

Begging for Mercy, Trusting in Grace

Physically or spiritually, some of us are like the *unrighteous steward* of Luke 16:3, too “*ashamed to beg*.” Pride does that to us. Operating under the mistaken notion that we are self-sufficient *physically* has the same effect *spiritually*, producing a prideful and self-righteous view of ourselves. Thus, *trusting in self* (rather than God) renders us too proud to beg.

The parable of *The Pharisee and the Publican* (or *Tax-gatherer*) in Luke 18:9-13 well-illustrates both sides of the paradigm. It was specifically given to “*certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt*,” v.9. The *Pharisee* thanked God, though he actually “*prayed to himself*,” for his own righteousness by listing items from his supposed spiritual wealth, vv.11-12. But the *Publican* of v.13 was “*even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast*” and begged, “*God be merciful to me, the sinner!*” The difference is obvious: one had a distorted view of his *wealth*, and the other had a clear view of his *poverty*. How important the *spiritual eye*, cf. Matthew 6:22-23! In reality, both were spiritually destitute and thus, completely dependent upon God’s mercy. But only one of them realized his poverty, and was humble enough to beg.

When we beg, not just someone’s pardon, but really beg, we are acknowledging our complete dependence on another’s mercy. In many biblical instances, the beggar *prostrated* himself. This means that either he *knelt and bowed low* with his face to the ground, or perhaps even *laid outstretched and face-down* before the one whom he petitioned for mercy (cf. Matthew 18:26). In ancient Eastern cultures, by thus exposing the back of the neck, the petitioner put himself completely at the mercy of his potential benefactor, who could either raise him up, or take advantage of his exposed neck by beheading him. Such highlights a couple of important points:

- The absolute *destitution* of the beggar for mercy- his *only hope* is for mercy;
- The total *dependence* of the beggar for mercy- he has *no other source* of mercy; and,
- He realizes that the mercy for which he begs is completely *undeserved*- such is the very nature of the concept.

But these things bring us to the second part of our title, “*Trusting in Grace*.” Though we are *in reality* spiritual “beggars for mercy” in all the ways described above (cf. Romans 3:23 and 6:23), and should be *in effect* also, there is hope through the promised *grace* of God. While *mercy* is not getting what we deserve on the negative side of the ledger (*i.e.* being *spared from punishment*), *grace* is getting what we don’t deserve on the positive side (*i.e.* the *undeserved favor* of reward). Again, let’s look to a parable of Jesus to illustrate.

The Prodigal Son, after demanding, getting, and wasting what was rightfully his (or at least would have eventually been so), came to his senses and went home. His plan was basically to “beg for mercy” from his father, cf. Luke 15:11-18. His hope, which was completely dependent upon mercy being granted by his father, was only to become “*as one of your hired men*,” which he readily admitted was more than he deserved, v.19. But in addition to the *mercy* he received from his father through forgiveness, he also got the abundant *grace* of “*the best robe... a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet*” as well as a *celebratory feast*, vv.22-24. That was grace!

OK, here’s the bottom-line “bad news”- as sinners (violators of God’s law), we are completely dependent upon His mercy to forgive our sins. There is no way, regardless of how (self?) righteous we presume ourselves to be, we can be anything other than

“beggars for mercy.” However, and lest self-loathing and abject spiritual poverty destroy us, we are promised both *mercy* toward our sins and the *grace* of salvation through Jesus Christ. “*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near **with confidence** to the throne of **grace**, that we may **receive mercy** and may **find grace** to help in the time of need,*” Hebrews 4:15-16. Hallelujah!

When we acknowledge our complete spiritual unworthiness, and confess our total dependence upon God by becoming a “beggar for mercy,” He promises not only the mercy of forgiveness, but also the grace of “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:2-3). Because of His promised *mercy* and *grace*, we have **confidence**- not in our selves or our own righteousness, but in **His promise!** Therefore we can live by *faith* (*belief, trust, and obedience, cf. Hebrews 11:6*) through His *grace*, Ephesians 2:8-10.

I’m not sure we can ever fully *trust* in the benefits of God’s *grace*- let alone *receive* them, without first truly becoming a *beggar* for His *mercy*. But I am sure that if we are willing to humbly and whole-heartedly become such, we can learn to faithfully *trust* and *live* in His *grace*. Think about it, won’t you? (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)