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James 3:1-12

The Mercy of Wisdom

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back at the beginning of this series I made the argument that the book of James, and the vision of the wise life that he presents, is a uniquely applicable message for our day. Godly wisdom, the kind of life that James describes, is the great need of our generation.

The two symptoms that I zoomed in on were despair and directionlessness.

One of the main causes of much of the despair and directionlessness in our world is the lack of meaningful community.

Worldview shapes story, and story forms community. Every worldview tells a story. What are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? How should we live?

And every community is formed *by* a story.

Secularism can't form meaningful community because it doesn't tell a meaningful story. What are we? Meaningless particles. How did we get here? Meaningless chance. What does the future hold? Death and silence. How should I live? Doesn't really matter.

Turns out that's not a compelling story.

Story forms community, and community forms the story into you. Community takes the meaning of the story and translates it into direction for your life.

Community is the school that teaches you how to live according to the story.

To put it another way, godly wisdom means the knowledge and skill to live according to the true story of the world. It's in community that we learn this knowledge and skill. Godly wisdom is gained and cultivated in godly community.

James has a lot to say about community – about life together in the church.

One of the major themes James will address in the next couple chapters is the idea that a community formed by the holiness and mercy of God in Christ should be a community that demonstrates the holiness and mercy of God in Christ.

Holiness and mercy: these are the two distinguishing marks of what Christian community should look like.

In today's passage James is going to be primarily addressing mercy in community. Certainly, this passage is about self-control, but it's self-control in a very specific direction and for a very specific purpose.

There are a lot of threats facing meaningful community. Here James addresses one of the biggest threats – mercilessness and judgmental tongues.

Here's the roadmap for today.

First, James will give us a call to mercy, then five lessons about mercy in community. Here's the big idea: *those who have been blessed by the mercy of God in Christ should bless others with the mercy of God.*

The Call

Ok, mercy. How do you get mercy out of this passage? Great question. This is one of those scenarios where you need to be careful to not miss the forest for the trees. He never mentions mercy in this passage, but the whole passage is a call to put away critical, judgmental, merciless tongues. The old-school word for this is *ensoriousness*. Censoriousness is when you are the kind of person who always sees flaws and faults in others and you are quick to offer a critical word.

To censure someone is to give them a disapproving, usually judgmental, critique.

Censoriousness is a critical and judgmental spirit that is quick to notice and comment on the faults, sins, and flaws of others. Censoriousness is the attitude that says, “if I see a flaw or a fault, I’m going to mention it,” and never pauses to think, “maybe I’m not the person to say it, maybe now’s not the time to say it, maybe there’s a better way to say it.”

Censoriousness is not the same thing as godly rebuke. Godly rebuke is done in love, is done in humility, is done by the right person, in the right way, at the right time. Godly rebuke doesn’t delight in putting yourself in that role but does it in love.

Censoriousness kind of loves being the person to tell other people how it is.

Censoriousness is the opposite of mercy. Censoriousness says I see your flaws, and I don’t have those flaws. Mercy says, I see your flaws and I might not have those flaws, but I have plenty flaws of my own.

Censoriousness says, I see your flaws and I’m not like you. Mercy says, I see your flaws and I’m like you too.

Censoriousness says, I see your flaws and because I need no mercy, you get no mercy. Mercy says, I see your flaws and I give you the same mercy that I myself need.

Before we move into the text itself, I want you to notice the context of this passage. As a rule, if the passage you are studying is bookended by comments on some topic, it’s likely that the passage in question is somehow relevant to that topic too.

In other words, this passage doesn’t mention mercy, but shortly before this passage James emphasizes the value of mercy, and right after this passage James describes this kind of mercy in community.

James 2:13, **“Judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”**

Then James 3:17, we’ll look at this next week, **“wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits.”** Wisdom from above is gentle, and full of mercy.

So, in the middle of all this talk about mercy, James gives us a warning about the temptation toward, and the dangers of censoriousness – judgmentalism.

Let’s get into the text, and hopefully you’ll see it as we go along.

Verse 1, **“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”**

Ok, what is he doing here? This is *not* a warning about the seriousness of going into pastoral ministry. That’s certainly a valid implication of this verse, but that’s not what James is getting at. The context simply can’t sustain that reading. He says nothing about pastoral ministry either before or after this.

James is an extremely fluid book. Each idea flows into the next. This verse flows out of what he said in the last section and flows into what he says in this section.

This is more like when one kid gets in trouble, and the other kid comes in to scold that kid, to tell him what he did wrong, and what the rules are. What do you do as the parent? You say, “ok buddy, you don’t need to be the dad, you don’t need to be the mom, I can handle this.” One of the temptations that we face in community is the temptation to want to become the enforcer of the rules and the corrector of bad behavior.

If we’re not careful, a community begins to be marked by this censorious, “everybody’s a teacher” kind of mentality. In this context everyone is constantly walking on eggshells around everyone else. And this is what James is warning against.

When a community falls into censoriousness the community starts to dissolve pretty quick because no one wants to be around each other. No one wants to tell anyone about their life because they’re worried they’re going to get chided or judged. “I can’t tell anyone about my weekend because what if they don’t approve of the movie we watched? Or what if they don’t approve of movie watching at all?” So, I’ll just talk about some doctrine that sounds complicated, or we’ll talk about what’s going on in someone else’s life.

Censoriousness, this everyone's-a-teacher mentality, destroys community because it makes everyone hide behind masks.

Now, there's two ditches here. A godly community should be a community marked by both holiness and mercy. Mercy without holiness isn't mercy, it's just worldly indifference. And holiness without mercy isn't holiness, it's just strictness.

So, we need to learn to be merciful while still taking sin seriously. And really, the more you get the gospel, the more intuitive that becomes. The more you get the mercy of God towards you, the more you will intuitively give mercy to others. And the more you see the death and chaos of sin, the more seriously you will take sin in yourself and others.

So, "not many of you should be teachers," means that we shouldn't be a church full of chiding and quick rebukes for every little misstep and sin.

James is basically making the same point that Jesus makes in Matthew 7 – part of the sermon on the mount. Matthew 7:1-5.

¹Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Notice the reciprocity in what Jesus is saying. If you judge others with a harsh and critical censoriousness, then they will judge you with a harsh and critical censoriousness. Little by little, this mercilessness will devour the whole community. This is why James says, "**How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!**"

Back to Matthew 7, verse 3.

³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

A couple of things you need to see there, that helps to shed some light on what James is doing here. First, notice that this isn't an absolute prohibition on confronting each other in sin and faults. He doesn't say, never mention the speck in his eye, but he does say, take the log out first.

In other words, he says first, put away your judgmentalism, put away your harsh censoriousness, then, when you've been softened by mercy, then you will actually be able to see clearly, you'll actually be able to help him. Then, engage the sin.

So, there's a right way to confront someone in their sin.

But the other thing I want you to notice is what Jesus calls these people he's calling out. What does he call them? Hypocrites. What's a hypocrite? Someone who has the appearance of faith, but not the reality. Someone whose faith is all talk and no works. Someone with what James just called, 'dead faith.'

I think this is why James moves straight from a warning against dead faith into addressing this issue of judgmental censoriousness. A dead, formal faith, the kind of faith that has a big talk, but doesn't actually produce any works, knows very little of the seriousness of sin or the mercy of God. This leads to a high view of their own righteousness and a critical view of the sins and failings of others.

In other words, someone with a dead, formal faith is the most likely person in the community to be censorious and merciless.

True faith, true gospel faith produces merciful mouths. Faith in the heart, mercy in the heart, produces mercy in the mouth.

Those who know nothing of the mercy of Christ, show nothing of the mercy of Christ.

Now, one more note on this first verse.

Notice that James loops himself in here. He says that **“we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”**

There is a proper office for teaching. There is a proper office for some in the community to teach the community how to walk uprightly. And that office comes with a certain measure of scrutiny. In the context of love, respect, and trust, that scrutiny is a blessing to both the church and the pastor. In its proper place, that scrutiny is a design feature, not a bug.

But, when everyone starts acting like a teacher, then everyone gets scrutinized like a teacher. And that is not a community you want to be a part of.

This is the big idea. This first verse is the call to mercy. Don't be a community marked by censoriousness, or you will very quickly become a community marked by walking on eggshells.

Before we move on, I want to pause and say one thing. Mercilessness is a weed with a deep taproot, so you kind of need to dig at it. But I really do think that this is a strength for our church.

It always kind of bugs me when preachers spend half their sermon talking about how amazing their church is, so I'm not trying to do that.

But I really do think that Grand excels at this. I think we take sin and holiness seriously. I think we care about walking uprightly. But I also think that on the main we do a really good job of bearing with each other's weaknesses with patience, and correcting each other in gentleness.

This sermon might hit you kind of hard as an individual – if that's what you need, praise God. But as a church, I think this is a “take heed lest you fall” kind of situation. Praise God for his grace toward us so far, and may he protect us from descending into censorious eggshell walking.

Ok, so that's the call. You've been shown mercy in Christ, so show each other mercy in Christ. Or, to put it in our James vocab, the wisdom from above walks in mercy.

Then with the rest of the passage James gives us five lessons about mercy.

The Humility and Glory of Mercy

The first two lessons are packed into verse two. First, the humility of mercy. And second, the glory of mercy. Look at verse 2, **“For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.”**

Ok, the first lesson that James teaches us is the humility of mercy. **“For we all stumble in many ways.”** Basically, he's saying, don't give in to the temptation towards judgmental censoriousness because you need mercy too. We all stumble in many ways. Maybe you don't stumble in the same way that the other guy does, but you have your own stumblings. So, in his stumbling, treat him with the mercy that you yourself need in yours.

Mercy towards the stumblings of others flows out of humility. Mercy flows out of the simple recognition that you too are a sinner in need of grace. This is why mercy is such a consistent fruit of true faith. Where there is true faith, there is a recognition of your own need for a savior. Where there is true faith, you are quick to give mercy because you are quick to receive mercy.

Christian humility should season with mercy our approach to the sins of others.

And notice that James refers to this kind of sin as stumbling. There's basically three ways that someone can sin. There's unrepentant sin, or what's sometimes called high-handed sin – where you know it's wrong, or at least you know the Christian's call it sin, and you just don't care.

Then there's ignorant sin. Where you don't realize it's sin. And then there's what James calls here 'stumbling.'

Generally, when you 'stumble,' you know it's sin. And there's a sense where you're doing it willingly, there's nothing forcing you to do it, and yet, your whole heart isn't in it. Even while you're doing it, you're hating it and regretting it. You tell the inappropriate joke, and before you're even done you hate that you just said that. You give the sarcastic remark, and even before you finish the sentence you feel guilty about it.

Christian humility should be merciful towards all three kinds of sin – unrepentant, ignorant, and stumbling. But its that third category that James is talking about. Stumbling sin is going to be the most common in Christian community.

Mercy in community flows out of a self-aware humility that is keenly aware of your own stumbling.

When you stumble I need to deal gently and mercifully with you because I stumble too. I know my own weakness. I know my own failures. I know my own sins. So that should soften my approach to your weaknesses and failures and sins.

In the Sermon on the Mount, just a few verses after the Lord’s comments about the log and the speck he says this, **“whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.”** We call this the golden rule. And this is the foundation of mercy.

I need mercy. I want mercy from you. I want to be a part of a community that offers mercy to one another. So, I better show mercy to others. I stumble plenty, I shouldn’t throw mud at you when you stumble.

Ok, that’s the first lesson. Mercy flows out of humility.

Then the second lesson. Mercy is the glory of godly wisdom. **“And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.”**

His point is this, mercy specifically, and how you use your words more generally, is the most reliable indicator of your spiritual maturity.

Mercy is the most reliable measuring rod of your sanctification. Other things can be helpful, but the most faithful measure of your sanctification is your mercy.

If you are perfect in mercy, if you can bridle your tongue to always bless and never curse (verse 9), to always speak in ways that build up and not ways that corrupt (Ephesians 4:29)¹, to always bring life and not death (Proverbs 18:21),² then your sanctification is complete.

Now, we don’t believe in the doctrine of perfectionism, that you can actually attain perfection in this life. James himself says we all stumble, even himself, an apostle, still stumbles. So, this is the goal, this is the direction that we move, but we have realistic expectations. We’re all always going to be on this journey in this life.

By the power of the Holy Spirit you will make great strides in this, and yet we’re all going to struggle with this to some degree throughout our life.

But this is the glory of spiritual maturity. Mercy is the crown jewel of Christian maturity. Mercy, a holy gentleness with your words, is where sanctification is most visible.

Mercy is the central fruit of faith. Last week, James told us that in order to check the life and vitality of your faith, look to your works. Then he moves into mercy. Mercy is the most reliable work to check. Your sanctification will never outpace your mercy. The most clear indicator of the vitality of your faith is your mercy.

A few weeks ago, at the end of chapter one we saw that pure religion looks like self-control, love for your neighbor, and a love for God that shows up as distinction from the world – being **“unstained from the world.”**

Mercy brings all of these together.

Mercy requires self-control. Especially when you are being sinned against. It takes a great deal of self-control to inwardly say, “wow, that stings,” and yet to say, “I’m no different from you, I need mercy too. I forgive you.”

¹ Ephesians 4:29–32, ²⁹“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

² Proverbs 18:21, ²¹“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

Mercy requires love for neighbor. “I want good for you, so I’m willing to sacrifice for you, I’m willing to take this hit from you and not throw it back at you.”

And mercy requires a certain distinction from the spirit of the age. The world always has a certain tendency to normalize revenge, biting sarcasm, and giving as good as you’ve got. But mercy requires a rejection of the ways of the world. Our loyalty, our norm comes from a higher kingdom, a kingdom of mercy.

So, however much you’ve been reading your Bible, or praying. However long it’s been since you’ve looked at porn. However long it’s been since you’ve emotionally manipulated someone – praise God, I hope you are growing in those areas – but however you’re doing there, the measure of your sanctification, the measure of your Christian maturity is your mercy.

So, here are the first two lessons. First, mercy flows out of Christian humility. And second, mercy is the glory of Christian maturity, the splendor of Christian maturity.

The Importance of Mercy

Ok, the next lesson comes out of verses three through six. Here the lesson is that mercy, or more generally, how you use your words, how you use your tongue, seems like such a small thing, but it’s influence vastly outpunches its weight.

Proverbs 18:21, the tongue is a matter of life and death.

Your life will be marked by mercy, life, fellowship, and light if your tongue is marked by mercy. And if your tongue is marked by judgmental censoriousness your life will be marked by bitterness, death, back-biting, and fire. It’s a small thing, but it makes a big impact.

That’s the basic thrust of his three images here. He uses the image of a bit for a horse, a rudder for a boat, and a small fire to start a big fire. Think about all the great forest fires that have been started by a single cigarette, or even a campfire left unattended.

And notice this, especially the image of the forest fire. Your tongue doesn’t just have the power to shape your life, but your tongue has the power to shape this entire church. This is why the Apostle Paul makes such a big deal about divisiveness.

Notice verse 6. **“And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”**

The tongue is a big deal to James. Mercy and mercilessness, life and death, is a big deal to James. The fires of hell are the accusations and condemnations of the evil one. All of us stumble. All of us have plenty in our lives to be accused about. But is your tongue an agent of the advocate or an agent of the accuser?

Mercy is important. The tongue is important – far more important than its size would suggest.

The Difficulty of Mercy

The fourth lesson comes from verses seven and eight. **“For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”**

The lesson here is that mercy is tremendously difficult. Mastery of the tongue is tremendously difficult. Beyond difficult. It’s impossible.

And that’s the point. James’ point here isn’t do better and try harder. James’ whole point is that mercy is a fruit of true faith. Mercy doesn’t come from trying to be merciful, mercy comes from being born again. You can’t fake it, not for long.

This is why James, in next week’s passage, will call godliness **“the wisdom that comes down from above.”** Wisdom *from above* is full of mercy. Not the wisdom that you find deep down in yourself. Not the wisdom that you

find from discovering your true self. The wisdom from above, mercy, comes from being born again. Mercy comes from dying to yourself and living to Christ through the Holy Spirit.

You cannot tame your tongue. Christ alone can tame your tongue. And the good news, Christian, is that he has. You have been given wisdom from above, now your job is to live in this wisdom. You have died to sin, so stop living to sin. Or as Paul says in Philippians 2, **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** Or again, in Romans 8, **“if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”**

You cannot tame your tongue. You cannot make yourself merciful. But by the Holy Spirit, you can put sin to death. You can walk in mercy, you can grow in mercy because the Holy Spirit is working in you.

Christ died for your sin. And Christ died for your mercilessness.

And he rose to make you righteous. He rose to make you merciful. In Christ you have the power you need to make real progress in mercy.

The Beauty of Mercy

Ok, last lesson. The beauty of mercy. In verses nine through twelve I just want to make one simple observation. Notice what the tongue is supposed to be. It's supposed to be a source of blessing, a source of sweet fruit, and a source of fresh water.

The tongue is meant to be a channel and conduit of creative beauty, goodness, and life. God made us as a special kind of creature with a unique power. God created the entire universe with his words. God spoke and creation came to be. Then God created us in his image. We are speakers like the speaking God. We are creators like the Creator God who created by speaking. We are rulers who rule by speaking, just like God – this is what law is: speech shaping society.

Your ability to shape the world around you by your words is both the most human thing about you, and it is the most godlike thing about you. It is precisely in your words, your speaking-creating-judging-ruling power that you are most human, and most like your Creator. It's uniquely in this that you bear the image of God.

Proverbs 18:21, **“death and life are in the power of the tongue.”**

Proverbs 12:18, **“The tongue of the wise brings healing.”**

Proverbs 15:4, **“A gentle tongue is a tree of life.”**

Your tongue has incredible power for destruction precisely because it was created with incredible power to bring life, and healing, and order, and beauty.

This is the beauty of mercy. Would your tongue be a spring of cool water. Would your tongue be a fruitful tree. Would your tongue be a fountain of blessing.

These are our five lessons on mercy from James. First, mercy flows out of gospel humility. Second, mercy is the glory of godliness. Third, mercy is tremendously important. Fourth, mercy – true mercy – is impossible without the new birth. And fifth, mercy is beautiful, in the fullest, life-giving sense of beauty.

Application

Before we close out, I want to end with some application. One clarification, or maybe a warning, and then some guidelines.

The warning would be this: beware of partial mercy. There's a way that we can think that we are a lot more merciful than we really are. There is a way that we can be merciful toward some groups, but censorious towards others. Or merciful towards some sins, but harsh toward others. This is an incomplete mercy.

At worst it's just partiality and favoritism. At best it's immature mercy. It might well be true mercy, true gospel mercy toward the one group, but unsanctified judgment toward the other.

This kind of incomplete mercy could show up in a thousand ways.

It could be mercy towards guys hooked on porn, but judgment towards guys that have anger problems. It could be mercy towards masculine coded sins, and harshness towards feminine coded sins. Or mercy towards feminine sins and censoriousness towards masculine sins.

It could be mercy towards the sins of the old, and censoriousness towards the young, or the other way around.

It could be mercy towards the sins of other cultures and harshness towards our own, or harshness towards other cultures and mercy towards the failings of ours.

Or, here's a tricky one – mercy towards people that struggle with more worldly coded sins – sexual stuff, drunkenness, immodesty – but then censoriousness toward people that struggle with censoriousness. Can you be merciful to the guy who doesn't do a good job of showing mercy? Can you be merciful to the censorious guy?

And this is why we get tripped up. We tend to think we're a lot further along than we really are. We tend to think of growing in mercy like filling a bucket. But in reality, it's more like filling an ice-cube tray – one cell then the next then the next. This first cell might be full and overflowing, but that one at the end is still bone-dry.

It's easy to be merciful to our friends. And this is what Jesus says. It's easy to love your friends. But do you love your enemies? Do you have mercy toward the sins that actually offend you?

So that's the warning. Beware of partial mercy. As you're fighting to grow in mercy, fight to grow in mercy all around.

Then the second point of application I want to give is a set of guidelines for how to address sin mercifully. Again, Christian community should be marked by both holiness and mercy. So, we need to be willing and able to address sin in one another, and do it in a merciful way. Mercy is not about ignoring sin, or normalizing sin, but mercy does shape how we address sin.

One of the main resources that I've been using for this series is a commentary from an old English Puritan pastor by the name of Thomas Manton.

He gives six principles that should shape how we address sin in others, six principles that keep us grounded in mercy.

First – we've touched on this a bit already – the first principle is humility. When you address someone else's sin, you need to keep in mind that you are in principle no different. Even if that particular sin or weakness is not something you struggle with, you are in principle no different.

Second, we should engage sin from a heart of sorrow, not delight. There's a way that we can see someone's sin and delight in it as a way of showing that we really are better than them after all. Addressing sin mercifully comes from a heart that sorrows over the sin and desires the persons restoration. Mercilessness comes out of the pride that delights in someone else's failings and sin.

The third principle is that we should read other people's sins and failures in the best possible light. Now, we shouldn't ignore the facts, but we should be disciplined to make the best assumption possible, not the worst.

When you see someone's sin, what do you assume about his circumstances? What do you assume about his intentions? His habits? His character? What do you assume about his future? Is he always going to be this way?

When we sin, we tend to attribute it to our circumstances. But when others sin, we tend to attribute it to his character. Unless the evidence forces us otherwise, mercy assumes the best.

Again, this isn't about denying the facts. But mercy thinks the best of others until the facts require you to conclude otherwise.

Mercy begins with humility, mercy operates out of genuine sorrow over their sin, and mercy assumes the best.

Fourth, mercy does not infringe on genuine Christian liberty.

The Bible gives us genuine rules for Christian conduct but then leaves us a good measure of latitude to figure out how to apply them in our own circumstances, in our own community, and according to our own consciences before God.

The Bible is clear that drunkenness is a sin.³ But it doesn't specify how each of us should relate to alcohol. The Bible has commands that touch on our entertainment. Sexual immorality, irreverent babble, and crude joking are out of bounds.⁴ And yet there is room for legitimate disagreement about the border cases. The same with how we dress.⁵ The Bible requires modesty, but there is room for legitimate disagreement about what exactly that looks like.

There are clear principles where there are clear rules for Christian living. And yet, the border isn't always as clear as we might like. Mercy respects Christian liberty and disagrees charitably – again, assuming the best until forced otherwise.

Then fifth, mercy speaks the truth in love. Manton says here, “there may be censure where there is no slander.”⁶

In other words, even if you are calling out a real sin, it can still be done in an unmerciful, judgmental way. Just because you're saying the truth doesn't mean you can say it however you like.

This means both tone, timing, and posture and all the rest. But it also controls who you bring it up to or in front of. Talking about someone else's sin or weakness behind their back is just gossip. Christian mercy should lead you to deal with the sin with as little public shame as possible.

And sixth, mercy never uses other people's sins to make yourself look better. Mercy never sees other people's sins and failures as an opportunity to make yourself look better in the eyes of the community. You can do this either by simply setting your virtue against their weakness, or by always using your example as the model to follow.

These are Manton's six principles of merciful reproof. Mercy begins with humility, mercy operates out of genuine sorrow over their sin, mercy assumes the best, mercy does not infringe on genuine Christian liberty, mercy tells the truth in love, and mercy is not self-serving.

Conclusion

No community can survive without mercy. At least no community made up of sinners.

Godly wisdom needs godly community. If you want to live a wise, meaningful, purposeful, godly and good life, you need community. And if you want that community to thrive, it needs to be a community grounded in the holiness and mercy of God and marked by the holiness and mercy of God.

Hopefully you've seen this already, but mercy is not something that you need to work up from within yourself. All real mercy is responsive mercy. All real mercy is a response to God's mercy toward you. **“We love because he first loved us.”** We show mercy because he first showed us mercy.

When faith sees the holiness of God in Christ, pride dies. When faith is comforted by the mercy of God in Christ, the heart expands and makes room to be merciful to others.

There are two lessons to be drawn from this text. First, godly community *must* be saturated in mercy. And second, a community will only ever be marked by mercy when they are together committed to beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Mercy in, mercy out.

³ Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:18.

⁴ Eph. 5:3-4, Phil. 4:8, 2 Tim. 2:16.

⁵ Deut. 5:18, Matt. 18:7-9, 1 Tim. 2:9-10.

⁶ Manton, 273.