

1 Peter 3:8-12

1Pe 3:8 (NKJV) **Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. ¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."**

As we navigate through this passage, we are looking at the various encouragements that Peter provides for us both as individuals, and corporately as a church. It appears that what Peter is doing is summarizing the kind of lifestyle that characterizes and exemplifies a mature Christian life. If we are willing to be honest and transparent about these virtues that he has listed, then in some ways they can serve as a way of actually measuring where we really are in our Christian life, kind of like a spiritual checklist of the reality of our profession and our faith. I am a note nut. I makes notes of everything that I have to do, of everywhere that I have to go. I have notes on my desk, notes in my truck, notes on my phone – you name it, I note it. The notes are my checklist for what I have to accomplish, what I have to finish and complete, where I have to be, and when I have to do something. In the same way, these virtues that Peter has listed serve as a kind of spiritual thermometer to measure where we really are in our Christian life, so it is very important that we pay attention to this listing. I have said it often, but when we come across a list in Scripture, it is something that is very important. Most always they are precise and concise.

Now, what Peter wants his audience to understand is that in order to receive God's blessings on their life and to be able to truly "**love life and see good days**" (v10) that there are various virtues that God would want us to have in order to inherit His blessings. However, what we saw is that Peter was writing to these believers in the midst of them enduring great suffering – probably not the place where any of us would think that we could "**love life and see good days**". At first glance, it almost seems contradictory and at odds with the idea of loving life and having really good days, but as we looked at what Peter was really trying to say, it was obvious that a believer's outlook is what so often determines their outcome. Until we really see life from God's perspective, it will be almost impossible to enjoy life under adverse and difficult circumstances. From our perspective, we see difficult and unpleasant days as bad days. So, it is important to understand that the reality check of the Christian life is simply that the way that God calls on us to live is actually very strange to the lost person. It flies directly in the face of all that the world has determined and defined as being normal, functional, and practical. These kinds of attributes make Christians look and appear to be very strange and unusual to the self-centered, pleasure seeking, money hungry, hedonistic lost person.

So far we have looked at what it means to "**be of one mind**". The next virtue is that of "**having compassion for one another**". In the Greek language, those five English words are only one word – "*sympathēs*", from where we get our word "sympathy". In fact the Greek Interlinear actually translates it as "**sympathetic**". It comes from a root word that means to experience pain jointly, and especially to suffer with someone in persecution. It means to mutually have compassion on someone else who is

suffering greatly because you also have experienced the same thing.¹ It would be like a community who is hit by a tornado, flooding, or a hurricane, and they all lose their homes and their livelihoods. Because everyone is experiencing the same kind of losses, they clearly understand what it means to have “**compassion for one another**”. If we break the Greek word “*sympathēs*” down, it comes from “*sum*” which means together or with, and the word “*pathos*” which refers to suffering and misfortune, i.e., literally to suffer with, to suffer together.² [Romans 12:15](#) says,

Ro 12:15 (NKJV) **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.**

As was the case with the word for “**be of one mind**”, this is the only place that this word is actually used in the New Testament. It is almost as if Peter is creating completely new words to describe what it is that these believers are experiencing and how God wants them to respond to one another. The emphasis of the word is that of being committed to and of participating in the lives of other people, and especially in those very difficult moments of their life.³ You know, and this should be obvious, that some people just seem to handle life better than other people. Anything and anyone can become an issue for them at any moment. It should not be that way. In fact, it should take a great deal to provoke a truly committed believer. However, for some people it just seems that the really simple things of life can be very challenging at times. In those cases, very often what happens is that we lose perspective on what it really means to be compassionate towards someone who is experiencing something challenging in their life. The Bible actually speaks of those who are “**weaker**” in certain areas of their life, and in most every case we are encouraged to be compassionate and patient towards them.

If I really have any kind of significant understanding about the Christian life, one of the things that I should fully realize is that the idea of meaningful spiritual growth can at times be very difficult. I have never read anything in the Scriptures that indicate that everything is always going to work out great just because I am a Christian. Once again, that is the critical error in charismatic doctrine – this idea that God is some kind of cosmic genie that will always make life great. That is an absolutely disastrous perspective that ultimately leads to despair and depression. Then on top of that, we all know other believers who have much knowledge relative to the Christian life and how it is supposed to be lived, but they simply lack the will and the resolve to do what they know is the right thing to do. Some Christians seem to grow old, but they never grow up spiritually.⁴ It is like on a daily basis that they keep losing perspective and determination to act, respond, and live how God wants them to live. Every time a difficult moment arises, they just seem to revert back to the flesh and just react negatively to how God would really want them to respond. Listen very carefully. I am to be sympathetic to those individuals simply because I use to be that way myself. Christian maturity does not happen overnight, so becoming understanding of those believers who are simply at a different place of spiritual growth in their life is critical for those who are more mature. What God wants each of us to become is a model for others to follow and emulate, and that simply means that we must learn to have compassion and understanding on those who have not yet matured in certain areas of their Christian life. [Psalm 86:15](#), speaking of God, says this,

¹ Strong's, *Greek word 4835 and 4841, sympathes and sumpascho*, ep.

² Zodhiates, 1328.

³ Harris, *Greek word 4686*, ep.

⁴ Swindoll, 194.

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

Psalm 145:8 says,

Ps 145:8 (NKJV) **The LORD *is* gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.**

Speaking of Christ, **Matthew 9:36** says,

Mt 9:36 (NKJV) **But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.**

In **Luke 10:33**, we have the story of the Good Samaritan, and it says this,

Lk 10:33 (NKJV) **But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.**

One of my favorite stories in the New Testament is that of the prodigal son, with whom I can certainly identify in my rebellion against God before I was saved, and it says this about the father in **Luke 15:20**,

Lk 15:20 (NKJV) **And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.**

In **Jude 1:20-22** it says this,

Jude 1:20 (NKJV) **But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.²² And on some have compassion, making a distinction;**

The idea behind the phrase “**making a distinction**” is lost in the NKJV translation. In reality it refers to having mercy on those who doubt (NASB, NIV, HCSB, ASV, ISV, RSV). I love the way the NRSV translates it when it says “**And have mercy on some who are wavering**”. We simply have to appreciate that there are plenty of other believers with whom our life interfaces that are spiritually vulnerable in different areas of their life. That is a reality that we have to understand. Everyone is at a different place, and it is this idea of having compassion for them that helps us to exhibit kindness, mercy, and understanding to them as they grow in their faith and their maturity. It is my personal opinion only that the times that this quality is demonstrated in the most genuine manner is when someone is actually suffering. This particular quality wants to alleviate the suffering – which sometimes we simply cannot do, but we still want to try and help. I deeply believe that one of the motivational spiritual gifts that God has given to me is the gift of mercy. It is strange how it actually impacts me at times. As I have grown in my Christian life, I have matured in not letting people use that tendency towards mercy to be taken advantage of in my life. As a church, we experience benevolent needs all the time, and we have always erred on the side of mercy with which we are generally comfortable in doing. However, for me personally, it is difficult for me to run over a squirrel or rabbit. It actually upsets me. I am not a hunter simply because I hate to see animals get killed. I could never shoot a deer unless we were starving. I hate fishing because you have to get the hook out of its mouth while it is watching you do so.

The problem with compassion and mercy is that if you get to a place in your life where you do not show any towards people who legitimately have various needs, the result is that you as an individual will become dull and cold to real genuine needs that people have in their life. The worst thing for a church

is to be so stoic and rigid in its policies and demeanor that it has no compassion for people that are really hurting in their life. If we are not careful, we will become no different than the priest and Levite who passed by the man who had been wounded on the road to Jericho in the story of the Good Samaritan. Listen to what it says about them in [Luke 10:31-32](#),

Lk 10:31 (NKJV) Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

Here was a real need, and they just “**passed by**”, just went along their merry way as if the guy was not even there.

One of the problems that we as a church or any church can have when we find ourselves fully committed to teaching sound doctrine with biblical clarity and accuracy, as well as holding forth the high standards of the Christian life and exercising meaningful restraint against sin in our life and in our midst, is that we often run into a problem. That problem is that marginal believers tend to see us as becoming very judgmental of others who may not meet our standards and who on the outside are really struggling in their walk with God. It seems, however, that one of God’s remedies for that kind of issue is this virtue of compassion and sympathy. We have to accept that in our midst there will always be those who fail, and some who are constantly prone to failure. Every church is composed of men and women who are sinners – all of us fit that bill to a tee. I was reading something that John MacArthur wrote in one of his messages and he said that the light always draws bugs.⁵ We have a light that we leave on all night on our garage walkway, and whenever I go out there, there are so many bugs flying into the light and landing on the walls that I can hardly make it into the garage without being attacked by the bugs. The church attracts sinners, and many of those people have real problems that simply take time and patience to be able to overcome. At times those kinds of people can literally drain you of any spiritual energy that you may have. They struggle, they continue to struggle, and they constantly fail. However, they are the very reason that we exist as a church, the very reason that we study the Scriptures – so we can know how to help them and how to become an encouragement to them. As a pastor, I believe that it is perfectly okay to have people in our midst who place demands on our time, on our leadership skills, on our patience, and certainly on our compassion.

For me personally, the area in which I have to constantly guard myself from not being frustrated and irritated is with those believers who are never really faithful. They seem to just be spiritually lazy, almost indifferent, satisfied with very minimal spiritual effort, and certainly not real contributors to what the church is doing. We could accurately call them spectators – believers who are just watching the game, but who are not really in the game themselves. They only come when it’s convenient or when they want to come. These are the people who simply cannot focus on what God really wants from their life. They simply have not figured out the incredible long-term impact that the consistent teaching of the Word of God makes on a believer’s life. They just live for themselves, live for their personal lifestyles, live for what is convenient and beneficial for them. For these individuals, it does not take long for them to become far-removed from what it even means to be a Christian. Before you know it, they have compromised every previous spiritual conviction that God had developed in their life. They have simply

⁵ MacArthur, Grace, ep.

missed the point or just ignored the point.⁶ I struggle with that and have to constantly guard my heart and my mind in not becoming overly critical of those individuals. No matter who those individuals might be, they still need compassion and mercy. In some ways, and I do not actually know if this is true or not, but I think they respond much better to compassion and mercy than they do to criticism. That does not eliminate the need for correction, but still mercy and compassion is a great attribute. The balance is often very difficult to achieve, but I tend to err on the side of mercy and compassion. In my heart, I feel deeply grieved for them. I hurt for them.

The challenge for every church is simple. It is how do you grow people into Christlikeness, into genuine, authentic Christianity, into men and women who are becoming disciples of Christ and not mere church-attenders. In my mind, the church has greatly failed. Why? It is because it has developed all of these very sophisticated models for numerical growth, but completely ignored spiritual growth. I simply refuse to read any more books on how to grow a church. They are almost non-sensical to me because of how distorted their view is of what God really wants in a church. The goal is not to have a big church. The goal is to have a healthy church. We can entertain with music and programs and nice facilities, and we can advertise and market the church on billboards, TV, and radio, but never have a healthy church. Really, it does not take much to get a big crowd, but it does take something to make disciples. I do not want our Christianity to be superficial and merely external. From week to week, my desire as your pastor is that God is constantly working on you, working on your Christian life, working on your marriage, working on your family, working on your heart and mind, correcting error in your life, correcting spiritual lethargy, and working on your resolve to become all that He wants you to become. I just love [Colossians 3:12-17](#). It seems to define what we are addressing here when it says,

Col 3:12 (NKJV) Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

It does not say one word about big buildings, multiple programs, entertainment, or anything of that nature. It is always related to spiritual growth and to being spiritually healthy. That is the goal, that is the target – becoming as much like Christ as is possible. [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#) says,

1Th 5:14 (NKJV) Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

In this church, in any church, we are to treat everyone – literally everyone, with kindness, compassion, patience, and longsuffering. The entire Old Testament is a message of a very holy God who was longsuffering and forbearing and as compassionate as He could be with people who were constantly going astray. Likewise we are to be the same way - to be constantly encouraging people, exhorting them,

⁶ MacArthur, Grace, ep.

helping them, often reproofing them, but always showing them compassion as much as is possible. As Peter says – “**having compassion for one another**”.

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