

The Mercy of God
Deuteronomy 30:1-10
Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction and Background

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of three speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness. The three speeches are as follows:
 - i. **Speech No. 1: Deuteronomy 1-4** (first four chapters)
 - ii. **Speech No. 2: Deuteronomy 5-26** (twenty-two chapters; about 25 lessons in this series)
 - 1. This section covers the specific laws and regulations.
 - iii. **Speech No. 3: Deuteronomy 27-34** (the last eight chapters of the book)
 - 1. Final wrap-up, including warnings and blessings, depending on whether the Israelites obey or disobey what has just been handed down.
 - 2. The death of Moses and the handoff of leadership to Joshua.
- b. From **Deuteronomy 28-29**, we learned from Moses:
 - i. What will happen if they obey the Lord and follow the Law given through Moses (abundant blessings of every type).
 - ii. What will happen if they turn away from the Lord and refuse to follow His Laws (unimaginable curses, defeat, slavery, famine, etc.)
 - iii. What will happen if all the Israelites *except one* person/family/tribe follows the Lord and keeps His Laws.
 - 1. God's character revealed: His *justice*.
- c. Now in **Deuteronomy 30** we will encounter:
 - i. One of the great closing speeches of all time.
 - ii. An important aspect of God's character revealed: His *mercy*, when we sin and then turn back to Him.

- iii. The simplest summary of what the Lord is looking for from His people:
 - 1. To love Him with all our hearts and souls.
 - 2. To heed His voice and keep His commands.
- iv. One of the greatest passages on God's design for us to have free will. Each person must make their own moral decision for good or evil.
 - 1. This also reveals a lot about the nature of the human heart (after the Fall of mankind).
 - 2. It answers the age-old question regarding whether we are, in reality, all good, totally depraved, or something else.

II. What If They Disobey (and are Punished) but Later Want to Return to the Lord

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 30:1-10**.
- b. If they stray from the Lord and receive the curses warned about by Moses (even being scattered among the other nations), and they return to the Lord and obey His commands, then:
 - i. The Lord will heal their sins.
 - ii. He will have mercy on them.
 - iii. He will gather them up from wherever they are, and bring them back to the land promised to their forefathers.
 - iv. The Lord will bless them even more than He blessed their forefathers.
 - v. He will "purify their hearts" (LXX; in the Masoretic Text it says "circumcise their hearts") and the hearts of their offspring, so that they can love the Lord with their whole hearts and souls.
 - vi. God will put on their enemies all the curses that previously had fallen on them.
 - vii. The Lord will bless the work of their hands and rejoice over His people for good.
- c. Moses explains that all of the wonderful blessings promised here are based on a very important condition.
 - i. **Question:** What is the *condition* that goes with this encouraging promise from the Lord?
 - ii. **Answer:**

1. *"IF* you obey the voice of the Lord your God to keep and to do all His commandments, ordinances and judgments, written in this book of the Law, and...
 2. *IF* you return to the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your own soul." (**Deuteronomy 30:9-10**)
- d. **Question:** What do we learn about the nature and character of God from this passage?
- i. **Answer:** God is merciful. *He has always been that way.* We see this even in the Law of Moses.
 1. He is not only *willing* to forgive us when we turn back to Him; He is *happy to do so*. He will rejoice over us and bless us even more than before.
 - ii. Other places where we see this same willingness of God to show mercy that come to mind:
 1. In **Exodus 34**, when Moses asks to see the Lord, and the Lord passes by, revealing His nature, Moses hears the proclamation:
 - a. "The Lord God, compassionate, merciful, longsuffering, abounding in mercy and true, preserving righteousness and showing mercy unto thousands, taking away lawlessness, wrongdoings and sins...." (**Exodus 34:6-8**, LXX, OSB)
 2. In **Psalms 50/51**, David begins his great prayer after his sin with Bathsheba (adultery, leading to deceit and murder of an innocent man) is exposed, by appealing to God's mercy.
 - a. "Have mercy on me, O God, *according to your great mercy*; and *according to the abundance of your compassion*, blot out my transgression...." (**Psalms 50/51:1-3**)
 3. In **Ezekiel 18** and **33**, the Lord explains that if a wicked man turns back to the Lord, He will restore him. The Lord does not desire the death and destruction of even the wicked.
 - a. Read **Ezekiel 18:27-32**.
 - b. God's merciful nature is so pronounced that the Jews of Ezekiel's day struggled to see how the Lord was being fair in His willingness to forgive sinners who repented at the end of their lives.

4. The entire story of Israel being taken into captivity in Babylon, and then returning after seventy years, reflects what Moses said in **Deuteronomy 28-30**. Near the end of that period of captivity, Daniel's prayer in **Daniel 9** calls on this very promise given by Moses, when the people have been taken into captivity because of their sins. He appeals to the mercy of God, as Moses had instructed.
 - a. Read **Daniel 9:3-5, 9:9-13, 9:18-19**.
5. The story of **Jonah** shows that God would have mercy even on the wicked Gentiles of Nineveh, after they repented and turned to Him (even doing so in sackcloth and ashes).
6. Jesus famously teaches the same thing about God's mercy on sinners who repent and turn back to Him, in three parables in **Luke 15**: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. All three reflect rejoicing in the presence of God after the lost sinner repents.
 - a. From the Lost Sheep parable: "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (**Luke 15:7**, NKJV)
 - b. From the Lost Coin parable: "And when she has found it [the lost coin], she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (**Luke 15:9-10**, NKJV)
 - c. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father kills the fatted calf and throws a party when his errant son returns (after having squandered his inheritance on prostitutes).
 - i. So much so that his brother, who had not strayed, is resentful of the special treatment his sinful brother receives from their father. (This is reminiscent of similar complaints in the **Ezekiel** passage cited above.)
- e. Practical lessons for us, regarding God's mercy.
 - i. God is merciful. As with the case of God's justice, it is in His nature, He has been merciful from the beginning. We see this teaching from Moses, the prophets, and later repeated by Jesus.

- ii. When we have strayed, and later repent, He not only is willing to forgive and restore us, but rejoices to do so. He really does not want *anyone* to perish.
 - 1. His desire is for even the most wicked people to repent and thereby be saved.
- iii. There is and has always been *a condition* to receiving God's mercy. After we have sinned, He extends His mercy to us when we:
 - 1. Return to Him;
 - 2. Love him once again with our whole heart and soul; and
 - 3. Repent and follow His commands again.
- iv. Lies from Satan on this topic include the following. If you properly understand God's mercy, you will avoid both dangerous extremes.
 - 1. On the one hand, some are plagued with the following condemning thoughts:
 - a. "God will not forgive me this time. I might as well give up."
 - b. "I'm just one of those people who is *destined for destruction*."
 - c. "Following the commands of God is impossible. One false step and I'm done."
 - 2. On the opposite hand, there are many others who are tempted to swing to the opposite (false) conclusion. They ignore the danger they are in by thinking something like the following.
 - a. "Thank heaven for the *mercy and grace* of God. Even if I sin repeatedly, I can relax because I know I will be saved in the end because of His mercy and grace. Therefore, it really is not necessary for me to repent or to obey His commands."
- v. A practical challenge for you to put into practice today. Take an honest spiritual evaluation of your life, where you are now. Where you need to repent, *turn back to Him and be confident that he will extend mercy to you*.
 - 1. "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in

darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*” (1 John 1:5-10, NKJV)

2. “Therefore submit to God. *Resist the devil* and he will flee from you. *Draw near to God* and He will draw near to you. *Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep!* Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (James 4:7-10, NKJV)
3. “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*” (James 5:16, NKJV)
4. Take an honest account of how you have been living your life. We all sin after baptism.
 - a. The question before us is: “What do you do *after* that happens (whether by a single sin, or an evolving pattern in your life that is pulling you away from God)?
 - b. According to this passage from Deuteronomy as well as several related passages in the New Testament, you need to:
 - i. Turn back to God, with your whole heart and soul.
 - ii. Obey His commands and teachings.
 - iii. Confess your sin (to God and man), and repent.
 - c. After doing those things, we should be confident (based on God’s nature being both just and merciful, and His faithfulness to His promises) that we have been forgiven. Then we can *move forward!*
- vi. Mercy is not merely something we can be grateful that God possesses. He expects us, those who are His followers, to show the same quality of mercy to others, as well!

1. In the Lord' Prayer, Jesus taught us to ask for mercy from God *only to the extent that we likewise are willing to show that same mercy toward others.*
 - a. "And forgive us our debts, *As we forgive our debtors.*
 - b. "...For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (**Matthew 6:12-15**, NKJV)
2. Jesus taught we must forgive others who sin against us, after they repent. Even if that happens many times.
 - a. "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." (**Luke 17:3-4**, NKJV)
3. Similarly, in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Jesus explained how God will revoke the mercy He extends to us if we, in turn, do not show mercy to others who have sinned against us.
 - a. Read **Matthew 18:21-35**.
 - b. Jesus answers the question from Peter about how many times we should forgive our brother who sins against us, by telling this parable.
 - c. After describing the punishment that the unmerciful servant will receive (being delivered over to the torturers by an angry master), Jesus concludes:
 - i. "...So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." (**Matthew 18:35**, NKJV)
- vii. **Application:** We are in an imperfect church. We will be sinned against by others. However, after they repent, we must be willing to show mercy and forgive them; or else the Lord will likewise withhold mercy and not forgive us.

f. Concluding Summary

- i. God is merciful, and happy to forgive and restore us when we turn back to Him. He has always been that way, even as revealed in the Law of Moses.
- ii. We must show that same mercy toward others, if we expect God to be merciful toward us.