

# Pure Compassion

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Pure compassion is a heart-felt desire to do good for another without demanding anything in return. In the New Testament, the idea of “compassion” was conveyed by a word that means, “I am moved in the guts”—*splanchnizomai*. Pure, unadulterated compassion is what is so astonishing about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He was “moved in the guts” by suffering and need, and this inspired Him to give and give and give. A right-thinking person instinctively recognizes compassion as something glorious, something God-like. To deny its value is to fight against the very order of things. The prominent philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche raved for years that Christ-like compassion is foolishness, that it shows weakness. History shows that Nietzsche himself was the fool—he died a raving madman (ironically cared for by the compassion of others--see photo above).

To understand the importance of compassion, consider its opposite—selfishness. The Greek word which captures the selfish tendency in us is *epithumia*, often translated as “lust.” Selfishness lowers us to the level of brute beasts as we lust for control, for pleasure, for approval, for material things. (A selfish person may do things that look compassionate, but if they have a desire to “get something out of it,” the action is disqualified.) In this state of selfishness, we are dead—dead to God, and dead to our created purpose (Eph. 2:1-2). In the darkest chapters of history, the light of compassion seems to have been extinguished—Nazi Germany, Rwanda, the Sudan. Such a world gives us a little foretaste of what hell will be like.

Compassion is the very first attribute to come from the mouth of God when He proclaims His ways to Moses: “Then the Lord passed by and said, ‘The Lord ... compassionate and gracious ...’” (Exodus 34:6). Compassion drives God’s program for humanity forward. John’s Gospel tells us that when Jesus Christ came into our world, light shone in the darkness. Jesus was pure, unadulterated compassion. In the midst of selfish, scratching, clawing humanity, He lived entirely for others. He did not amass wealth, seek for status, or fulfill his appetites by using and abusing others. From dawn ‘til dusk He allowed Himself to be moved by the needs around Him. Compassion compelled Him to feed the hungry, embrace the outcast, heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, forgive the sinner, and show people a better way to live. Compassion drove Him to meet humanity’s greatest need—freedom from sin (the fruit of our selfishness), by laying down His life. The great hymnist Charles Wesley put it this way: He “died for Adam’s helpless race.” Not only did He pay our penalty, He showed us the way of pure compassion.

Compassion was what God had in mind when He said, "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26). It is the quality evident in the life of a person who has been redeemed by God. It is also the litmus test for true religion. "Whoever ... sees his brother in need and shuts up his compassions, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). The day we discover God's compassion in the cross of Christ and let it heal us from our selfishness, a metamorphosis begins—from selfish, benighted beasts to joy-filled saints. From that day on, we don't do good to get anything from God, or to earn salvation (just another manifestation of selfishness), we do good because we have been saved! The person who discovers this is beginning to understand the deep mysteries of creation—they have caught a glimpse of God and are beginning to bear the image of their Creator.