

JUSTICE TEMPERED BY MERCY

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! James 2:12-13

One of the most important lessons anyone learns at seminary is how to live without money. It is a valuable lesson that is often necessary throughout the remainder of life. I have always felt sorry for those who had rich parents or some other source of income and did not have to take this course.

In our particular case, it was a three-year course. Not only did it teach us to trust in God's provisions but it also provided some very memorable experiences. One such experience happened at the conclusion of a fishing trip.

Those who know me would be surprised to learn that I have ever been fishing. Yet, several of us loaded up hours before the Saturday morning came up and drove to western Kentucky for a day of fishing.

Sharon and I rode with Fred and Val, who were our pastor and closest friends, to meet a family from the church at the lake. It was a short night and we were already tired by the time we arrived. In spite of our weariness, we spent an enjoyable time. I do not remember catching any fish but I did delight in the boat ride.

By late afternoon we had to begin the journey back home. As the pastor, Fred had a work day on Sunday. It was dark and late by the time we arrived back at the church. Sharon and I transferred our stuff into our little Mustang and started across town toward home.

For several months I had been driving with expired license plates. It was not because of rebellion; I simply did not have the money to purchase new plates. During that time I had nervously passed policeman but they did not notice or did not care enough to stop me. I had become comfortable with the expired plates.

As we drove down the highway, anxious to get home and into bed, I saw the dreaded flashing lights in the rear view mirror. Dutifully, I pulled over to the shoulder of the road while attempting to figure out why I was being stopped. By the time the policeman walked up to the car window I was still without a clue.

He checked my license and registration and then informed me that my license plates were expired. I assured him that I was aware of the situation but did not have the money to correct the problem.

Undaunted by my confession, the policeman faithfully carried out his responsibility. He requested that we get out of the car. I do not know when he became aware that I walked on crutches but it did not seem to matter. He escorted us to the back seat of his patrol car. Sharon and I sat together and waited for a wrecker to come a tow our illegal car to the police garage.

We were then driven to the county jail, processed for arrest, and finally allowed to make our phone call. The only person I knew to call was Fred. We tried to keep our sense of humor and laughed that our pastor bailed us out of jail. Fred claims that he still has the canceled check he wrote to cover my bail. The whole event took several hours and by the time we finally crawled into bed we were exhausted. The concern about paying the fine and getting the car returned were not enough to keep us from sleeping.

The next morning at church we were overwhelmed by God's mercy and the generosity of God's people. Privately, Fred shared with several of the folks about our predicament. They gathered a collection and provided more than enough money to solve our problem.

On Monday morning I had to appear before the Judge. As Fred and I waited for my turn, our concern grew. The Judge appeared to be very harsh and demanding toward all the defendants on trial. We were apprehensive about my possible punishment.

Finally, I was called to explain my case. The unmerciful police officer stated the facts and then I was given an opportunity to respond. I had no defense other than the lack of funds. The Judge, demonstrating great mercy, instructed me to get the proper license plates and return to him with proof within thirty days. There was to be no other punishment.

Fred and I walked out of that courtroom breathing a sigh of relief. When it comes to judgment, no one truly wants justice.