

*Redeemer Presbyterian Church*  
**“Ministries of Mercy- The Call of the Jericho Road”**  
(A study of the book by Timothy J. Keller, P&R Publishing, 1997.)

**Session VII.**  
**CONDITIONAL AND UNCONDITIONAL:**  
**A BALANCED JUDGEMENT**

*When he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds (Luke 10:33-35)*

***“God’s mercy comes to us without conditions, but does not proceed without our cooperation. So too our aid must begin freely, regardless of the recipient’s merits. But our mercy must increasingly demand change or it is not really love.” (Keller, p. 93)***

Last week we discussed the call for us to extend mercy to unbelievers. Are we to make any distinctions among the needy?? Are we to help anyone, regardless of his or her circumstances?

*Under which, if any, conditions shall we give aid to the needy??*

## **I. Who deserves mercy??**

- Often the poor are divided into two categories:
  - *Deserving poor*: poverty is not their responsibility
  - *Undeserving poor*: poverty due to their own sin and folly
- *“Everyone is...deserving of our mercy. Our obligation to them is limited only by our opportunity and resources.” (Keller, p. 94)*
- The church needs to strike a biblical balance between aiding only the deserving poor and showing mercy indiscriminately.

### **A. The Case Against Conditions**

- Jesus ministered in word and deed to the house of Israel AND to the sick and needy outside the house of Israel (Matt. 15:26ff)
- Jesus tells us to do good to the wicked and ungrateful without expecting anything in return (Luke 6:32-35).
- God came to us while we were enemies (Rom. 5:10)
- It is difficult to speak about “deserving” poor. How can anyone deserve mercy? Do we wait until a heart is somewhat righteous before we minister?
- ***Therefore*** our mercy must follow the pattern of God’s mercy. It comes ***without conditions.***

## B. The Case For Conditions

- All able-bodied people must work “Six days you shall labor” (Ex. 34:21)
- We were built for work and cannot be fulfilled without it (Eccl. 3:22; 5:12)
- “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (II Thess. 3:10)
  - “This appears to be an admonition to the congregation to allow the lazy brother to experience the consequences of his own behavior. ‘Don’t keep giving food and support to people who then will have no incentive to find a living,’ Paul is saying” (Keller, p. 95)
  - Also note the teaching in I Tim 5:3-10 , where Paul sets conditions for a widow’s admission to the poor roll.

### Summary of Scriptural conditions for aid:

1. **Our mercy must not make it easier for someone to disobey God**
2. **Our mercy to the poor must be such as to make the poor merciful themselves**

## II. The Two Sides of God’s Mercy

- God’s grace first comes to us unconditionally
- Though it comes unconditionally, it does not *proceed* without conditions
- God demands our cooperation with his mercy (sanctification)

## III. The Two Sides of Our Mercy

- *At first* we should show mercy to anyone in need, as we have *opportunity* and *resources*. (But we should be alert for fraud and not give naively)
- The **goal of mercy** is not spot relief- it is to *restore* the person- building them up until they are self-supporting
- Deut. 15:12-15 When a slave’s debt was erased he was sent out with the resources necessary for a new life
- Counseling, education, education, job training- all may be necessary
- If *eventually* (not *initially*) a person or a group evidences a rebellious and disrespectful attitude toward the gospel, we withdraw.
- We may have to ask those receiving mercy to “let us into your life” to identify habits and patterns that cause poverty.
- **Let mercy limit mercy.** We must discontinue our aid if it is truly *unmerciful* for us to continue.

## IV. Three Causes of Poverty

- **Oppression or injustice** (delayed or unjust wages, government systems that favor the wealthy, high interest loans)
- **Natural disaster or calamity** (floods, crop failure, disabling injury, fire)
- **Personal Sin** (laziness, lack of self-discipline, expensive taste, luxury seeking)

**Note: sometimes all three of these causes are present and interlocking.  
A few case examples:**

- A young couple purchases their first house. The wife finds herself with a surprise pregnancy, the husband develops a kidney problem and is out of work for a year. He's back now, but they have unpaid medical bills and are way behind on their house payment. They are trying to sell the house but the market is way down in their town. They are at the point of not eating properly.
- A young woman, age 28, recently separated from her husband who fled to a state where he cannot be forced to support his three children. The woman has few skills and works a minimum wage job to try to support her children.
- A 34 year old man with a long history of not holding jobs because of irresponsibility asks for funds for food. His wife recently left him because he was unable to provide for the family. He has become an alcoholic..

**Conclusion: Our love of the needy is not mere sentiment. It is active, and it longs to bring about healing and change in the lives of the recipient under the kingship of Jesus. Nothing less will satisfy it.**

***For further reflection and study:***

1. What is the goal of mercy? How does that reflect Kingdom priorities?
2. Give an example of giving mercy that could encourage rebellion against God.
3. Give an example of giving mercy that could encourage faith in God.

Note: All of these study notes are drawn from *Ministries of Mercy- The Call of the Jericho Road*, written by Timothy J. Keller. P&R Publishing, Second edition 1997. ( available on Amazon.com; also on cvbbs.com , the Cumberland Valley Bible Book Service)