



“And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” – John 8:32

*For I am the LORD, I change not... Malachi 3:6*

Once in a while I'll hear or read a comment about how the “God of wrath” in the Old Testament somehow went through a personality change by the advent of the New Testament. It appears that many have the impression that in the Old Testament, God was following around His people with a giant ax in His hand just waiting for them to flub up somehow just so He could cream them. Then all of a sudden we are presented with the concept of grace in the New Testament and God is transformed into a kind, merciful Father who never disciplines anybody for anything. Both concepts are erroneous misconceptions.

The God of Israel is the same yesterday, today and forever. He never changed His nature, especially to accommodate us humans. He is who He always was, a just, fair and merciful God and Father of the human race. His loving mercy is evident throughout the Old Testament, just as His love and judgment are apparent in the New.

These misconceptions arise because in all probability the people expounding them have never really delved into the Word for themselves to discover the true pigments that color the portrait of who He really is.

As we open the book of Genesis and the wondrous painting of Eden unfolds, we witness the first example of the beautiful, merciful nature of the Lord. The Master Artist has created a perfect world and in the garden that He has planted He places His children and tells them that in order to remain in this paradise they only have to keep just one commandment. In other words, He is asking for simple obedience to His word and humankind will remain in a state of blessing.

His children disobey Him and the great lesson of the original sin unfolds before us which is, that we all must live with the consequences of our choices and actions. God could have destroyed them at that moment but He didn't. He looked upon their trembling nakedness and lovingly clothed them with the first sacrifice, a foreshadow of the grace to come through the sacrifice of the Messiah Jesus, - Genesis 3:21. The forgiving

## The Merciful God

grace of the New Testament originates in Eden with the covering of the first humans by the mercy of a loving God.

During the tumultuous history of God's people, the Jews experienced a diversity of leadership some good and some horribly wicked. Two of their most notorious leaders were Ahab and Manasseh.

Ahab “did abominably” in God's eyes and the Lord pronounced dire judgments against him through the prophet Elijah. But when Ahab heard these proclamations of doom he *“rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly”* – I Kings 21:27.

God responded to Ahab's willingness to repent and humble himself, and God postponed His judgments so they would not occur during Ahab's lifetime.

Manasseh provoked God to anger by practicing witchcraft and a score of other atrocities that emulated the practices of the pagan nations that God had removed from His people. In response to Manasseh's wickedness, God caused him to be captured by the king of Assyria. *“And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and he prayed to Him: and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God”* – II Chronicles 33:12, 13.

A genuine, heartfelt repentance by this formerly wicked king, led to a complete restoration through God's mercy and from that point on Manasseh followed God with all his heart.

The Old Testament Scriptures abound with references to the mercy and compassion of our God. Whenever the Scriptures recount the incidences where God allowed severe judgments to fall upon His people, it was only in direct response to their unwillingness to obey Him for their good. They were the womb that God had chosen through which He would birth the Savior of the world, and it was vital that this womb be preserved for that purpose. Therefore God had to use whatever means that were necessary in order to keep His people from being polluted by the pagan nations

around them. God never willingly afflicts His people and always sought to turn them from their sins before judgment would fall.

*“And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy” – II Chronicles 36:15, 16.*

God will always respond in mercy when there is repentance and a change in behavior, but the pride that mocks its Maker by continued disobedience can only expect to reap what it sows.

This truth is carried over to the New Testament, where the covenant of grace has been implemented through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. God’s mercy has been exemplified and the prophecies have been fulfilled, yet amid the rejoicing there emerges a couple of devious souls, Ananias and Sapphira who experience a bit of the “Old Testament wrath of God” when they lie to the Holy Spirit and are struck dead at the Apostle Peter’s feet. (Acts 5:1- 11). The church beheld “The goodness and severity” (Romans 11:22) of our God in one fell swoop and recognized that His justice is never far removed from His compassion.

The Book of Revelation chronicles the great tribulation, a time of trouble unsurpassed in human history. It is the culmination of judgments upon a humanity that has chosen to run amuck. And as God dealt with Manasseh, so here as well, mankind reaps the fruits of their own wrong doing. The afflictions continue, but unlike Manasseh, the souls of this age refuse to repent - Revelation 9:20, 21.

At this moment in history, all of humanity is standing on a conveyor belt that is carrying us to the future described in the pages of the book of Revelation. The God of mercy and judgment is waiting for us at the end of the story. He is perfectly capable of rewriting the prophesied scenario of destruction because the Scriptures have shown us that it is always God’s intention to bring restoration upon any who choose the wisdom of a humble repentance. There is a remnant upon this planet that possesses this wisdom

and can stand before the God of the universe in victory when life reaches its finale. Are you one of them?

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

*For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

*John 3:16, 17, I John 1:9*

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## God's Yearning Heart

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kills the prophets, and stones them which are sent to you, how often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! – Matthew 23:37*

It does not matter who you are, or what you have done, or what your sexual persuasion is, God wants you to know that He loves you; He sees you as a valuable treasure that He sent His Son to die for. His yearning heart only desires that you trust Him enough to surrender to Him the clay beads of your old life.

Jesus cried over His people who rejected Him, "How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!" God’s yearning heart wants to gather all people into His embrace through the arms of the Messiah Jesus, but this amazing offer of peace and security is abandoned by most because they are unwilling to repent and they cannot relinquish the worthless clay beads of their sin. The pleasures of sin for the short season of this life are more valuable to them than the glowing treasures of eternity. How sad.

The fear of change keeps its captives clinging to the raft of their own desires with no hope of ever reaching a safe haven in the storms of this existence. God’s yearning heart will never stop longing for these ones, even though they disdain His provision for their salvation in Jesus.

If you are drifting in your fragile raft of temporary illusions, look at those clay beads in your hand and ask yourself if it would be much wiser to trade them for the treasures of eternal life? All it takes is some faith to hand those worthless beads over for something so much better and valuable. Give God those clay beads of your sin, pride and self, and trust God that He will replace them with diamonds.

