

## Sermon Notes, October 15, 2017

### The Christian Lifestyle: Mercy—Costly Love, Ephesians 4:25-32

Why have we spent so much time on Eph. 4:25–32? Because Paul gives you so many subjects here. He is showing you the comprehensiveness of the Christian lifestyle. In here we see communication principles, principles about relationships, principles about self-control and about your emotional life, about how to deal with anger and resentment. It's all there. Paul says in v. 24, "All of this glorious change, all of this rich tapestry of the Christian lifestyle will all be yours if you put on the new self,"

We're focusing in on the last thing Paul says in v. 28. It's easy to assume verse 28 is just sort of a casual offhanded thing. But it isn't. Every word in this passage in this particular section Paul weighs. He is saying the purpose of work is to make money in order to give it away. Actually, he's going this far. He says there are two purposes for work. One is to make yourself useful to mankind through your work, but then the second purpose is to make money so you can give it away. This is what he's saying.

Another way to put it is that Christians ought to make as much money as they can so more of the world's wealth is under the control of people who will use it compassionately instead of selfishly. Now, if this was the only place it's mentioned, you might think that we're reading too much into it. What's bothersome about this subject is that everywhere you look, anywhere you look, you see this woven within everything else the Bible talks (read the prophets!) about when it comes to the Christian lifestyle, and that is, a compassionate heart for the poor.

For example, read Romans 15. What's the major point? Paul says that taking care of the poor is at least as important as him going and preaching Christ in Rome.

Or Galatians 2. Paul and Peter argue over Jewish and Gentile Christianity. Yet, the one thing they agreed upon, it says in Gal. 2:10, actually Paul says, "All the apostles urged that I would remember the poor, which I have always been most eager to do."

You have the parable of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan meets physical needs, economic needs, medical needs, social needs, and he meets material needs. At the end of the parable, Jesus asks the law expert, "Who was the hero in this parable?" The law expert says, "The one who showed mercy." Jesus looks at the law expert and says, "Go and do likewise."

Historically, churches have referred to the ministry we're talking about here as the ministry of mercy. Yet, there has been a tendency, in the church, for us to believe that the ministry of mercy is an optional ministry. When you come to a church and you are discipled, you're told that you need to engage in the ministry of worship, in the ministry of prayer, in the ministry of the Word, which means you have to study the Word and come and listen to the Word preached, and you have to be involved in the ministry of fellowship, which means you have to counsel one another, build one another up and edify one another. You also have the ministry of outreach or evangelism. You have to witness to your faith.

A lot of discipleship material will not tell you that the ministry of mercy stands right up there with every other ministry that you are bound and required to engage in. The ministry of mercy is not an option for you personally. The ministry of mercy is not an option for us corporately. Anybody who's a Christian must engage in it, just like worship or evangelism.

#### 1. First of all, what is the ministry of mercy?

Basically, the ministry of mercy is meeting human needs through deeds. It says in Luke 24:19, "Jesus was mighty in word and deed." Everywhere you read about Jesus, it never says he just preached. It always says he went everywhere preaching AND doing good. He didn't just talk about the kingdom of God; he exhibited the kingdom of God through deeds.

When Adam and Eve sinned, you immediately can see several concentric circles of misery that emanate from that first sin.

- The first thing that happens as a result of sin is we're cut off from God. That's spiritual alienation.
- Because we're cut off from God we're cut off from ourselves. We're psychologically alienated.
- Our psychological alienation leads to social alienation—our relationships are messed up.
- And eventually, the Bible teaches us, as a result of the first sin it leads to physical alienation.

These are all the results of sin. Now, without the Spirit of God, you can't see that your core need is to be related to God through Christ, but you don't need the Holy Spirit to know if you're hungry that you're hungry. That is a felt need. The only way to deal with needs like that is through deeds.

The Bible says Jesus was mighty in word and deed, and we're told that when the Holy Spirit gives out spiritual gifts into the congregation, he gives out word gifts and deed gifts.

Some of the gifts are word gifts, talking gifts: exhortation and evangelism and teaching and pastoring. Those are word gifts.

But what about the gifts of helps and of mercy? What about the gift of giving? What about the gift of hospitality? What about those gifts? Those are deed gifts.

In the Bible, there are two classes of officers in the church: elders and deacons. Who are these folks? Elders are word ministers and deacons are deed ministers. There were two classes of officers and two classes of gifts because the church, like Jesus himself, is not supposed to simply talk but do.

What is the ministry of mercy? It's the ministry to felt needs through deeds. The Bible specifically tells us and commands us to do it.

2. Secondly, let me tell you what the Bible says about the importance of it.

As you study the ministry of mercy in the Scripture it's easy to get troubled by certain passages. One of those is Isaiah 1:10–17. Another is Matthew 25. To the sheep, Jesus says, when you took care of the poor, the homeless, those in prison, the least of these my brethren, you took care of me. Then he's going to turn to the people on the other side, the goats, and say, "Depart from me; I never knew you, because I was hungry and you didn't feed me." Now, you might think, "What is he talking about? How can he do that? Aren't we saved by faith not by works?" What Jesus is actually saying is that the poor person in your midst is a test.

It happens again and again. In Luke 16, the story of Lazarus and the rich man ... Lazarus was a beggar at the gates of the rich man, and the rich man had no mercy on him. The rich man goes to hell and Lazarus goes to heaven. What's the point? Lazarus was a test at what was in the rich man's heart. Jesus is saying, "What you do on Sunday is one thing, but I want to know what's really in your heart, and the index of real faith is whether or not you're generous to people like that." That's what he's saying. Jesus brings things into sharp focus in this parable. I am to love people. I don't have to do loads of ritualistic things that are the requirements of some religions.

What do I have to do to please God? What's the standard? Here it is in a nutshell. Micah 3:6-8. "What does the Lord require of you? Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God."

That's what Jesus is saying. It's not complicated. It's simple.

We are to get involved in, and do, the ministry of mercy. Jesus said, "You do it because it's me."