

“CHRISTIAN COMPASSION”

But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. (Psalms 86:15 NKJV)

Everyday when I pick up my mail there are at least several pieces of mail from charities or Christian groups doing some work of mercy.

They all want money. The appeals that really annoy me are those that send some piece of merchandise and want you to show your appreciation by sending a donation. I already have a drawer full of 2010 calendars, several dozen blank Christmas cards, an umbrella, a half dozen tee-shirts, a calculator with my name imprinted, an Indian dream catcher, dozens of note pads, and thousands of address labels.

If it is a charity or Christian agency whose work I believe in and want to support, a lot of the money I give that organization will not be used for the work they do but rather to pay some professional money raising group to buy this junk and send it out. Sometimes these requests for funds are from an organization that I never heard of. It may have pictures of veterans in wheelchairs and lying in hospital beds but how do I know that they will use the money they get to do any good?

I divide these organizations into two groups – secular charities and Christian agencies of compassion. Whenever I can, I support a work that shows compassion in the name of Christ. UNESCO and World Vision do the same kind of work. World Vision does it in the name of Christ. I support World Vision. When there is a disaster I choose the Salvation Army over the Red Cross. Same reason.

What is compassion? The roots of the word mean “suffering together with”. The dictionary says “sympathetic consciousness of other’s distress together with a desire to alleviate it.”

1. Compassion Is Part of the Nature of God.

When God revealed Himself to Moses on the mountain, He said,

Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Exodus 33:19 NKJV)

In the Psalms the compassion of the LORD is praised in song.

For their heart was not steadfast with Him, Nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, And did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, And did not stir up all His wrath; (Psalms 78:37-38NKJV) He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The LORD is gracious and full of compassion. (Psalms 111:4 NKJV)

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works. (Psalms 145:8-9)

When the sins and idolatry of God's chosen people became so great, and their hearts were hardened so they would not repent, God sent the Assyrians to conquer Israel and drive them out of the Promised Land. Later, He sent the Chaldeans to conquer Judah, destroy Jerusalem, and take the people as captives to Babylon. In Captivity they repented, turned to God, and their hope was in God's compassion.

"Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. (Jeremiah 12:15 NKJV)

Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19 NKJV)

God created man in His own image. The compassion which is part of the nature of God sometimes is seen in someone who is an unbeliever but nonetheless made in the image of God. We see this in the daughter of Pharaoh who saw the baby Moses in basket floating on the water and had compassion on him. We see it in the good Samaritan who saw the man beaten by robbers lying in the road and had compassion on him .

2.) Jesus Christ Defined Compassion By His Life.

Compassion is a "sympathetic consciousness of other's distress together with a desire to alleviate it." God saw the sinfulness of man and sent His Son to make the way of salvation already planned. To do so the Son was made man took upon Himself the form of a servant.

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:17-18 NKJV)

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:14-15 NKJV)

In the Gospels we find many instances of Jesus' compassion:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:35-36)

King Herod had John the Baptist beheaded. When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:13-14)

Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." (Matthew 15:32 NKJV)

On that occasion He fed 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him. (Matthew 20:30-34 NKJV)

Those examples are from just one of the Gospels. The life of Jesus was a continuing series of instances where people came to Jesus and found compassion. They encourage us to come to Him with our woes.

3.) Christians Are Sent To Follow Christ In His Ministry of Compassion

We are to have compassion for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you... You are My friends if you do whatever I command you... These things I command you, that you love one another." (John 15:12,14,17 NKJV)

Jesus doesn't mean that we should love the small group of people in our church who are our close friends, nor does He mean that we should love all the members of our church. He means that we should love every Christian in this town, in this state, in this country, in this world as He has loved us. If someone in the church lost their job, you would want to help and you would do all you could to help them find another job. When a Christian brother or sister in one of the black churches loses a job would you want to help and would you help if you could?

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9 NKJV)

The case of Christians who sin grievously, perhaps hurting another Christian in the process, presents troublesome decisions that the church must take to the Lord in prayer. On the one hand there is Peter who denied the Lord on more than one occasion. The Lord and the church had compassion on him and he became a leader in the church. On the other hand there was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and there was Diotrophes who opposed the apostle John and other evangelists.

And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. (Jude 1:22-23 NKJV)

I receive those requests for donations in the mail because all around the world Christian compassion has established hospitals, clinics, food distribution, disaster relief, hospices for the dying, homes for orphans.

