

MERCY AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

“For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6 KJV).

The significance of this verse is enhanced by the fact that Jesus made reference to it on at least two different occasions. First, when He was criticized by the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus said: **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:12,13)**. In the second instance the Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath. After reminding them of what David did, and what the priests did, Jesus said: **“If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent’” (Matt. 12:7).**

Since “learning” about this Scripture and “knowing what these words mean” was important to Jesus, it ought to also be important to us!

Let us begin by reflecting on Hebrew parallelism. *“Synonymous parallelism is the most common type of Hebrew parallelism. The second part of a synonymous parallelism simply repeats or restates the main idea of the first part. To put it another way, the second line repeats or restates the first line in different words by having similar meaning.”*

The Hebrew Bible is filled with “parallelisms”. Note, for example, Ps. 19:1 **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”** Note how the second part repeats the main idea of the first part.

The same is true of the next verse, Ps. 19:2: **“Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge”**. Again, the second line restates the first line in different words but with a similar meaning.

This method of teaching is common in the Old Testament Scriptures which were originally written in Hebrew.

But now let us apply this to our text:

“For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6).

In this verse “mercy” is parallel with the “knowledge of God” and “sacrifice” is parallel with “burnt offerings”. The parallel states the previous but in different words. In other words “mercy” means the same thing as the “knowledge of God”. Nothing, as you know, is more important than the knowledge of God! No wonder Jesus wanted us to know what these words mean!

WE REPEAT! UNDERSTANDING “MERCY” IS THE SAME AS UNDERSTANDING GOD”!

The Hebrew word here translated as “knowledge” is “daath”. It is found 92 times in the Bible and means knowledge, perception, discernment, understanding, etc. The first two times the word occurs in the Bible it refers to the tree God placed in the middle of the garden which was called the **“tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 9, 17).**

Adam and Eve knew the word “good” for God is “Good” and everything God created was also “good”. They had no “knowledge” however, of “evil”. This was a new word and they had no idea what it meant. Our text is therefore foundational for it helps us to understand the “knowledge of God” and by contrast the “knowledge of evil”.

Remember! All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important. $2 + 2 = 4$ and Jesus is the Christ. Both are equally true but not equally important. When Jesus was asked: **“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”** He did not hesitate to answer. Out of hundreds of commandments Jesus selected only two. The first and most important is to love God with all of your heart, soul, and mind. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36-40). All of God’s commandments are important, but these two are the most important. They have priority over all the others. The Scriptures are filled with such examples. Consider, for example, faith, hope, and love. All three are commanded by God and all three are essential to our salvation. Yet the Scriptures are clear that love takes priority. **“And now these three remain: faith hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).**

So also in our text, both mercy and sacrifice are important. Both are commanded by God. Mercy, however takes priority for God desires mercy more than sacrifice!

AGAIN, FOR THE SAKE OF EMPHASIS WE STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF A CORRECT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWING GOD! THIS VERSE PROVIDES CRITICAL INSIGHT INTO THE NATURE OF GOD! IT TEACHES THAT UNDERSTANDING MERCY INVOLVES UNDERSTANDING GOD!

THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

The sacrificial system dates back to Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned they sewed fig leaves together and tried to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:7). Since this covering was not adequate God made garments of skins to cover them (Gen. 3:21). Thus God Himself performed the first animal sacrifices. The practice of making sacrifices would continue throughout all of history and would culminate in the cross of Christ.

The importance of a blood sacrifice is clear from the story of Cain and Abel. Both worshipped God but God looked with favor on Abel and his offering and not with favor on Cain and his offering (Gen. 4:4,5). Perhaps this was because Abel offered a blood sacrifice and Cain did not. Remember that Abel made his sacrifice by faith (Heb. 11:4). Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), we can infer that Abel heard and obeyed God while Cain heard God and didn’t obey.

The history of sacrifices and burnt offerings is long and clear:

- All godly people from Adam to Christ built altars and made sacrifices and burnt offerings.

- The first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark was build an altar and sacrifice burnt offerings (Gen. 8:20).
- Like all of the patriarchs, Job also sacrificed burnt offerings (Job 1:5).
- The first thing Abram did when he arrived in the Promised Land was build an altar (Gen. 12:7).
- All of the patriarchs built altars and made sacrifices.
- In Egypt the children of Israel pleaded with the Pharaoh to let them go into the desert and make sacrifices to God (Ex. 5:3).
- The Israelites delivered their firstborn from death by placing the blood of a sacrificial lamb on the door posts of their homes (Ex. 12:12,13).
- Later at Mt. Sinai the Law of Moses was received in association with building an altar and shedding blood (Ex. 24:4-8).
- According to the Law blood sacrifices were to be made every day (Ex. 29:38-41).
- When the Hebrews sinned the Law required them to offer more blood sacrifices (Lev. 5:1-13).
- The Law also required two lambs to be sacrificed every Sabbath (Nu. 28:9,10).
- On the first of every month the Law required priests to sacrifice two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old (Nu. 28:11).
- Sacrifices and burnt offerings were also made on special occasions such as Passover, Pentecost, the day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles (See Lev. 23:1-44).
- The dedication of Solomon's temple was accompanied by the sacrifice of 20,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats (1 Ki. 8:62,63).
- Etc.
- **YET WE ARE SPECIFICALLY TOLD: "IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE BLOOD OF BULLS AND GOATS TO TAKE AWAY SINS" (HEB. 10:4).**
- **GOD IS NOT IRRATIONAL. HE OBVIOUSLY HAD A REASON FOR COMMANDING THAT MILLIONS OF ANIMALS AND BIRDS BE SACRIFICED!**
- **PLEASE CONSIDER THAT GOD COMMANDED ALL OF THESE SACRIFICES TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS!**
- **THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS IS THE FOCAL POINT OF ALL HISTORY!**
- **JOHN THE BAPTIST SAW JESUS AND SAID: "LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD" (JN. 1:29). NOTHING WAS MORE TRUE!**
- **THERE ARE MANY LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM, BUT THIS ONE LESSON IS CLEAR: "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE" (JN. 3:16).**
- **JESUS ON THE CROSS HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND WHO GOD IS!**
- **"GIVING JESUS", ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, INVOLVES HIS DEATH. JESUS HIMSELF EXPLAINED THAT AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS SO ALSO THE SON OF MAN HAD TO BE LIFTED UP! (JN. 3:14).**
- **THE BIBLE IS CLEAR, LIFTING UP JESUS REFERS TO HIS CRUCIFIXION (JN. 12:32,33).**
- **THE FACT THAT JESUS DIED TO SAVE MANKIND GIVES INSIGHT INTO WHO GOD IS! GOD CLEARLY DISPLAYED HIS MERCY BY SACRIFICING HIMSELF!**

MERCY VS. SACRIFICE

Please note that the focus of the sacrificial system is “inward”. In Egypt, for example, each man sacrificed a Passover Lamb for himself and his family (Ex. 12:3). No one sacrificed anything for his neighbor! Job also sacrificed burnt offerings for his family (Job 1:5). When a Hebrew man sinned he confessed his own sin, not the sin of his neighbor. The sinner was commanded to bring a female lamb or goat to the priest, and then the priest would make atonement for him and his own sin (Lev. 5:5,6). The focus of the sacrificial system is “inward”.

The focus of “mercy” is “outward”. How beautifully this is illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37). Jesus told of a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and left him half dead by the roadside. A priest and a Levite “passed by on the other side”. They avoided the wounded man. They gave him no help. Their focus was inward. They were only thinking of themselves. If the wounded man was unclean they would become unclean by touching him and thus not be able to make sacrifices.

The Good Samaritan focused on “mercy” not “sacrifice”. He didn’t think about himself. He was willing to become unclean in order to help someone in need. His focus was on the man who was naked and half dead. Therefore he bandaged the poor man’s wounds pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and cared for him. Finally, he paid the innkeeper and promised to return and reimburse him for any extra expense. The Samaritan showed mercy, and Jesus said: **“Go and do likewise” (Lk. 10:37).**

THE POINT IS THAT THAT THE FOCUS OF GOD IS OUTWARD. HIS VERY NATURE CAUSES HIM TO BE MORE INTERESTED IN OTHERS THAN IN HIMSELF. WHY ELSE WOULD HE SACRIFICE HIMSELF FOR US?

- REMEMBER! **“GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH HIM” (JN. 3:17).**
- REMEMBER! **“GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT HE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS” (JN. 15:13).**
- REMEMBER! **“THIS IS HOW WE KNOW WHAT LOVE IS: JESUS CHRIST LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US. AND WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR OUR BROTHERS.” (I JN. 3:16).**
- REMEMBER! **“GOD MADE HIM WHO HAD NO SIN TO BE SIN FOR US, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD” (2 COR. 5:21).**

NO ONE DREAMED THAT GOD WOULD SACRIFICE HIMSELF!

- The death of Jesus on the cross was a surprise! No one in heaven or on earth dreamed He would do it! This mystery is too wonderful for words!
- Paul put it like this: **“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements and his paths beyond tracing out . . .” (Rom. 11:33).**
- God decided before the creation of the world to redeem mankind with the precious blood of Jesus! (1 Pet. 1:18-21) This glorious plan, however, was kept secret (Eph. 3:1-12).
- As we have said, the plan was so audacious that no one dreamed what God was going to do. The only way we now understand this mystery is that God revealed it to us. Isaiah said it like

this: **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God is prepared for those who love him BUT GOD HAS REVEALED IT TO US BY HIS SPIRIT. THE SPIRIT SEARCHES ALL THINGS, EVEN THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD! (1 Cor. 2:9,10)**

- The prophets tried to understand what God was going to do but they didn't (1 Pet. 1:10-12).
- Even the angels wanted to understand, but they couldn't (1 Pet. 1:12).
- The millions of sacrifices and burnt offerings pointed us to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ!
- The Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).
- Praise God! The mystery hidden for long ages has now been revealed (Rom. 16:25-27).
- Christ volunteered for this mission (Phil. 2:5-11). He knew that God was not pleased with animal sacrifices, so He said: **“I have come to do your will O God” (Heb. 10:5-7).**
- While the blood of bulls and goats couldn't take away sin, the blood of Jesus could!
- Therefore Christ **“Offered for all time one sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:12).**
- **“Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:13,14).**
- Jesus did not enter an earthly tabernacle with the blood of goats and calves, but He entered into heaven itself with His own precious blood (Heb. 9:11-14; 23-28).
- Looking backward this “one sacrifice” set people free from all sins committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15). Jesus died for all the sins committed from Adam to Calvary.
- Looking forward this “one sacrifice” makes perfect all those who are being made holy (Heb. 10:14). Jesus also died for all the sins committed from Calvary to the end of the world!
- NOT ONLY WAS THIS MYSTERY HIDDEN FROM MANKIND AND GOOD ANGELS, IT WAS ALSO HIDDEN FROM SATAN AND BAD ANGELS.
- WHEN SATAN ENTERED INTO JUDAS HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT HE WAS DOING. REMEMBER! IT IS THROUGH DEATH THAT JESUS DESTROYED HIM WHO HOLDS THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS THE DEVIL! (HEB. 2:14)
- WE REPEAT! TO UNDERSTAND MERCY IS TO UNDERSTAND GOD!

HOSEA

- It is appropriate that our text comes from the book of Hosea.
- Hosea was a prophet who was commanded by God to marry an adulterous woman. She would even bear children as a result of her unfaithfulness (Hos. 1:2). She was not worthy of her husband's love. How beautifully this book illustrates the mercy of God!
- Note that God did not call Hosea as a prophet to condemn his wife, but to save her!
- Note also that Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save it! (Jn. 3:17).
- Hosea was to show mercy to his adulterous wife in the same way God showed mercy to the adulterous Israelites (Hos. 3:1).
- Remember! Whoever comes to Jesus will not be cast out (Jn. 6:37).
- Hosea therefore bought his own wife for fifteen shekels of silver and about ten bushels of barley (Hos. 3:2).
- God would also ultimately buy us back with the precious blood of Jesus! (1 Pet. 1:18-21)
- We see from this book that Hosea was merciful to his wife just as God was merciful to Israel.
- Like the Father of the Prodigal son God waits with open arms for His people to repent! (Lk. 15:20-24).
- REMEMBER! GOD DOES NOT WANT ANYONE TO PERISH BUT EVERYONE TO COME TO REPENTANCE (2 PET. 3:9).

- PAUL POINTED OUT THAT GOD USED HIM AS AN EXAMPLE OF HIS LONG SUFFERING! **“HERE IS A TRUST WORTHY SAYING THAT DESERVES FULL ACCEPTANCE. CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS – OF WHOM I AM THE WORST. BUT FOR THIS VERY REASON I WAS SHOWN MERCY SO THAT IN ME, THE WORST OF SINNERS, CHRIST JESUS MIGHT DISPLAY HIS UNLIMITED PATIENCE AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THOSE WHO WOULD BELIEVE ON HIM AND RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE” (1 TIM. 1:15-16).**
- THE POINT OF PAUL’S TESTIMONY IS THAT IF A WICKED SINNER LIKE HIM CAN BE SAVED, ANYONE CAN BE SAVED!
- THE POINT OF OUR TEXT IN HOSEA 6:6 IS THE SAME! NO MATTER HOW WICKED YOU ARE, YOU CAN STILL COME TO JESUS AND BE SAVED!

THE GOSPEL

- There are some who have the mistaken idea that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament.
- This is not true! There is only One God! The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. His mercy endures forever (See Ps. 136). He never changes (Mal. 3:6). The mercy of God is therefore not only a New Testament doctrine, for when properly understood the whole Bible reflects the mercy of God!
- The promise that Christ would defeat the devil is first mentioned in Gen. 3:15 and thereafter became a common theme throughout all of Scripture.
- The word “Gospel” means “Good News”. It is now clear that **“through him (Jesus) everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).** This is “Good News”.
- Almost immediately after the church began a creed was formulated explaining the Gospel. Note that this creed involves the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Both believing and unbelieving scholars accept this early creed as a historical fact.
- Paul himself received this creed and passed it on to others. He wrote: **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of who are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all of the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).**
- Please note that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were “according to the Scriptures”!
- The resurrected Jesus spoke to two disciples on the Road to Emmaus and said: **“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Lk. 24:25-27).**
- Before ascending into heaven Jesus told His apostles: **“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His**

name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:44-49).

- The point is that the suffering of Christ for mankind is a central theme throughout all Scripture!
- On the night before Calvary Philip said to Jesus: **“Lord, show us the Father and it will be enough for us. Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:8,9).**
- To understand Jesus is to understand God for in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead in a body (Col. 2:9).

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Most people believe in God. According to Wikipedia only 7% are atheists. Unfortunately, however, many who believe in God do not know God. This is why God sent Jesus into the world. Jesus reveals to us what God is like. The name of Jesus is “Immanuel” which means “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Jesus is the “Word” of God (Jn. 1:1). That is, Jesus is the vehicle by which God communicates Himself to mankind. **“No one has ever seen God, but God, the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known” (Jn. 1:18).**

One common Hebrew word which means “to know” is “yada”. It is found 947 times in the Bible and is used in a wide variety of ways. One use of the word describes the intimate relationship between a husband and wife. Note: **“Adam knew (yada) his wife and she conceived and bare Cain and said I have gotten a man from the Lord” (Gen. 4:1).** In this instance, “knew” means to become intimate with so that a new life is produced.

How beautiful! How utterly beautiful! To “know” God intimately is to be born again! May the knowledge of God be so clear in your mind and heart that a new life will be created. The symbolism is clear, no matter how sinful we are Jesus wants us to be His Bride (Rev. 20:2).

It is in the context of marriage that God inspired Hosea to write: **“I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6 KJV).**

Everyone who has had their love rejected understands how Hosea felt. Everyone who understands how Hosea felt also understands how Jesus feels. Jesus, as an unloved husband was **“a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering”**. His love was rejected and **“He was despised and rejected by men” (Is. 53:3).**

**JESUS LOVES YOU! JESUS DIED FOR YOU! NO MATTER WHAT YOU HAVE DONE
JESUS WANTS TO SHOW YOU MERCY! JESUS WANTS YOU TO BE HIS BRIDE! PLEASE DO
NOT REJECT HIM!**

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