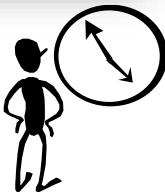


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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.  
Worship 10:00 a.m.  
Worship 5:00 p.m.  
(every other week)

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study 6:30 p. m.

## Compassionate and Merciful

By Matthew W. Bassford

There are many different opinions about the point of the Book of Job. Some say that it proves that man will serve God for nothing. Others posit that it is about the incomprehensible nature of suffering. Personally, I am partial to the explanation provided in James 5:11.

According to the inspired author, Job's story proves two related points. First, those who endure are blessed. Second, the outcome of the Lord's dealings is that He is compassionate and merciful.

Interestingly, both of these conclusions come from the back half of the frame tale in Job 42, not from the poetic discussion that makes up the bulk of the book. Job spends chapter after chapter questioning the justice of God, but ultimately his life reveals God's mercy.

I think this mercy appears in two main ways. First, God does not merely restore Job's possessions. He gives him twice as much.

Second, God deals patiently with Job's complaints. If one of our prayer leaders addressed God in the way that Job does, we would be shocked. I doubt the brother would ever be asked to lead a public prayer again! However, God endorses Job's words even though he is mistaken and admits as much. Indeed, an even more shocking example of undeserved suffering proves exactly the same point as Job's suffering. Job was righteous, but Jesus was sinless. Job suffered from circumstance, but Jesus suffered from human envy and malice. Job lost his possessions and his health, but Jesus lost His life. If we didn't know how the story turned out, this would seem like the strongest possible proof of God's callousness and unfairness.

Of course, it proves the opposite. The One who hum-

bled Himself to the point of death on the cross was highly exalted and given the name that is above every name. What's more, His selfless sacrifice enabled God to offer mercy and compassion to everyone. God's ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts, and He is able to reveal His compassion in a situation where we think it is impossible.

This gives me great hope, and it should give great hope to every Christian who is suffering. I do think that Job shows that human suffering is mysterious and incomprehensible. Job and his friends couldn't figure out what was going on, and neither can we.

However, if we endure despite not getting it, we can be certain of what the outcome will be. Once again, God will prove Himself to be compassionate and merciful.

I don't know what this will mean for me. Maybe it will be revealed in God's personal dealings with me somehow. Maybe my suffering will reveal His mercy and compassion to others. Maybe both will be true. Maybe it's something else that I haven't even thought of yet.

In short, I don't know how any of this will glorify God's mercy and compassion, but I am certain that it will. That is the outcome of His dealings with all His people, especially those who endure suffering. If you are one of those people, take heart. You might not get it. You might not be able to imagine what God could possibly be doing in your life. If you cling to Him, though, the day will surely come when you look back and marvel at how your suffering revealed His compassion and mercy.

## Measured to Us

By Doy Moyer

*“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2).*

*“Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Romans 2:1).*

These are sobering thoughts. We sometimes wonder how God can be just in condemning anyone who lives by a standard different from what He has revealed, even if they were unaware of His special revelation. Here is a principle to consider. Those who entirely reject God still live by a moral standard with the expectation that others live by that standard. Atheists have moral codes and they judge others based on those codes. This is inevitable. No one escapes the moral sense of ought or the desire to do something about violations of the accepted standard. Think of all the cries for justice in the face of evil acts.

The problem is that none live perfectly consistent with the standard they accept and require of others. They violate that by which they judge and condemn other violators. If then they are judged on the basis of the standards they accept and by which they judge others, they will stand condemned. God would not be unjust in applying the same accepted standard by which unbelievers judge others because they condemn themselves by violating their own rules. Such will be measured back to them, and the problem is that there is no ultimate grace in the application. One might pay for a crime or receive a temporary reprieve, but the guilt remains.

God has a right to judge and He has the ability to do so perfectly and righteously. He has all information at His disposal and understands justice flawlessly. Justice will be given to those who reject Him, and the irony is that the systems of unbelievers are sufficient to condemn them if God simply applies what they have accepted and applied to others. That's just, and God is not to be blamed for being unfair.

God offers a greater standard, however, and this is what ultimately matters. The beauty of this standard is that grace and forgiveness are found therein. People think God's standard is harsh and unfair, but it is quite the opposite. The systems of humanity are harsh and unforgiving, and these standards by which people have judged others will be measured back to them. God's standard, on the other hand, is meant to provide a path to forgiveness so that one need not be finally condemned (Romans 8:1-2). People stand judged and condemned when they reject Jesus because now their judgment will come from a place where forgiveness cannot be found.

*"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"* (John 3:17-18).

If we want to avoid the judgment systems that can only condemn, our only option is to follow Jesus. Yes, we have all violated God's standards and sinned, but what God has supplied deals with the sin in ways that no system of this world, devised by flawed humans, can match. *"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:23-24).

One of the primary ways that we can know whether we have accepted God's standard is through how we extend mercy and forgiveness to others.

*"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:36).

*"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:14-15).

The standard of God is fully seen through Jesus Christ. *"For the Law was given*

*through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ*’ (John 1:17). Through Jesus, sin is condemned, God’s holiness is vindicated, and the seriousness of judgment is impressed upon us. But also through Jesus, grace is provided, sin is forgiven, and judgment need not mean our condemnation. *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us”* (Ephesians 1:7-8).

Shall we give ourselves over to the human systems that judge and condemn without providing ultimate mercy and forgiveness, or shall we give ourselves to the standard of God wherein we see the seriousness of sin while also being able to receive His solution? Shall we accept a human standard that will be measured back to us without mercy, or God’s standard with His offer of mercy? The standard we accept and apply makes all the difference.

## The Quiet People

By Matthew W. Bassford

Let us exalt the quiet people. Let us consider and honor them. They are nothing in the sight of the world and too often nothing in the sight of their brethren, but they are choice and precious in the sight of God.

Every congregation has them. They assemble faithfully each Lord's Day, but they are rarely conspicuous in the assembly. Many of them are women, who have no public role in church at all. They are, in a word, quiet. I Thessalonians 4:11 is their verse: [*“that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.”*]

When they are not assembled, they quietly do good. They look in on people and look after people: their families, their brethren, and their neighbors. Year after year, decade after decade, they patiently serve others. They desire neither recognition nor reward. It would not occur to any of them that they are anything special. They believe that anyone in their situation would do as they have done, even though this is not actually true.

I am not one of the quiet people. I never have been. By the grace of God, I am a writer, and like all gifted writers, I have a unique authorial voice. People with voices are not quiet. Nonetheless, the quiet people have always been my brethren and my friends. In addition to their other virtues, they are generally supportive of preachers.

Since my diagnosis, though, my relationship with the quiet people has changed. Now I have been added to the list of those for whom they care. In person, they look after me and mine. They might take the kids for a day, mow the lawn, or bring a meal by.

When distant from me, they continue to care as best they can. They pray. They leave supportive comments on Facebook. They send cards. They send money. Others might put their money where their mouth is; the quiet people put their money where their hearts are.

At times, I feel embarrassed by and guilty about their generosity. Both of these feelings are temptations and lies. Instead, I must rejoice in the wisdom of the generous. They have chosen to lay up treasure in heaven, to trust in the ancient promise that God will care for those who care for others.

We often say that the church is people. I will go one step further. The church is the quiet people. The preachers and teachers may be noisier, but they are not nearly so numerous. Mostly, the Restoration project has produced the quiet people. The work of the Holy Spirit in creating them cannot be denied.

For this reason, it makes me angry when I see “the Church of Christ” attacked online. Allegedly, “we” are legalistic, hardhearted, emotionless, unloving, etc. Because the quiet people are the church, this is an attack on them.

Frankly, I think the real issue is that the quiet people have a public relations problem. They do not sound a trumpet before them as they go to do good, so church critics leap to the conclusion that no good is being done. It is shockingly imperceptive and unfair.

Let us celebrate the quiet people instead. Let us celebrate the cleansed and sanctified church in which they congregate. God does, and who are we to judge more harshly than He?

## Finding Real Happiness

By Richard Thetford

Everyone wants a life filled with joy and happiness, but very few find it. One major reason man fails to find the happiness he seeks is that he is trying to obtain it through the wrong means. Millionaires who have houses, yachts, and condominiums often complain in counseling sessions that they're so unhappy they often think about committing suicide. They have everything money can buy, but they're unhappy with their lives! There's a void in their hearts that has never been filled -- a thirst that has never been satisfied.

The void that people have in their hearts can only be filled through a relationship with the Lord Himself. Jesus stated in John 4:13-14, *"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."*

Only the Lord can fill the deepest longings of the heart. Proverbs 3:5-8 says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones."*