

Compassion

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Among the many attractive and ennobling traits of character urged upon servants of God and followers of Christ is compassion. Even those who possess no compassion admire and appreciate this trait in others.

God's compassion is extolled in Psalms 86:15: "But thou, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." Notice the companion virtues to compassion: graciousness, longsuffering, and mercy. Because of His compassion, God is slow to anger (145:8). Out of His compassion, God sent the prophets to warn His people of coming doom if they failed to repent (2 Chr. 36:15).

Compassion graced the earthly life of our Savior. Upon seeing the multitudes, Jesus "was moved with compassion for them" (Mat. 9:36); cf. 14:4; 15:32; et al.). In every case where His compassion is mentioned, He did something to help the object of His compassion.

Since we are to follow God as our pattern of behavior (1 Pet. 1:16), and since Christ is to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19), it follows that we must be compassionate. The upright man is "gracious, and full of compassion and righteousness" (Psa. 112:4). The Hebrew Christians were commended for having "compassion on them that were in bonds" (Heb. 10:34). Zechariah commanded God's people of old: "Execute true judgment and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother" (Zec. 7:9).

While lauding this all too uncommon virtue, a word of warning is in order concerning its misuse. We must never use compassion as an excuse for a compromising attitude toward God's Word. In the name of "compassion," some would withhold the Truth from those who need it lest they be offended. It is no mark of compassion to neglect or refuse to speak the whole counsel of God whereby one might be saved, whether it be to a brother or an enemy. Nor does a compassionate disposition contradict the capacity to raise one's voice in bold protest against sin and error, as our Lord often did. Paul's compassionate spirit did not prevent his calling Elymas the sorcerer "thou son of the devil" (Acts 13:10). As with the noble virtue of sincerity, so with compassion—it is not the totality of virtue. Let us cultivate the sweet disposition that can be born only of compassion, all the while determined to stand firm in all of the Truth.

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