

the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him..." (Philippians 2:8,9).

Yes, God's mercy reached out to Him, and He was covered by God's grace. But when? As the result of His humble obedience, and only then!

Yes, the price for sin had been paid and now God's grace could be extended to all men — but how? **Only in Christ, and only in His death.** "...Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). "God...has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Now we have two possible places for man to exist: **(1) in himself, with his sins (2) in Christ, free of his sins.**

All accountable humans exist in the first realm. They can live there, and they can die there, by simply doing nothing. And if they die in sin, they have totally and forever shut themselves behind the wall of sin over which God's grace does not cross.

No amount of human godliness is enough to take away sin; ignorance is no excuse for sin; human frailty and good intentions cannot erase sin. No human, on his own, can stand before God. Will tears and pleadings for mercy avail? How can we think so, when God could not spare

even His own Son from paying in death for the sins He carried which were actually ours?

So we look to the second place in which we may choose to live: **in Christ.** How do we pass from the place of sin to the place of salvation in Christ? If the wages of sin is death, how does *His* death become *our* death, so that *we can live in Him*?

"...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3,4).

All humans must, like Christ, humble themselves to become obedient. Only then can God's mercy reach out and cover us with His grace. Only then can we have salvation in the blood of Christ.

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Where
GRACE
and
MERCY
END

Betty Burton Choate



WHERE GRACE AND MERCY END

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Always, it seems, men have freely promised God's grace. Certainly, the individual, regardless of his life, his religion, his sins or his failures, almost invariably believes that somehow, at the time of death, God's grace will cover **his** human failures and will open the gates of heaven so that **he** may go in.

Seldom is a funeral sermon preached that does not promise God's saving grace for the deceased.

Men look at other men — at the godly, at the ignorant, at the weak who wish to be strong — and they pronounce the covering of God's mercy and grace. "Surely such a godly man is saved." "God would not condemn those who have never been taught!" "God knows our human frailty — He would not condemn those who try."

Human judgments — human extensions of a grace which is not ours to command!

Is it true that God's grace is so great that it can cover the entire world, every human who has ever lived? Of course it is! But does mercy so control God's heart that grace is extended indiscriminately? Since grace is God's gift, not man's, it is God who determines how it will be dispensed. What does He say?

In emphatic and clear words God pronounces, "*For the wages of sin is death...*" (Romans 6:23). Since **all** have sinned (Romans 3:23), **all** are under the curse of death. Without God's grace, there would be no salvation for anyone. What is the possibility of our human ability to enable us to escape from the certain and eternal destruction? **Zero, zero, and Zero.**

But God's mercy and grace do come into the picture. How? All would agree, "Through Christ Jesus."

But before we look at God's mercy and grace for ourselves through Christ, we need to consider God's mercy and grace toward Christ:

◆ Did Christ need mercy? No, He had no sin.

◆ Christ was born, though, to make Himself the death offering instead of man. On the cross He took the penalty for our sins, and the Scriptures say, "*He made Him...to be sin for us...*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

◆ Concerning Christ, Hebrews 5:7 says, "*He...offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death....*"

◆ Death was the wage of sin. Christ had taken the burden of our sins and had come under the curse of death. But He was God's own Son! In the garden He had cried out piteously, with tears, begging God to spare Him that bitter cup — begging for mercy and grace.

◆ No mercy was shown. No grace was extended. Instead, God closed His ears to the cries, forsaking His only begotten Son, and He let Him die. Why? Because of the sin He carried which could be paid for only by death!

What is the lesson for us?

That there is a wall which can stop even God's grace, a wall over which His mercy cannot leap: the wall of sin. "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*" (Isaiah 59:2)

But we look again at the picture of Christ — no longer a dead sacrifice, but the resurrected and glorified Lord over all. What made the difference? Again, what do the Scriptures say? "*...He humbled Himself and became obedient to*

