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PASTORAL CARE: A MINISTRY OF MERCY

“The first duty of love is to listen.”

PAUL TILLICH

First of all, we must say, without fear of contradiction, that the ministry of pastoral and family care is a ministry of mercy and compassion. If these qualities are not present in those who are interested in wanting to get involved in this ministry, we think this will inevitably lead to failure and would, unfortunately, bring the body of Christ a lot of pain.

Therefore, we must try to be aware of having the heart of the Lord, that is, allowing God to manifest himself in his reign in our hearts. Now many of us do not see this in a tangible way and rather what prevails are our interests, our assumptions, our prejudices, our religion ... and the heart of the Lord is left out or relegated, not occupying a central part in our lives.

How we are going to present ourselves to care for leaders, ministers or pastors in crisis? What kind of approach are we going to provide? Will we stand on Mount Sinai representing justice, judgment, and religion, or rather, will we stand on Mount Calvary signifying grace, mercy and forgiveness? These are valid questions that we have to make and that will help us stay focused. Now this ministry, beloved fellow servant, urges us to be receptive to the heart of the Lord, so that we look after the shepherds of his flock, being sensitive to the person of the Holy Spirit.

We were talking about the heart of our Lord and of the need to be receptive to it, but what is his heart like? A few years ago, the Lord

revealed it to us through His Word, and we want to share it with you. Throughout all Scripture, there are two attributes that are mentioned frequently about God, which in most cases go together. They are mercy and truth. Here are a couple of examples:

*“For great is your mercy in the heavens,
And unto the clouds Thy truth” (Psal.57:10 KJV)*

*“But you, Lord God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psal.86:15 KJV)*

The psalmist mentions to us that the essence of God’s presence has to do with these qualities when he says: “Mercy and truth go before thy face” (Psal.89: 14b KJV).

- **Mercy**
- **Truth**

Moreover, the Bible promises us that if we try to let mercy and truth reign in our lives, we will have the same favor before God and people:

*“Never turn away from thee mercy and truth;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart;
You find favor and good understanding
In the eyes of God and men”
(Prov.3: 3-4 KJV)*

Likewise, David asked for the same thing to the same Lord in prayer when he said:

*“O Lord, let thy mercy and thy truth always preserve me”
(Psal.40:11b GNV)*

When we see the theme of mercy and truth, we conclude that throughout the Bible:

- Mercy is placed first,
- and then truth.

Perhaps, at this stage of reading, you might ask: Is this important? Does it make a difference rather or not mercy comes first? We, dear reader, had the same idea you have, until the Lord Jesus revealed to us in his Word.

Notice the following, as evangelicals we have emphasized truth for a long time over mercy. For years we have proclaimed: We have the truth of Jesus Christ! The truth of the Word! We have and grab hold of the truth, the truth, the truth!

And many times, in an effort to defend the truth, we have fallen into a ruthless legalism, hurting people, bumping the Bible on their heads, without love or mercy of any kind. So many beautiful people that the Lord was giving us in our congregations have run from our midst. Many are stuck at the moment in the world away from God, all because we defended the truth, but without mercy. And what about the issue of restoring a pastor who has fallen? Many times, we pastors have been unloving, mercilessly condemning the cold truth to the needy minister.

This has been a constant attitude that we have seen in the treatment that many countries have had with the pastoral body.

AND JESUS?

It is interesting that when we analyze the four Gospels and see the life of Jesus Christ and how he developed his ministry, we realize that at all times he showed the heart of the Lord of mercy and truth.

Let me show you some examples from the Gospels:

Let's consider first of all the passage of the woman caught in the act of adultery. In John chapter 8, the religious men of that time bring a woman to Jesus and say:

“. . .Master, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. And in the Law Moses he commanded us to stone such women. But you, what do you say? More they said this testing him, to accuse him power

... But Jesus stooped down, wrote on the ground with his finger. And they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them,

Which of you is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. And again he stooped to the ground, he continued to write on the ground. But they, hearing it, being convicted by their conscience, They went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the middle. Jesus straightened up and saw none but the woman, he said: Woman, where are those who accused you? No one condemned you? She said, No man, Lord. Then Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you; Go and sin no more "(Jn.8: 4-11 KJV)

What I want to emphasize in this passage was the attitude that Jesus Christ had. It is the same attitude that we should have as his followers and counselors. The religious presented themselves before the Lord with the truth. "Listen, Master, the truth says ..." Notice that Jesus never said, "you lie" because they were telling the truth, but Jesus prefaced mercy above the truth. This attitude does not give us license to live in sin messily or allow cheap grace. On the contrary, the Lord tells this woman, "Neither do I condemn you; Go away and sin no more." (Jn.8 11 KJV) First mercy and then the truth.

Now let's look at the passage where Jesus heals a leper:

"He came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down said to him: You can add me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him, and said, I will, be clean. And so he had spoken to the immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was clean." (Mark 1: 40-42 KJV)

Here we note, dear reader, that Jesus acts in the same way. He puts mercy before truth. Why do I say this? Because the law forbade touching a leper, but in this passage we see that the Lord had mercy on the leper, touched him, and declared his healing. How wonderful!

Thus, we encourage you to analyze how Jesus developed his ministry and teachings and you will notice that this has always been his pattern.

When He tells us the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, we also have a clear example of how God's mercy is placed first and then his truth. Thus, we see that the younger son asks the father for his share of the inheritance, leaves the house, and goes to a distant city to live riotously. As we all know, he comes to himself, repents, and returns to his father's house asking for mercy.

The father, a symbol of God, maintained from the outset a merciful attitude toward his youngest son. He sees him from afar, runs to him, and gives him all the protection and compassion he deserved. He went so far as offering him new regal garments, giving him the ring of authority, and proclaiming a party in his honor.

In the next act, in this parable that Jesus tells, the eldest son comes in, as a symbol of truth and of religious legalism. He feels very offended that his father is showing mercy toward his brother. In summary, sometimes the attitude of holding truth above mercy, has led many of us to have a very self-righteous attitude, stripping the truth of love.

And with regard to correction and discipline and what we have taught in our churches about people who sin, the Church has been abusive by standing on the truth without any anesthesia, where people have left our congregations sicker than they entered.

Why has this happened? Because we have neglected mercy.

Notice that the same blessed word of the Lord shows us clearly what attitude we need to have; it is better to use mercy first followed by truth.

*"By mercy and truth iniquity he is corrected."
(Pr.16: 6a KJV)*

The Lord Jesus Christ warns us quoting the prophet Hosea of the need for mercy:

*"Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice:
for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."
(Mt.9:13 ASV)*

UNMASKED LEADER

Therefore, in pastoral care, we must take the warning James gives us in his letter seriously:

*“For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy;
and mercy triumphs over judgment. “
(Jam.2:13 KJV)*

It is interesting that at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew’s Gospel exhorts us: “Therefore, you be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48 ASV) while the other synoptic Gospel of Luke, referring to the same instruction, says: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36 ASV).

Thus, we believe deep in our hearts that we, dear reader, enter in the perfection of our God, when we proceed with mercy toward our fellow man.

Dear fellow servant, remember one of the statements made by Jesus about the hearts of the strongest religious leaders of his time: “but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you” (John 5:42 ASV). Really what he was saying is “I only see a legalistic attitude in you.”

Of course, we don’t stay with only mercy and grace, falling into a debauchery where everything is allowed. But we do not remain with only the truth either, trying to apply all kinds of rules and disciplines, bringing pain and dryness.

Remember, the Lord tells us: “mercy and truth together.” That’s where Jesus is, and we want to be where the Master is.

I wanted to start this book with this subject because I believe it is of immense priority that pastoral counselors have the same heartbeat as our Lord has who has called us to this ministry that is so special to take care of his pastors and families in crisis.

We believe, dear fellow servant, if we are to engage people with a heart full of the mercy of the Lord, the blessed Holy Spirit will support

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us bringing the manifestation of his presence, since that same feeling is our beloved Lord's feeling. Remember: if you are going to get involved in the ministry of pastoral care, become aware, realize that this is a ministry of mercy!