

Mercy or Justice? Your Druthers

Pastor Kerry Doyal

She leaned forward against the rail, tightly clutching her purse, clearly tense, and embarrassed. Almost pale with fear and intense with earnestness, she responded to the Judge who had called her name, brought up her case.

This tired looking woman - wife and mother - was facing the Judge on drug charges. Possibly it was a pain medication that got out of hand. Maybe a party-lifestyle caught up with her. For whatever reasons, she was buying, using and being spent up by drugs.

What had been private was now all too public. Whoever happened to be in the courtroom that day - like me for instance - could hear of her woes, see her tighten in shame.

How many other places would she have rather been that day? How many "highs" would she have foregone to avoid this uncovering of her low condition? How many concealed, dark escapades would she have exchanged to prevent this in the light-of-day exposure?

The Judge was straightforward but respectful. She respectfully answered him. She did not deny her offense. She did not make excuses. She publicly confessed crime, admitted her problem.

Remarkably, several others whom the Judge summoned that session stayed seated as they seemingly chatted with the Judge. Some even saying, half mumbling, "yeah" in a culture and a setting that expects and deserves "Sir" at a minimum.

Unlike those, she stood, looked at him, spoke respectfully - reverently if you will - and owned up to her crime. Instead of concealing her sin, her problem, her law offense, she came clean.

As a result of her demeanor and decorum, she received mercy. The Judge became her Advocate. Speaking to the Prosecutor he said, "Here is a lady that has abused drugs and now they are abusing her". The one who could sentence her now himself sought mercy for her.

"Ma'am, are you in treatment now?" he asked. "No", she replied without any hesitation born of calculation. "Will you seek treatment?" he asked. "Yes", she replied, even offering to help them catch those who sold her the drugs.

"Is your husband supportive of you in this?" the judge inquired, further displaying concern for her beyond mere satisfaction of the law. "Yes", she said, honoring a man who stood by his woman.

Turning now to her Counsel - court appointed, state funded - the Judge said "help me here. What can we do for this woman?" The next moments were spent discovering and discussing treatment options for her. Where could she go? Who would be able to take her right away?

Making his intentions and heart abundantly clear, the Judge addressed all those involved in making decisions about her future with these unforgettable words: "I don't want jail for this lady, I want treatment."

Obviously relieved and even some what revived from having felt mercy's sweet touch, a different woman walked out of that courtroom. It is quite likely that she was unaware that they, in that Kingsport courtroom, had just incarnated Proverbs 28:13-14.

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper,
but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.
Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD,
but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble." (NIV)

Mercy is a reprieve from deserved justice. It is available and freely offered to all who will 'fess up and come clean with God through Christ. If you need some courage and encouragement to come out of hiding, drink in some or all of these passages about God, His mercy and you: Romans 5:1-11; 8:1- 2; Psalms 5:1-7; 32; 51; 57:1-5; 2 Samuel 24:14; Isaiah 55:5-9; Hebrews 4:12-16; James 5:7-11; 1 Peter 1:3-7; 2 Peter 2:9-12.

Kerry Doyal - Pastor
Jan. 2003
Grace Ev. Free Ch. - Kingsport, TN