



Sympathetic

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1Peter 3:8)

Peter, in summing up the attitudes and behaviors that exemplify submission (1Peter 2:13-3:7), uses several terms that have to do with hearts and emotions (1Peter 3:8). Certainly, each of these terms is important, however, at least one of the terms seems often to be “read over” without grasping the full depth of its meaning. This word is “sympathy.” This word is sometimes taken for granted since in modern usage it is often synonymous with “feel sorry for.” This word is also translated as compassion [Both words are very much alike in their meanings, but come into the English language from different sources: “compassion” comes through Latin, while “sympathy” comes directly from the Greek, *sumpathes*.]. It is very important for God’s people to understand this term since the command is to be sympathetic. In its most simple term, the word means “together feeling or with same feeling.” How can we know what this simple phrase entails? Begin with God.

God is Sympathy

Our God is a God of sympathy or compassion. “*But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth*” (Psalm 86:15). “*He has made His wonders to be remembered; The LORD is gracious and compassionate*” (Psalm 111:4). “*Light arises in the darkness for the upright; He is gracious and compassionate and righteous*” (Psalm 112:4). “*The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness*” (Psalm 145:8). He is so merciful, compassionate, and loving, that He sent His only Son to live among men and be crucified for them: “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). People must learn to be sympathetic to be like God. Claiming to be God-like without compassion is one of the most glaring of man’s inconsistencies. God is never inconsistent—look at the way the Lord lived on earth.

God's Sympathies as Man

Our example of compassion is Jesus. He showed this in so many ways. Jesus had compassion upon the confused people of his time. *"Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd"* (**Matthew 9:36-38**). Does the confused multitude around us bother us very much?

Jesus had compassion upon those physically sick. *"When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick"* (**Matthew 14:13-14**). It is not so pleasant to be around many sick people. Many shun them. Do you?

Jesus had compassion upon the physically hungry. *"And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, 'I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way'"* (**Matthew 15:32**). We all have need for food. Do we think about that need in anyone else enough to do something about it?

Jesus had compassion upon the blind. *"And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, 'Lord, have mercy on us' ... Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him"* (**Matthew 20:30-34**). We can't miraculously restore sight, but how about us? Do we show sympathy for those who endure such circumstances?

Jesus had compassion upon the leper. *"And a leper came to Jesus ... Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed'"* (**Mark 1:40-42**). Again, we can't cure incurable diseases, but let's examine ourselves. How do we think of and treat those with these ailments?

Jesus had compassion upon those who mourned physical loss. *"Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, 'Do not weep'"* (**Luke 7:11-13**). Sometimes, we find it difficult even to speak to those in sorrow. Why, if we are to "feel together" others sorrow as did the Lord?

Jesus showed compassion upon those in need. We should be the good Samaritan. *"But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him"* (**Luke 10:30-36**). Remember John's question? *"But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"* (**1John 3:17**).

God's Sympathies Go Deeper

God's sympathies are extensive, but Jesus, our example, also demonstrated to all how to show compassion on a much deeper and important level. What did Jesus do before meeting the crowd's physical needs? He showed sympathy to the lost by teaching them. *"When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things"* (**Mark 6:32-34**). We ought to do likewise. *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have*

mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh” (Jude 20-22).

Jesus showed sympathy by teaching men to forgive using a story of a father having compassion on a wayward son (**Luke 15:20**). He expects the citizens of His kingdom to have the same sympathies: *“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (Luke 17:1-4).*

My Sympathy

Could it be that the reason we do not teach more, help more, and forgive more is because we don't have sympathy as we ought?