



Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

News of His

Abbeyville Road Christian Church

551 Abbeyville Road Lancaster, PA 17603-6399
717-393-8821 FAX 717-393-8660

email: office@abbeyvilleroad.com

web site: www.abbeyvilleroad.com

One Century in the Service
of our Lord Jesus Christ

Vol. 46: No. 18 September 19, 2007

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lancaster, PA
Permit No. 1324

The Primacy of Compassion

³⁵Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." - Matthew 9:35-38

Can you think of any virtue that can more closely identify a believer with the character of Jesus than compassion? Jesus is often depicted in the Gospels as being "moved with compassion" before responding to some dire need. In this instance, Jesus acted upon that which stirred within Him by giving authority to His twelve disciples "to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Matthew 10:1).

To follow Jesus is to answer a call to compassion, but this is something more than just a challenge to "feel" for the needy. Compassion as Jesus modeled it was to "feel enough" to become involved and to act in some fashion significant enough to alter the course of another person's life. When Jesus modeled compassion, the resulting action could never be characterized as a token gesture or handout.

A popular observer of churches and practical ministry issues writes:

"Compassion is tough. Compassion, community, challenge, reasonability, and commitment - these are powerful motivations for the Christian life. All of them are tough, especially compassion. Sometimes, when I'm leading a seminar on motivations, someone will say, 'Dr. Callahan, we appreciate your emphasis on compassion, and we agree, but when are we going to get around to the really tough one, namely, commitment?' Compassion is as tough as commitment." - Kenneth Callahan

As I processed that paragraph, it occurred to me that compassion is among the hardest of all virtues, at least when taken to a Christ-like degree. Most people believe that they have a compassionate heart, but that is because sentimentality is so easily mistaken for compassion. The mere fact that my heart is stirred at some poignant sight only insures that I am still human. I must act and I must do so significantly.

The church needs people to be more committed, but there is a kind of commitment that can cover over an utter lack of compassion. What seems to be a commitment to the church and its work could, in fact, be a commitment to process. A so-called commitment to excellence might only reflect a perfectionist personality. We must seek nothing less than a commitment to authentic, Christ-like kingdom virtue, which, of course, is steeped in compassion.

Challenge is important to a church, because there is something adventuresome in many people that responds to challenge. It gives us a sense that we are doing something important for the kingdom. But, there are some challenges that so consume the energies of congregations that they actually become distractions from true compassion.

Reasonability can become a substitute for compassion. How many times has reasonability talked a believer right out of extending compassion, for there is often a risk involved when helping someone?

Nothing is more important to any church than building a sense of community. I once heard a speaker say, "The genius of God in the church is fellowship." How can any person live the life in Christ he or she truly desires to live without mutual accountability, mutual affection and mutual encouragement? But, how easily can community become inwardly focused, thereby, strangling opportunities for compassion beyond the group?

Today, when we look around at a clearly directionless world, what virtue of Jesus do you think will best empower the church to make a difference in the lives of the "helpless and harassed"? Community? Reasonability? Challenge? Commitment? In a list of essential virtues to which Paul called the Colossians, he had to select one to list first. Perhaps, there was a reason behind the one he chose:

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion ..." - Colossian 3:12



Karl's Korner