

October 16, 2022 Compassion Part 4

In our series on compassion, we have studied

- the compassion of the Father who pursued his prodigal son,
- Jesus having compassion and feeding a hungry people,
- the compassionate power of the Holy Spirit in healing a beggar,
- Now today, we study the compassion of the church.

Acts 2:43-47 *Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Compassion is recognizing the suffering of others and taking action to help. Compassion is defined as "a sympathetic consciousness of others distress along with a desire to alleviate it." **Acts 2** tells of compassion, not compulsion; of love, not law. This was the church body at work. This was the hand caring for the foot and the eye looking out for the ear. The church was becoming aware of needs within.

Charity is often motivated by pity but compassion is motivated by love. Charity gives from the surplus while compassion gives from the whole. This was not some ploy the disciples used to get people into the kingdom of God but rather a spontaneous, natural desire to care for the needs of those the Lord was adding to their fellowship.

We are not capable of doing anything without the Holy Spirit. Too often we read this passage as a starting point rather than seeing what the desire came from. These verses cannot be read with any hope outside the beginning of **Acts 2 ... Acts 2:4** *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.* Growth is not about our ideas or thoughts but is dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within us.

Acts 2:42 *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* There was no forced compliance between these believers but rather a joyful expression of what the Lord was doing in their midst.

Acts 2:43 *Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe...* They weren't awed by the church because of its buildings, programs, or anything reflecting human ability, but by the supernatural character of its life. There was a distinction of life within the early church that the world had no other response than to be in awe of what it observed. The oneness of the early church was organic, not an organized oneness. There was a mutual caring and concern for other believers. It was a spontaneous coming together of like-minded believers in love with the Lord, in love with each other, in love with lost souls. **Acts 2:42** These were the things they committed themselves to:

- Teaching
- Fellowship
- The breaking of bread
- Prayer

Verses 43-47 was the result. Compassion is most often found amongst groups of people who have intimate knowledge of one another's needs and concerns. This early church made it part of their practice to meet together again and again.

Hebrew 10:25 *Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Assemble ourselves together and all the more as we see the day approaching.*

The New Testament church was intensely relational. They met in the temple and from house to house. They continued steadfastly. This was the whole emphasis that Jesus points to when He says that His prayer for us is that we would love one another the way that He has loved us. **John 17:21** *That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

What became evident was their oneness - they had all things in common. Through oneness, the world would then be in awe of what they see. It was an extravagant oneness. The result: *that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

Acts 2:47 *Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

The last thing we read about in **Verse 47** was the growth of the Church, which will always be the result of what happens when **Verses 42-46** are practiced. The people saw how they related to one another and how they cared for one another and it resulted in awe and multiplication. Compassion produces favor and multiplication. As a result of their lifestyle toward one another, it produced favor amongst the surrounding community and a continual increase in those coming into the kingdom of God.

Proverbs 16:7 *When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.* What relationships in our lives need peace? People that have wronged us? abandoned us? Separated from us? The favor that the Church of Acts experienced was not a result of clever communication but a commitment to ways of pleasing the Lord. If a relationship needs changing in our lives, commit to what is found in scripture instead of clever words.

It must be noted that it wasn't any one thing that they were committed to but rather all of these things together that produced this great work in the early church. Teaching. Fellowship. Breaking Bread. Prayer.

True growth happens when we adhere to the things of God and respond to His calling in how we should love. Evangelism was the last thing on the list in **Verse 47**. There is much work that must first be experienced within the church if it is able to reproduce. New life is the result of a compassionate church. They created a new culture: a culture that looked different than the culture around them; a culture that was built on compassion - as anyone might have need. This was not meant to be some lofty unachievable example of the church in history... this was intended to be a model for how the church would operate throughout history. They were living transformed lives - transformed by the Holy Spirit. Compassion is a sign of those being transformed.

James 2:14-17 *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

The life they were living was a result of their faith. Compassion should be the evident result of our faith. They committed themselves to teaching of scripture, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to prayer. As a result, the church grew. The closer we get to one another, the clearer we see one another and can help each other. It begins with us as with the early church and with the Holy Spirit helper so that we can make a commitment to reading God's Word together, being together, eating together, and praying together.

What is the motive of compassion? vs motive of pity? How have you seen this?

Have you experienced the oneness of a church? Were these 4 parts in it? scripture, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer.

What relationship in our lives needs peace? People that have wronged us? abandoned us? Separated from us?

What are you challenged to do?