

## Sympathy

Romans 12:15

### Introduction

1. Christians are those who are ever drawing nearer to God through His Divine Son. They have witnessed the glory of God in the face of Christ (**cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6**), full of grace and truth (**cf. John 1:14**), and are seeking to become more like Him every day.
  2. This continued increase in becoming one with the divine nature necessarily includes our growth in relation to fellow man, and especially fellow members of Christ's body.
  3. The entire Biblical corpus magnifies the love of God toward man. This love is one filled with sympathy and compassion, and which condescends to man's needs.
  4. In our increasing efforts to be one with God, our sympathy for man must grow as well.
- I. Sympathy
    - A. *sympatheō* – “sun, ‘with,’ pascho, ‘to feel’”; “to have a fellow-feeling for or with” (VINE)
      - a. Includes corresponding action – “as showing a disposition to help because of fellow feeling” (ALGNT)
      - b. **Sympathy is not some mere passive feeling we have or cultivate within ourselves but is something expressed toward others for their benefit.**
    - B. Most often considered in light of negative circumstances – compassion – from Latin *compati, com* – “together,” *pati* – “to suffer.”
      - a. *sympatheō* – translated “**compassion**” in **Hebrews 10:34** (NKJV, ESV)
  - II. The Basis and Standard of Sympathy
    - A. Relationship is the Basis of Sympathy
      - a. By definition, sympathy requires a connection between two – this is a relationship.
        - i. Relationships vary in intimacy, but sympathy is possible and expected by God wherever relationships exist between people.
      - b. Humanity – **Acts 17:26-28** – this connection is a basis for sympathy between any people.
        - i. **Physically** – unobstructed by malevolent ideologies, our common identity as human beings results in sympathy – live, move, have our being – these all result from the same things, and involve the same struggles.
        - ii. **Spiritually** – for the honest heart who understands the Divine image all members of humanity bear, sympathy intensifies – distinct value from the rest of creation, unique attributes which take on heightened experiences – in Him we live, move and have our being, we are His offspring.
      - c. **Proverbs 22:2** – the Lord is the maker of all – that is the universal fact making sympathy possible for all.
      - d. **Job 31:13-23** (Job making a defense of his innocence to his friends) – His actions did not amount to mistreatment or indifference, but sincere and active compassion for all.

- e. Parable of the Good Samaritan – **Luke 10:25-37**
  - i. **(v. 29)** – who is my neighbor?
  - ii. **Neighbor** – *plēsion* – “from *pelas*, ‘near’” (VINE); “(1) marker of a position quite close to another position...(2) as subst. ὁ πλησίον: the one who is near or close by, neighbor, fellow human being” (BDAG)
  - iii. **(vv. 30-35)** – man left for dead, priest and Levite passed by w/out help, Samaritan helped.
    - 1. **“he had compassion” (v. 33)** – *splagchnizomai* – “to be moved as to one’s inwards (*splanchna*), to be moved with compassion, to yearn with compassion,” (VINE)
  - iv. **(vv. 36-37)** – which was neighbor to him?
    - 1. Could have asked, “which one considered himself in light of that man’s condition?”
    - 2. Which one acknowledged his nearness to the injured man? – not spatial nearness, but relational – fellow man.
    - 3. **What prompted the Samaritan’s actions? – Sympathy, compassion – feeling with, suffering with.**
- f. Sympathy should intensify as the relationship increases – **1 Timothy 5:8** (physical relation); **1 John 4:20-5:1** (spiritual relation)
- B. Jesus Christ is the Supreme Standard of Sympathy
  - a. **Hebrews 4:15** – He can sympathize.
    - i. This continues the theme of Christ’s High Priesthood began in chapter 2.
    - ii. **Hebrews 2:10-11, 14, 17-18** – complete through suffering in becoming one with humanity (brethren of those who embrace His gift), shared in flesh and blood – thus suffering, High Priesthood dependent on these facts
    - iii. Thus, He is a sympathizing High Priest – when we are tempted, or suffer, He is able to commiserate with us and seeks to aid us.
  - b. “a heart at leisure from itself is needed to sympathize; and not less needed is a sedulous cultivation of the power of sympathy.” (Alexander McLaren)
    - i. **Heart at leisure from itself – Philippians 2:3-4, 5 – “better than” = “more important than” (NASB)**
      - 1. Jesus looked down at humanity, not with pomp and pride, but with full focus on us.
      - 2. His estimation of humanity was one devoid of self-interest, and all His consideration fell on our needs.
      - 3. Translated into action to cultivate a greater understanding while at the same time meeting our need.
    - ii. **A sedulous cultivation of the power of sympathy – Philippians 2:6-8**

1. As though it were not enough to pity us from heaven, Jesus came to suffer with us.
  2. This effort of the Son of God according to God's plan allows Him to "feel with us," and makes Him qualified to do what we need the most – **Job 9:32-33; 1 Timothy 2:5**
  - c. **Jesus is the perfect standard of sympathy – He was selfless, thinking only of God's will, and our need, and He was active, taking pains to understand, and meet our needs.**
- III. The Scope of Sympathy (Romans 12:15)
- A. **Romans 12:15** – concisely describes sympathy in its completeness.
    - a. The scope of sympathy is not to be limited to one type of circumstance.
    - b. **True sympathy is unbiased regarding the type of feeling or circumstances – negative or positive – it reaches out to all people in all circumstances as it has opportunity.**
  - B. Rejoice with Those Who Rejoice
    - a. We often limit sympathy to the negative, but Christ calls us to a complete sympathy which involves a "fellow-feeling for or with" (VINE) those who experience good – **Romans 12:15** – "**rejoice with the rejoicing**" (YLT)
    - b. This can be seen in what Christ calls us to refrain from when we put on the new man in Him:
      - i. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** – not envy, not parade itself, not puffed up, not behave rudely, not seek its own, not provoked, not rejoice in iniquity but in truth.
        1. These are the opposite of sympathy in joy – rejoice with those who rejoice.
        2. Such a person is too selfish to take part in another's joy but instead acts only in a way that diminishes it.
        3. Love is happy for others, parades others, lifts others up, is kind, seeks the interests of others, rejoices with others.
      - ii. **Galatians 5:15, 19-21, 22-23, 26** – hatred, contentions, jealousies, selfish-ambitions, envy – love, joy, peace.
        1. Failing sympathetic joy is evidence of the influence of the flesh.
        2. The Spirit leads one to rejoice, promote peace, kindness and love.
    - c. "It is, indeed, more difficult to congratulate others on their success, especially if their success involves disappointment to us, than it is to sympathize with their sorrow and their loss. It is only when self is dead that we can take as much joy in the success of others as in our own." (William Barclay)
    - d. When we are dead to self, alive to Christ, and thus considerate of our brethren, we will be able to achieve this sympathy – **1 Corinthians 12:26**

- i. **“rejoice with it”** – *sygchairō* – “sun, “with or together,” and *chairō*, “to rejoice”; “sympathize in gladness, congratulate” (STRONG)
    - ii. **If we are members of one another, it only makes sense that the joy of our brother should become our own.**
  - e. **“especially if their success involves disappointment to us”** – it is not as though we are to ignore or discount our own disappointments, but in our disappointment we should be awakened to a joy that one we love is experiencing what we desperately want, or need.
    - i. This takes spiritual maturity, founded on humility.
    - ii. **Philippians 2:3-4** – this mindset not only takes action to aid others but is moved to joy when their circumstances turn positive.
    - iii. **This mindset prevents insincerity in our actions – it makes the efforts to rejoice with them that rejoice genuine, and meaningful.**
    - iv. **Some may even rejoice with those who rejoice and be moved to tears in the process.**
  - f. This activity is purely Christ-like – **Luke 15**
    - i. This chapter exemplifies what Jesus would later state, and the emotion heaven experiences when such is accomplished – **“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10)**
    - ii. **(vv. 1-2)** – their attitude was bitter toward the people, but also Jesus – rather than rejoicing in their spiritual interest, and with Jesus that He had attracted their attention to spiritual matters.
    - iii. Parable of the lost sheep – **(vv. 6-7)** – **“Rejoice with me”** (*sygchairō* – “sympathize in gladness,” STRONG)
    - iv. Parable of the lost coin – **(vv. 9-10)**
    - v. Parable of the lost son – **(vv. 28-32)** – **“It was right that we should make merry and be glad”** – the older son would not sympathize with his brother’s joy in restoration, or his father’s joy.
  - g. This should be an activity for all positive situations – **Luke 1:7, 13-14, 57-58** – **“rejoiced with”** (*sygchairō* – “sympathize in gladness,” STRONG)
  - h. **When our brothers and sisters in Christ struggle under the weight of sorrow or loss, we seek to help them in bearing that load by showing compassion. Why should we not seek to augment their joy when they are in a season of blessing?**
- C. Weep with Those Who Weep
  - a. It is important that we are sensitive to, and considerate of the sorrow of others – **Romans 12:15** – **“weep with the weeping” (YLT)**
    - i. Some are dismissive of the plight of others because it does not affect them.
    - ii. It can be easy to overlook the plight of others when we ourselves are experiencing a pleasant season.

- iii. Compassion is a duty of the Christian – it takes attention, effort, and care.
- b. The Hebrew writer recalls the compassion of his readers, and urges them to maintain it:
  - i. **Hebrews 10:32-34** – not only had they suffered directly, but they suffered as a result of their active companionship (**v. 33b**).
    1. **“Companions”** – *koinōnos* – “a partner, sharer, in anything” (THAYER); Fellowship.
      - a. “The believers had found it a privilege to ‘share’ each other’s sufferings. This is fellowship on the deepest level.” (Guthrie, Donald, Tyndale Commentaries)
    2. **“for you had compassion on me in my chains” (v. 34).**
  - ii. **Hebrews 13:1, 3** – these words exhort continued effort, but also instruct the method of cultivating and sustaining compassion.
    1. **“as if chained with them...since you yourselves are in the body also”** – **cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26**
    2. “Put yourself in someone else’s shoes” is a legitimate practice – such can be challenging, but rewarding, and it will ensure compassion.
- c. Jesus is consistently recorded to have had compassion:
  - i. For the multitudes – **Matthew 9:35-36**
  - ii. Before feeding the 5,000 – **Matthew 14:14**
  - iii. Feeding the 4,000 – **Matthew 15:32**
  - iv. Restoring sight to the 2 blind men – **Matthew 20:32-34**
  - v. Healing a leper – **Mark 1:40-41**
  - vi. Raising the son of the widow of Nain – **Luke 7:12-15**
  - vii. Jesus wept with those who wept – **John 11:32-36**
- d. Most importantly, we need to have compassion on those who do not know their miserable state (spiritually), and seek to open their eyes to it – **Mark 6:34; Matthew 23:37-39**

## Conclusion

1. We aim to be more like Christ each day, and in doing so we must continue to grow in our awareness and care for our fellow man, especially our brethren.
2. The sympathetic care of Christ is genuine and powerful. In granting us sympathy – both in joy and sorrow – Christ entrusts us with it to engage in it ourselves toward those around us.
3. Sympathy is such a weighty responsibility for God’s children, and a powerful tool in helping us understand and appreciate God even more and draw nearer to heaven.