercy is only shown in the New Testament, not in the Old Testament. (Nehemiah 9:17)
 8. **True | False** Jonah knew God was merciful and didn’t want Nineveh to be spared because of that. (Jonah 4:2)
 9. **True | False** According to Ephesians, God is rich in mercy and made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in sin. (Ephesians 2:4–5)
 10. **True | False** Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of God’s mercy. (1 Peter 1:3)
 11. **True | False** Without God’s mercy, one could not receive salvation. (Titus 3:5)
 12. **True | False** Isaiah prophesied that the iniquity of us all would be laid upon Jesus. (Isaiah 53:6)
 13. **True | False** According to James, mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13)
 14. **True | False** The Bible teaches that those who are merciful will themselves receive mercy. (Matthew 5:7)
 15. **True | False** Micah 6:8 teaches that one of the things the Lord requires is to love mercy. (Micah 6:8)
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Answer Key

Estimated time to read the answers: 10 - 15 minutes. With reflection and contemplation: 30 - 45 minutes.

1. God’s mercy is what spares us from receiving the punishment we rightly deserve. **True**
“*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...*”
(Titus 3:5)
God’s mercy means He does not give us the punishment we deserve for our sins. Instead, He provides salvation through compassion.

2. In the Bible, mercy and grace mean the same thing with no distinction. **False**
“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love... made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:4–5)
 Though closely related, grace is unmerited favor (giving what we don’t deserve), while mercy is withholding what we do deserve (punishment).
3. Mercy, in scripture, is often shown as God’s loving response to human suffering, especially because of sin. **True**
“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” (Psalm 103:8)
 God’s mercy is rooted in His love and is especially evident when He forgives and helps those suffering from sin’s consequences.
4. According to Proverbs, God’s mercy is one of the ways by which sin is purged. **True**
“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged...” (Proverbs 16:6)
 This shows mercy isn’t just a feeling; it’s part of how God addresses and forgives sin.
5. David pleaded for mercy after his sin with Bathsheba, asking God to blot out his transgressions. **True**
“Have mercy upon me, O God... blot out my transgressions.” (Psalm 51:1)
 David knew only God’s mercy could forgive his grievous sins. His plea reveals a humble, repentant heart.
6. According to the Psalms, God’s mercy is limited to those who have never sinned. **False**
“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” (Psalm 136:1)
 God’s mercy is not limited, it is extended to all, repeatedly and without end, even to those who sin and repent.
7. God’s mercy is only shown in the New Testament, not in the Old Testament. **False**
“But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful...” (Nehemiah 9:17)
 God’s mercy is evident throughout the Old Testament as He forgives, restores, and blesses His people time after time.
8. Jonah knew God was merciful and didn’t want Nineveh to be spared because of that. **True**
“For I know that You are a gracious and merciful God...” (Jonah 4:2)
 Jonah resisted going to Nineveh because he knew God would forgive them if they repented, demonstrating God’s great mercy.
9. According to Ephesians, God is rich in mercy and made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in sin. **True**
“But God, who is rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ.” (Ephesians 2:4–5)
 Even when we were spiritually dead, God acted out of mercy to give us life in Christ.
10. Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of God’s mercy. **True**
“According to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 1:3)

Jesus' death and resurrection is the fullest demonstration of God's mercy, offering salvation to sinners.

11. Without God's mercy, no one could receive salvation. **True**
"Not by works of righteousness... but according to His mercy He saved us." (Titus 3:5)
We cannot be saved by our own merit. God's mercy is the foundation of salvation.
12. Isaiah prophesied that the iniquity of us all would be laid upon Jesus. **True**
"And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)
This prophecy foretells that Jesus would bear the punishment for our sins, a great act of mercy.
13. According to James, mercy triumphs over judgment. **True**
"Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13)
God's mercy provides hope even in the face of judgment, His forgiveness can prevail if we are humble and obedient.
14. The Bible teaches that those who are merciful will themselves receive mercy. **True**
"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)
Jesus teaches that those who extend mercy to others will themselves be shown mercy by God.
15. Micah 6:8 teaches that one of the things the Lord requires is to love mercy. **True**
"What does the Lord require of you but... to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"
(Micah 6:8)
God doesn't just show mercy, He expects His people to love and live it as part of their walk with Him.

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