

Compassion 08

Today I am coming to end this miniseries, speaking about compassion, and about being compassionate. We have seen that God the Father is compassionate and that we are made in His image. We have seen that Jesus is compassionate and that we can do what Jesus did. And today I am going to round off by looking at New Covenant scripture.

Acts 2 v 42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

New Covenant Scripture is what we can take literally, and implement in our lives. Most Scripture we have used in this series has been from the Old Covenant, so I need to provide New Covenant confirmation for you.

And I know it is not going to be contradictory. God is compassionate, Jesus is compassionate, and this is confirmed with New Covenant Scripture. It will be no surprise when I tell you that New Covenant Scripture is going to suggest that we should be compassionate people.

I am going to base my sermon today on a clear and challenging passage of Scripture. A few verses in this passage stands out and should challenge a believer.

1 John 3 v 11 to 24

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him?

Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

There is so much in this passage, I wasn't sure where start when thinking about this sermon. Start at the beginning the Lord said!

1 John 3 v 11 to 24

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

This is a very good place to start today, where right away we see the main message, that we are to love one another. If there were one main messages from this series, it would be that compassion operates from love.

The good Samaritan was operating out of love for his fellow man. The priest and the Levite were not operating from love, they were operating from religious and racial prejudice. They were clearly not showing love to the injured man, but the Samaritan cared and showed love. He was moved to compassion, and remember only compassion is only compassion when you act and help, when you meet the need you are confronted with.

He showed love to the injured man. We have seen in this series, that compassion is an expression of love. But it is not just any old love.

As we know there are different types of love in Word, there is phileo (or brotherly love) for example, but this is agape, or what we call God's kind of love.

Agape is the way God loves Jesus, the way God loves us, without bias, without preconditions, and without the baggage that most human love comes with. It has no conditions; it does not say I'll love you if you do this or if you stop that. It is unconditional and absolute love.

OK, let's get to the final challenge in this series. And it should be challenging, it should leave us with questions to answer. If it does not, then I'm not teaching this right or you not hearing me, Amen.

Verse 17 and 18

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Now yes, this is a bit wordy, it is a bit olde English. But let's work through this and see what it is saying to us.

The word good in the Greek means life, state of existence, by implication the means of a livelihood. It means if you have the resources to make a living i.e. if you have the physical things for life. It is talking about people who have enough to eat, who have a home, have money, can buy things.

Can anyone reading this identify with that? None of you are starving, homeless, or in extreme poverty. OK, so this is talking about us then.

So if there is a person like that (the way we are we have just agreed) and they see a brother in need and they shut up your bowels of compassion, or in other words do not show compassion, what does this tell us? Well, John asks a question. He says, if they have resources and see a need, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

Or in other words is the love of God living in him?

If a believer is not compassionate, (yes there is a caveat, I agree), does the love of God dwell within them in what John is asking.

OUCH!

If that does not challenge you as a believer you have not heard it correct, or just don't care. I have been honest all the way through this series, saying that I know there are times I have not been compassionate. This verse asks the question, "at that time Vic was the love of God dwelling within you?"

Now, let's be careful here, and not take this verse out of context, and take into account the rest of what we know from the Word of God.

This is not saying the love of God is not in him, it is not saying God is not in Him, and it is not saying they are not saved, not a Christian. But this is clearly saying that compassion is an extension of God's love in some way.

We know God loves us continually and love us unconditionally. We know once we come to faith, we have the Living God dwelling in us, along with His love. So this passage must once again be about understanding and knowledge. If we know and understand the love of God, I see that as dwelling in us.

If we know and understand His love, we will demonstrate compassion. Compassion will be expressed in relation to His love, or rather to the extent of our knowledge and understanding of His love. Compassion is the expression of God's love within us.

If we are not compassionate, the love of God is not being expressed or rather the way I see it, showing a lack of perception or understanding about God's love.

Think back to the parable of the good Samaritan. The Levite and the Priest, pictures of law and religion, showed no love, no compassion, and provided no help. The good Samaritan, a picture of grace, was all about love and truth, and he was full of compassion, helped meet a need out of his own resources.

An understanding of God's love toward us is expressed when we love others, and that includes compassion, and remember compassion is about acting, about doing things, and about meeting needs.

Verse 18

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Here is another challenge, and this is all about acting, about doing something; to me this is all about compassion.

Word in Greek is logos, and means something said, reasoning, doctrine, or treatise. Tongue in Greek means language, and what you say.

This means we do not express love in what believe, think, write or say. We express love and show love by what we do, by our deeds.

But what does 'in truth' mean?

Verse 19 and on makes that clearer by talking about the truth, and then about God, and about love again. What I think verse 18 means is that we show love through what we do and that is in and through God's love.

James 2 v 20***But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?***

Faith without works is dead, not works of the law but works of grace; works of love, which is talking about compassion.

What is this verse saying, and what is 1John 3 v 17 and 18 saying?

I think it is saying what worth is your faith, your Christianity, your witness and testimony, if you are not compassionate? It is saying are you really operating in faith if you are not compassionate? It is saying do you know (understand) about the love of God if you are not operating in compassion?

Now don't let this take you down a road of condemnation.

If you are thinking this is describing you, I would suggest this is a knowledge and understanding issue and both of those can be increased with time and work and effort, Amen? But that's a problem for some people unfortunately. But not for others, as I have seen many people change and be transformed through knowledge and understanding of God's Word.

Love is about taking action; compassion is about taking action. In His love God acted.

John 3 v 16***For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.***

God acted out of His love and compassion, and (remember) we are created in His image. If we have God's love, and know it, we will act, we will meet needs and help others. Compassion always means action is taken and needs are met.

I want to repeat myself here, but I think this is important. I am not saying if you are not compassionate, you are not saved. In the same way we do not say if sin not saved, if you swear, drink, or smoke, you are not saved. We know that is not the case, and I am not saying that here.

I believe this is about understanding and knowledge.

I suggest what this is saying is that if you are not compassionate, you don't really understand God's love. You don't know His love at a heart level; you don't have epignosis about love. You may have gnosis, head knowledge, but not have epignosis, real deep experiential knowledge.

Let me translate verse 17 and 18 for you, or rather interpret it in my own words.

If you have the resources and the means to help, and you see a fellow human being in need, and you close yourself off to compassion, do you have an understanding on God's kind of love? Your love cannot be expressed in what you think or write or say, it is expressed in what you do through what you understand about the truth.

And that is a challenge to every single one of us as born again believers. It is a question only you can answer; do you really understand God's love, especially for you?

Now there is a caveat to this statement, I can see that, there is a potential 'get out of jail card' here if you want it.

It starts by talking about if you have the resources and means to help. You may be thinking, but I don't have those resources, I cannot help. Again that's a question only you can answer. But I would suggest we all have these resources, especially those of us living in what is known as 'the West'.

The Word tells us to feed the widows and orphans, and I've shown that for our feeding station in India that this cost is about £15 month, not even £4 a week, less than 60 pence a day. Now I am not trying to condemn anyone, trying challenge us. I believe that we cannot say we do not have the resources, especially in this example.

I can only see two reasons for not being compassionate if we are a Christian

1. We do not have epignosis about God's love
2. We choose not to be compassionate, make a judgement call and operate out of prejudice and bias

You may think that this rationale is a bit harsh, and it may be the case. But that is what I think the Scriptures point to. That is what I see: if it is not a lack of knowledge then it must be a conscious choice and I would argue that if that is the case, you don't know about God's love!

So in that way, there is only one reason for a Christina not being compassionate, a lack of knowledge and understanding of God's love.

And the good news is that we can do something about that.

We have God's Word (the Bible), we have the Holy Spirit to guide us in it, we have each other in the local church to discuss, and we have more teachers and teaching than any previous generation. We have no excuse, other than not wanting to put in the time, effort, and work.

1 John 3 v 22 to 24

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

We are called to believe on Jesus (including in that the true nature of God and God's love) and love one another. This is what we need for compassion, what we need to be compassionate.

Believe on Him, who He is, what He has done, and within that understand and know God's love. He came for us as an expression of the love of God. If we dwell on that, let that dwell in our heart, we will love one another and we will display compassion.

So, what was the main lesson out of this series on compassion?

God was compassionate, Jesus was compassionate, and we are called to compassion. And we will be compassionate and express His love more, the more the know He loves us.

It is that simple but maybe not always easy.

AMEN