

## Reflecting the Father's Compassion 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4

### Introduction:

J. W. Meiklejohn, sighting passages along the way, wrote on compassion, “The prophets and other men of God were deeply aware of the wonder of God’s \*mercy to sinful men. They taught that anyone who had experienced this would feel it his duty to have compassion on his fellows, especially ‘the fatherless, the widow, and the foreigner’ (frequently named together as in Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:19; Je. 22:3, *etc.*) and also on those in \*poverty and the afflicted (Ps. 146:9; Jb. 6:14; Pr. 19:17; Zc. 7:9–10; Mi. 6:8). There is no doubt from the frequent references in Deuteronomy that God expected his people to show compassion not only to each other but to foreigners who lived among them.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Old Testament, we have in great detail, at times, the compassion of God.

He is compassionate by nature, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin...” (Exodus 34:6-7a).

God shows compassion as a parent (Psalm 103:13 and 14).

Psalm 145:8 and 9 read, “The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.”

His compassion is shown to those in deep trouble, to sinners, and to those who repent.

The deeds of God show his compassion (Psalm 111:3 and 4).

His compassion is essential to the well-being of all believers (Psalm 119:77).

### I. New Testament Compassion

Most of the Hebrew words used for compassion are translated by a single Greek term in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

The same word “eleos” (ἔλεος l-a-os) appears in the Greek text when quoting the Hebrew Scriptures. Eleos is mercy; pity; compassion shown toward offenders by a person or agency of authority.

In Matthew 12:7, Jesus challenged the Pharisees to learn of God’s desire for compassion.

He said, “But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”

God desires that we be merciful.

Jesus used the term in Matthew 18:33 when he challenged Peter to understand that slaves should practice compassion and forgiveness.

Peter came to Jesus, asking, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

Jesus related the story of a king, his servant, and another servant.

Moved with compassion (a different Greek word, that we will get to shortly), the king forgave the entire debt of his servant.

Unmoved, the first servant had the second servant thrown into prison.

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. Meiklejohn, “[Compassion.](#)” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 218–219.

The king called his servant and asked, “Should you not also have had mercy (eleos = I-a-os) on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?”

Forgiveness is about compassion. God will not forgive the unforgiving.

Using the same Greek term, Paul showed that demand for compassion is rooted in the nature of God.

Ephesians 2:4 and 5 say, “But God, being rich in mercy (eleos = I-a-os), because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

God is love. God is compassionate.

A second prominent Greek word for compassion is *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (splanchnizomai splunk-knee-so-my) to have or to feel compassion.

This term is related to the Greek noun for “inward parts,” suggesting the seat of human emotion.

Jesus felt compassion for the Galileans “because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

When Jesus felt compassion, he healed their sick (Matthew 14:14), fed the hungry (Matthew 15:32), restored sight to the blind (Matthew 20:34), and comforted the bereaving (Luke 7:13).

In the parable of the unforgiving servant, Matthew 18:27 tells that the master had compassion (splunk-knee-so-my) and forgave the servant’s debt.

Jesus defined compassion as the attitude that should capture the life of every believer.

Servants should have compassion, as just mentioned (Matthew 18:27).

The prodigal son’s father had compassion for him (Luke 15:20).

The good Samaritan (as we refer to him) had compassion on the injured traveler (Luke 10:33).

Jesus had compassion on the crowd so “He began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

People who needed help asked Jesus for compassion.

The father, in Mark 9, who had the son that was made mute, thrown around into the fire and into the water, foamed at the mouth, and grinded his teeth because of a spirit, said to Jesus, “If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us” (Mark 9:22)!

The two blind men cried out “Have mercy on us, Son of David” (Matthew 9:27)!

The Canaanite woman, who came from the region of Tyre and Sidon, said, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed” (Matthew 15:22).

Blind Bartimaeus cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47)!

Ten lepers “raised their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us’” (Luke 17:13)!

Oiktirmos (οικτιρμός Oik-tear-mos) is expressing sympathetic participation in grief, a deep awareness of and sympathy for another’s suffering.

2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4 read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of **mercies** and God of all comfort (or encouragement), who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

We receive comfort or encouragement from God who is “the Father of compassion, pity, or mercy” during our afflictions so that we can comfort or encourage the afflicted by the same comfort.

James 5:11 reminds us, “We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is **merciful**.”

This compassion is ready to help the one who is sorrowing.

Συμπαθής (Sumpathes) is compassion that suffers with or suffers alongside.

The English language borrowed this word directly from Greek and spells it “sympathize.”

Peter listed “sumpathes” among the basic Christian virtues in 1 Peter 3:8 and 9.

To sympathize with others helps us live in loving harmony, reward both good and evil with good (1 Peter 3:8-12).

New Testament compassion leads to a new understanding of compassion.

## II. New Understanding of Compassion

This marvelous aspect of God’s character is exhibited throughout the passages of Holy Writing and is incarnated in Jesus Christ.

In Christ, the Father of compassion and God who gives comfort shows himself.

Therefore, Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies (compassion) and God of all comfort.”

Jesus shows the compassion of God.

This was one of the purposes for which Jesus was sent into the world.

The birth of Jesus assured the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

In Jesus, God “raised up a horn of salvation...to show **mercy** toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant” (Luke 1:67-72).

The compassion Jesus shows is the basis of Christian confidence.

Hebrews 4:14-16 states, “Therefore, since 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 One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive **mercy** and find grace to help in time of need.”

Jesus demonstrates compassion in supporting the weak (Matthew 12:20), healing the sick (Matthew 14:14), comforting the bereaved (Luke 7:13), feeding the hungry (Matthew 15:32), finding and forgiving sinners (Mark 6:34), and giving rest to the weary and heavy-laden (Matthew 11:28 and 29).

Jesus Christ’s compassion is a model for Christians to follow.

## III. New Person of Compassion

As *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* states, “One’s intense inner feelings should always lead to outward compassionate acts of mercy and kindness.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was reviewing his ministry for his disciples when he said to the Father, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

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<sup>2</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Compassion](#),” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 504.

Believers who have come to Christ have received his compassion, are learning his compassion, and are instructed to share his compassion.

2 Chronicles 30:9 informs, “For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your sons will find **compassion** before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and **compassionate**, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.”

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13).

Colossians 3:12, instructs, “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a **heart of compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Luke 6:36 says, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Do not just love those who love you.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men” (Luke 6:35).

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:1 and 2, “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and **compassion**, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

### **Application:**

Compassion is to be shown to anyone who needs help, without respect of persons, and expressed in deeds (1 John 3:17) which may involve personal sacrifice.

God’s compassion taught and shown in the Old Testament is exhibited in Christ Jesus in the New Testament as he reflects the Father’s compassion.

The way Jesus dealt with fallen humanity, the weak, the bereaved, and so many who needed help is our example for better understanding God’s compassion.

Having received compassion from God, we are to learn his compassion and share his compassion with the world.

Reflecting the Father’s compassion is part of our mission.

### **Conclusion:**

As the Prodigal son’s father felt compassion for him, provided the best for him, and celebrated with him, God, our father, feels compassion for us when we return to him; he has provided the best for us in his Son, Jesus Christ; He will celebrate with anyone who comes to him.

Anyone “who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

“One sinner who repents” incites “joy in the presence of the angels of God” (Luke 15:10).

“Everyone who confesses [Jesus] before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8).

“Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).