



Merciful Justice—Thankful Response to Christ’s Love*

Joy overflows when Jesus is the center of your life. This joy is observable, as should be a companion characteristic noted in Philippians 4:5, “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand” (ESV).

Some translators say that Philippians 4:5 is one of the greatest translation challenges in Scripture. The challenge centers on the word “reasonableness” which has various shades of meaning as indicated in the following Bible versions—moderation (KJV), gentleness (NIV), gentle spirit (NASB), forbearance (Young’s Literal), gentle and kind (New Century Version), patience or temperance (Wycliffe), unselfish or considerate (Amplified Bible).

The difficulty this word posed for Bible translators is obvious but you may think, “Why make such a big deal out of it?” Here’s why: Whatever this word means, believers are told to be characterized by this trait ... and all who observe these believers will recognize it! For purposes of life application, the phrase “merciful justice” can encompass all of the above shades of meaning used in various Bible versions.

A well-known Bible expositor, John Gill, expressed a similar perspective in his *Exposition of the Bible* (accessible through many Bible study sites on the internet). Gill explained this particular word in Philippians 4:5 in the following manner:

“Showing clemency and lenity [being lenient]; not dealing with men according to the severity of laws and strict justice, but according to equity, and with mildness and gentleness; giving up strict and proper right, receding from what is a man’s due, and not rigidly insisting on it; putting up with affronts and injuries, and bearing them with patience; and interpreting things in the best sense, and putting the best constructions on words and actions they will bear; and in using inferiors and equals with all humanity, kindness, and respect: and this is what is here intended.”

In Scripture, “merciful justice” was displayed when the adulterous woman was brought before Jesus (John 8:1-11). The Law said, “stone her.” Jesus said, however, that the sinless ones in her accusing group should be the ones to stone her. The fact that she was guilty was unquestioned. The fact that she also needed mercy was unquestioned as well. Instead of being stoned, she was given a second opportunity in life by Jesus’ exercise of “merciful justice.”

Obviously, justice can be legitimately applied in many situations. Believers who habitually rejoice in Christ will be able to deal “in justice” and “in mercy” simultaneously and, in the process, demonstrate the difference Jesus has made in their lives. The linkage between joyful believers and their exercise of “merciful justice” is possible because of the following realities:

Believers are joyful because they deserved justice to be applied to them as a result of their own sinful pathway to death but, instead, received mercy (which brought life).

Romans 6:23, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Believers are joyful that they will continue being recipients of divine mercy as they willingly grant mercy to others.

Matthew 5:7, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

James 2:12-13, Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Believers realize that God exercises righteous judgment and, at the same time, provides mercies that are “new every morning.” Knowing that God’s unfailing love is available to ungrateful, evil people, believers can also be merciful and loving in a similar manner as they follow the Lord.

Lamentations 3:21-23, This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. The LORD’S lovingkindnesses [*mercies*] indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Luke 6:35-36, But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Believers learn to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Matthew 7:12, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The practice of “merciful justice” is not emphasized nor taught as much as it could be. Yet, its practice could actually lend itself to increased joy and lessened worry in your life as you follow Christ and obey God’s Word. This can happen because joy occurs when believers realize what God has done and continues to do in and with them, and an absence of worry is a by-product of being obedient to God’s plan for everyday life. May “merciful justice” be one of your recognized characteristics!

**Excerpted from [Joyful and Worry Free](#)*