

Compassionate Ministry: Christological and Practical Reflections

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Christian compassion towards others should be built on a solid biblical-theological foundation if Christianity wants to witness about God and His character, which is repeatedly presented throughout the Scriptures and especially revealed in the God-person of Jesus Christ. The only way the world will ever experience this divine compassion and hear about the blessed hope in Jesus is when it practically sees and experiences the touch of the loving hearts of Christ's followers.

Introduction

True compassion, as a form of love, is an attitude of sincere care and genuine concern, which manifests itself when confronted with those who suffer or are vulnerable. To be compassionate means to have a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, as this quality allows one to enter sympathetically into another person's world of sorrow and pain. Christlike compassion is ingrained in empathy, sympathy, and mercy towards others and is driven by a passionate desire to alleviate the sufferings of the sufferer. It may sound strange, but the English word "passion" is used to translate at least five different Hebrew words in the Hebrew Scriptures and eight Greek words in the New Testament.¹

¹ See Don H. Stewart, "Compassion," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 324-326.

Stewart discloses the meaning of compassion through the following Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible:

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The theological aspect of compassionate Christlike ministry and its practical application and implications are inseparable. All the Scriptures speak not only about justice towards others, in general, but special focus and emphasis is applied to a godly attitude towards widows, orphans, and the poor. Even the eschatological Holy City will be represented as a community of true justice and divine compassion. No wonder Christ's ministry was a ministry of comfort, empowerment, liberation, and reconciliation. Thus, Christians are called to function as healing agents and a stabilizing force in times of crisis and change. When all is tempestuous around, Christians should provide assurance of hope that there is One who sits above the storms of this world, whose

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- a. *Châmal* (Heb. לַמָּה) means “to regret,” “to be sorry for (i.e., to pity),” “to grieve over,” or “to spare someone.” See 2 Samuel 12:4; Exodus 2:6; Zechariah 11:6; 2 Chronicles 36:15; Isaiah 63:9.
 - b. *Chên* (Heb. חֵן) represents “grace” and “charm.” See Zechariah 12:10; Job 8:5.
 - c. *Chûs* (Heb. חוּס) is close in meaning to the English word “empathy.” See Deuteronomy 7:16; Ezekiel 5:11.
 - d. *Nichûm* or *nôcham* (Heb. נִחַם, נִחָם) contains more than emotion, as it means to “be sorry for,” “regret,” “comfort,” or “console.” See Genesis 6:6; 8:21; 1 Samuel 15:29; 2 Samuel 24:16.
 - e. *Râcham* (Heb. רָחַם) is related to the word for “womb” and relates to a mother's (Isaiah 49:15) or a father's (Psalm 103:13) compassion for a helpless child. See Hosea 2:4, 23; Zechariah 1:16; 10:6, Psalm 145:9.
 - f. *Eleos* (Gr. ἔλεος) translates most of the Hebrew words mentioned above. See Matthew 9:13; 12:7; 18:33; Ephesians 2:4; 1 Peter 1:3.
 - g. *Eleēmōn* (Gr. ἐλεήμων) indicates a compassionate and merciful quality. See Matthew 5:7; Hebrews 2:17.
 - h. *Splagchnizomai* (Gr. σπλαγγνίζομαι) is related to the Greek noun for “inward parts” or “bowels of mercies.” Jesus took the term a step further and used it to define the attitude that should capture the life of every believer. See Matthew 18:27; Mark 6:34; Luke 10:33.
 - i. *Splagchnon* (Gr. σπλάγγνον) metaphorically expresses the concept and experiences of empathy, mercy, and compassion through the use of a word that literally refers to the inner parts and bowels of a *human being or animal*. See Luke 1:78; 2 Corinthians 6:12; 7:15; Philippians 2:1; Colossians 3:12; 1 John 3:17.
 - j. *Oiktirmos* (Gr. οἰκτιρμός) is translated as “compassion.” See 2 Corinthians 1:3.
 - k. *Oiktirō* (Gr. οἰκτίρω) describes the act of bestowing mercy or compassion. See Romans 9:15.
 - l. *Oiktirmōn* (Gr. οἰκτίρμων) expresses the quality of mercy or compassion. See Luke 6:36; James 5:11.
 - m. *Sympathēs* (Gr. συμπαθής) means “to suffer,” “to suffer with” or “to suffer alongside.” See 1 Peter 3:8.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

commitments are eternal, and who will ultimately prevail. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to focus on the Christological aspect of Christ's compassionate ministry by referring to the biblical-theological foundation and its application not only in today's context, but also making distinct the importance and essence of the eschatological hope to the contemporary suffering world.

Christology and Compassion in the Hebrew Scriptures

The nature of Christology is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, where Christ is revealed as the coming Messiah, the Son of God. The first promise given to human beings in Genesis 3:15 discloses the compassionate nature of God, who could not remain passive or indifferent to the human dilemma. Even more, the "substitutionary mechanism of redemption"² had been planned long before the creation of this world (Rev 13:8).³ The prophetic Messiah should bruise the serpent's head, as it is "implied in Psalm 110, which identifies the Lord Himself as the One who crushes the head in Genesis 3:15 (Ps 110:1)."⁴ A similar thought is repeated to David when God made a covenant with him (2 Sam 7:11-13).⁵

It should be noted that, in ancient times, a messianic figure could be understood as anyone who was anointed. In the Hebrew Scriptures, messianic figures were priests, kings, and prophets who were anointed for a special service to fellow human beings. For example, Aaron was anointed to be a high priest to stand between God and the people (Lev 8:6-12), and thus he became a type of Christ (Exod 28:1; Heb 9).⁶ David

² Jacques B. Doukhan, "Genesis," *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 103.

³ "It was a part of the plan of redemption that Christ should suffer the scorn and abuse of wicked men, and He consented to all this when He became the Redeemer of man." Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 65. All Ellen G. White quotes and references mentioned in this paper are taken from <https://egw writings.org>.

⁴ Doukhan, 102.

⁵ In addition to the above-mentioned Old Testament passages, Isaiah clearly speaks about the suffering Messiah (Isa 53). Also, the New Testament refers to Genesis 3:15 with Jesus' figure fulfilling that promise. See Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 12:1-6, 11.

⁶ Aaron offered sacrifices (Exod 29), Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice (Heb 9:28; 10:11-14); Aaron was anointed with oil (Lev 8:12), Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22); Aaron bore the names of Israel on his breast (Exod 28:12, 29), Jesus bears the names of His followers before the Father (John 17; Heb 7:25); Aaron entered the most holy place of the earthly tabernacle once a year (Lev 16), Jesus entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary once and forever (Heb 9:24-26).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

was anointed to be a king (1 Sam 16:13; 2 Sam 2:4; 5:3)⁷ as a type of Christ, who is later described as King of kings (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16). Also, prophets experienced a similar anointing for special service, namely, to be God's mouthpieces (1 Kgs 19:16). However, Christ was anointed for a specific function, that is, to reveal the Father's inner being and His character (Luke 4:18). In addition to that, the Hebrew Scriptures prophetically speak of the coming of the Redeemer of Israel, who would be despised, rejected and killed. This figure, who became known as the Messiah, is no other than God Himself (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; 53).

It is obvious that human types of Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures were not able to fully mirror His character and the purpose of His coming, because of their sinful human nature (Rom 3:23); only Christ—the true antitype—was able to fully reveal the Father and the beauty of His being. The biblically visible glimpses of God's character disclose a number of His moral attributes, namely, His love, grace, forgiveness, patience, mercy, and compassion, among many other ones. These concepts intermingle and interact with one another, forming various verbal clusters, as can be seen from various contexts and instances. It is the Lord's mercy and His compassion that compelled Him to enter into the covenant with Israel.⁸ The great declaration "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth" (Exod. 34:6) echoes in a number of other Scriptural passages, like Deuteronomy 4:31; 13:17, and Hosea 2:19. His unchanging compassion, produced by His steadfast love, is manifested in action by which He sustains His covenant and repeatedly passes over the people's sins (Deut 13:17). For instance, when David cries for God's mercy and pleads not to remember his sins (Ps 25:6, 7), he knows God's compassion will extend towards him in fatherly grace. The king's hope for forgiveness relied on the "multitude of [God's] tender mercies," which he had experienced in the past (Ps 51:1).⁹ The compassionate Lord forgave David his transgressions, and all those who pled with Him for mercy, because God loves to grant forgiveness. As Isaiah writes,

⁷ David was anointed for his kingly service three times: (1) in a private or prophetic ceremony (1 Sam 16:13); (2) in recognition as a king over Judah (2 Sam 2:4); and (3) as a king over both Judah and Israel (2 Sam 5:3).

⁸ P. H. Towner, "Mercy/Compassion" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 660–663.

⁹ See similar passages in Psalms 69:16; 103:4; 119:77; Jeremiah 3:12; 16:5.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

“I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins” (Isa 43:25). Luke confirms the same profound truth by saying that God overlooked “these times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30; in KJV—“winked at”) for the purpose of human repentance and acceptance of His gift of life.

Jeremiah beautifully testifies of this merciful and compassionate characteristic of God by stating, “*Through* the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. *They are* new every morning” (Lam 3:22, 23). No wonder Isaiah also joins Jeremiah by referring to the beauty of God’s character in his profound prophesy about Christ’s ministry. He presents a number of Christ’s various titles, among which there are two that contain specific nuances: “Wonderful, Counselor” (Isa 9:6).¹⁰ The quality of being a wonderful counselor cannot be manifested without compassion and mercy that is based on love.

It is important to note that the one who experiences the Lord’s compassion is not worthy of it; it is given freely because it is a gift from a loving God. For example, the enslaved Israelites in Egypt received God’s mercy without any payment for it. He not only prophesied of their future freedom (Gen 15:13, 14), but also graciously provided it, without them deserving it (Deut 7:7, 8). Neither the people of Nineveh nor Jonah the prophet deserved life after what they did or did not do, but God, in His mercy and compassion, extended it to them, and even to their animals (Jonah 4:2, 10, 11).

In the same way, God, being the Author and Source of true compassion, works through human instruments to extend His love and mercy to their fellow earthly dwellers. He chose the daughter of the pharaoh to rescue baby Moses in order to raise him to become the deliverer of the Egyptian slaves (Exod 2:6). Ellen White, describing the event, states that, “Angels directed Pharaoh’s daughter thither. Her curiosity was excited by the little basket, and as she looked upon the beautiful child within, the tears of the babe awakened her compassion; her sympathies went out to the unknown mother who had resorted to this

¹⁰ It should be noted that there were no commas in the original versions of the biblical writings. Therefore, one of the names of Jesus could be a combination of the two words, one of which is an adjective and the other a noun: Wonderful Counselor.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

means to preserve her precious little one. She determined that he should be saved; she would adopt him as her own.”¹¹

Similarly, in his defensive speech, Job tells about his compassion towards other people before the many multi-faceted tragedy struck him: “Have I not wept for him who was in trouble? Have not my soul grieved for the poor?” (Job 30:25). His life prior to this misery was known as “blameless and upright” (1:1). Even Job’s three friends are introduced in the Bible as the ones who “made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him” (2:11). They had a desire to commiserate with their friend in quietness; and if only they would have gone back to their own dwelling places right after their seven days of silent compassionate visit, they would never be known in history as “miserable comforters” (16:2).¹²

Moreover, the Psalmist reveals that it was the Lord who made the captors have pity over the captives, as indicated in Psalm 106:46: “He also made them to be pitied by all those who carried them away captive.” This text denotes the idea that the Lord sometimes allows struggles and pain to overtake human beings, but, at the same time, His compassionate nature works on the hearts of the oppressors to have pity on the suffering ones and ease their struggles. In a similar way, in his response to the leaders of the people who were left behind after the Babylonian invasion, Jeremiah declared, “Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid . . . I will show you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and cause you to return to your own land.” (Jer 42:11, 12).

In summary, the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures clearly and repeatedly refer to the compassionate and merciful nature of the Lord, as it was revealed to Moses (Exod 34:6, 7). The psalmist echoes the same note by exclaiming: “But You, O Lord, *are* a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth” (Ps 86:15). The Hebrew Scriptures present God’s character by means of various

¹¹ Ellen. G. White, *From Eternity Past*, 167. See also, Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 243; *The Story of Redemption*, 106.

¹² The story of Job’s three friends’ visit teaches many lessons, one of which is not to be overwhelmed with personal feelings and start talking nonsense while providing a compassionate visit. See “What Did Job’s Three Friends Have Wrong, and What Did They Have Right?” accessed on October 7, 2019, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jobs-friends.html>.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

exemplified types of Christ,¹³ and lay a strong Christological foundation for the future ministry of compassionate Jesus in the New Testament era.

Immanuel: The Compassionate Christ

With the New Testament era, various types of the Hebrew Scriptures pointing to Christ's nature and ministry became personalized in the person of Jesus "who became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The incarnated God (Matt 1:23; Isa 7:14) practically demonstrated an unreserved compassion, mercy, and empathy, which means that He literally walked in the shoes of human beings during His entire earthly life. These were His eternal, fundamental, and distinctive qualities that He demonstrated by taking upon Himself human flesh. He fully identified Himself "with the needs and hurts of all people."¹⁴ Moreover, He took the sins of this lost world upon Himself and died on the cross (John 3:14-17; 1 Cor 15:5; Gal 1:4) to be resurrected and give hope to all who believe in Him (1 Cor 15:20).

The authors of the New Testament speak extensively about Christ's compassionate ministry in the context of soteriology. This theological truth with its practical application is especially highlighted in the Gospels. Salvation, by its nature, function, and purpose, is not only an eschatological doctrine that refers to the future eternal life in the Kingdom of God, but it also incorporates the past and the present with all the blessings of salvation that include effective acts of compassion here and now. For instance, the three parables in Luke 15 "describe the present salvation"¹⁵ of the restoration of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. In addition to His teachings, Jesus performed a number of healings with the goal of reaching human hearts. His earthly ministry was salvific by its nature in its purpose and function. As Edwards notes,

¹³ In addition to the above-mentioned examples, there are numerous human examples who reflected God's compassionate character: Joseph's provision to his own brothers who had sold him to slavery (Gen 45); the nameless slave-girl who introduced Naaman to God through the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 5); the wise and brave Abigail who compassionately saved the life of the future king David and her own household from an unnecessary war (1 Sam 25), and many others.

¹⁴ Laverne Winn, "Empathy," *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 144.

¹⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 73.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

“Jesus did not perform a single punitive miracle, He performed only beneficial miracles.”¹⁶

The acts of Christ’s ministry of healing in a number of the New Testament texts are described with the Greek word *sōzō* (σώζω). While the ultimate goal of the compassionate mission of the Messiah was to die for sinners and then fully eliminate sin with all its consequences on the eschatological judgment day, it also included the alleviation of at least some sufferings in the present world. Thus, He healed a blind man (Luke 18:35-43, esp. v. 42) and a demon-possessed individual (Luke 8:26-39; esp. v. 36), restored the woman’s health from the twelve years of her hemorrhage affliction (Mark 5:25-34, esp. vv. 28, 34), and even resurrected Jairus’ daughter in the same context of various healing miracles (Mark 5:22-23, 35-43, esp. v. 23). These and other biblical accounts indicate that the meaning of the Greek word *sōzō* (σώζω) includes not only salvation, but also a broad restoration to a state of safety, deliverance, soundness, health, and well-being. These could not be done without the compassion and love that radiated from Christ’s divine heart.

Moreover, the acts of Christ’s compassion and salvation were also extended for redemption to those who either did not fit in the Jewish framework or lived beyond their boundaries. While Jesus performed most of His works of healing among people of the Jewish nation, there were instances when He broke down the barriers of prejudice and extended His mercy to the Gentiles.¹⁷ The Immanuel image of God touched the heart of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30; Matt 15:21-28). Although Christ showed a seemingly harsh approach to and treatment of her at the beginning of the conversation, her faith “got

¹⁶ Rex D. Edwards, “The Miracles of Christ: Impetration or Inherent Omnipotence?” in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton*, eds. Daniel Heinz, Jiri Moskala, Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 2009), 92.

¹⁷ While it was not Christ’s mission to attract people to Himself by performing miracles, especially among non-Jews, He responded to faith expressions of some of them. For example, observing the centurion’s faith, Jesus healed his servant (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). He restored the daughter of the Canaanite woman (see the text above) and a Gadarene demoniac (Matt 8:28-34). Jesus worked on the heart of the Samaritan woman, and later on, He was accepted by the citizens of Samaria (John 4:5-42). When the Greeks came to see Him, Jesus told His disciples that the hour had come that He should be glorified (John 12:20-23). The deep interest of the Greeks was a visible evidence that the time had come for His redemptive mission to be culminated on the cross and the good news of God’s love, compassion, and salvation be extended throughout the world.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

rewarded in spite of her ethnicity.”¹⁸ His facial expressions and body language revealed His heart of love toward human beings. As White puts it: “Beneath the apparent refusal of Jesus, she saw a compassion that He could not hide. . . . The woman departed, acknowledging her Saviour, and happy in the granting of her prayer”¹⁹ At that very moment of her faith expression, Jesus rewarded her hope and healed her daughter from demon possession (Matt 15:28).

Thus, the incarnated God not only gave Himself for humanity in a soteriological sense (John 3:16), but also prepared the ground for the spreading of the word about His divine compassionate character among the nations. He taught His followers about true greatness and witnessed about the nature of His Father to the surrounding crowds by His example of self-sacrificial love (John 13:34, 35).

Christ’s Compassion: Eschatological Dimension

The purpose of the plan of redemption, laid before the foundation of the world, would not be completed if the compassion of the Lord would be extended only within the boundaries and realms of this world and during the lifespan of humanity. Even if all the human good and charitable deeds of mercy toward other people were done in love for Christ, the end result would still be death (Rom 6:23). Something extraordinary had to take place from outside of this world, which the Scriptures describe as the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 22:12). In other words, human “history moves relentlessly toward its rendezvous with destiny—meeting Christ rather than human improvement.”²⁰ This is the biblical “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13); it is rooted in Christ’s soon return and His final judgment, which will be full of mercy and compassion. It is also the culmination of believers’ inward and outward preparation while living here and now.

Though various biblical texts refer to different aspects of the Second Coming of Christ—where waiting will culminate in life eternal—it should be noted that the concepts of mercy and love function as the key terms throughout various contextually apostolic salutations (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 John 3); in the motive for God’s saving actions (Titus 3:5; 1

¹⁸ George R. Knight, *Exploring Mark* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 152.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 401, 402.

²⁰ Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998), 539.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Pet 1:3); in the present assistance from God (Heb 4:16); and in the context of the Day of Judgment (Matt 5:7; 25; 2 Tim 1:18). “Mercy is not something that we have already received, for the final judgment has not yet happened. But the image is that of coming before the Lord one has faithfully served, confident that one will receive the reward that he has promised.”²¹

Jeremiah points out that God does not deliberately afflict human beings (Lam 3:31–39). When He executes His judgment on sinners, He does it in love and compassion. “Judgment and compassion” always go together hand in hand (Deut 32:26; Ps 78:38; 135:14).²² Divine eschatological judgment and compassion do not function as two contradictory terms mutually excluding each other. The fact that in the final judgment God will judge the ungodly along with the devil will prove before all the unfallen worlds that God is the God of love and compassion, because the basic function and purpose of His grace is intended to save any truly repentant man or woman.

Thus, in the context of God’s compassion, the two dimensions resonate throughout the entire Scripture, fully encompassing protology and eschatology. On the one hand, God’s justice and mercy are revealed and confirmed in the context of His saving grace, namely, He forgives and justifies a person by making him or her His child, and it is possible only because of Christ’s suffering and death through which He took the sins of the world upon Himself (1 John 1:9; John 3:16). On the other hand, the one who rejects the invitation of the divine call to accept the gift of salvation through Christ, who ignores God’s saving grace revealed in His compassionate call to the fallen human race, and disregards His divine love manifested on Calvary, places oneself under the execution of the final eschatological judgment (John 3:18), which will be the final expression of God’s mercy and compassion.

Meanwhile, Christ-centered eschatology gives God’s people the courage to face the problems of agonizing grief, pain, misery, dying, and death because their “hope finds in Christ not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering.”²³ Eschatological theology proclaims that the future has already begun with

²¹ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 98. See more on pages 96-98.

²² Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Prophets*, vol. 4 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 77.

²³ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 5.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

the coming of the compassionate Messiah, and the kingdom of God has started here on earth, even though it will be fully revealed and realized only at the second coming of Christ. In spite of the fact that believers still die, they have complete assurance that they will one day live with Jesus forever (John 14:19). Biblical hope in Christ's promises brings meaning and purpose to the suffering, persecuted, and dying, and to their family. Thus, the assurance "of both eternal life for the individual and the hope of a final consummation of the reign of God beyond earthly time and space"²⁴ move Christians forward by faith.

Compassion Applied: Practical Reflections

While many things can be mentioned concerning various privileges of a Christian, which automatically involve certain responsibilities, one stands above all—*agapē* love (Gr. *ἀγάπη*). It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22), which reveals one of the most significant and all-encompassing attributes of God that He freely shares with humans. As Barclay says, "The one thing which makes us like God is the love which never ceases to care for men, no matter what men do to it."²⁵ To this Ellen G. White adds, "And when His parting words are fulfilled, 'Love one another, as I have loved you' (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts."²⁶ If the followers of Christ, who call themselves God's chosen spiritual Israel, will not learn how to love not only each other, but even the world that is far and near around them, their philosophical theology is of no avail. God is free to choose other people or an instrument to fulfill His purpose, as it was in the case with ancient Israel.

While this sounds very harsh, it is important to remember that the more God revealed Himself to human beings, the greater was their responsibility and accountability to Him. The more elevated people's privileges, the more solemn were their obligation and answerability.²⁷ That is why Jesus told a number of parables in which responsibility and

²⁴ Georgia Harkness, "The Ethics of Jesus" in *Christian Ethics*, accessed on October 25, 2019, <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-3-the-ethics-of-jesus/>.

²⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Edinburgh, UK: The Saint Andrew Press, 1958), 1:177.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 641.

²⁷ Walter A. Elwell, "Responsibility," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

accountability go hand in-hand and are the focal point.²⁸ The God who knows everything “is not fooled by our pretense, by the ostentation of our worship.”²⁹ God’s people can do many charitable things at home and throughout the world. Their good works of compassion and kindness can even be publicized on the front pages of the church and secular news. However, all of their humanitarian endeavors, offerings, and sacrifices would mean nothing in the end, unless there is an undivided heart-obedience to God and unreserved submission to His will, which are based on the principle of love on the vertical and horizontal levels.

In this connection, Jesus makes a crystal-clear statement, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). In the same vein, Peter also noted that judgment begins with the family of God (1 Pet 4:17). This truth had been established from the very beginning of creation and it is reemphasized throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, the Lord revealed to the prophets Ezekiel and Amos His expectations of His people and the dangers of disobedience (Ezek 3:18, 20; 33:6, 8; Amos 3:2).³⁰ Because God is not only sovereign, but also the Creator and Redeemer, all people are accountable to Him for everything they do, say or think.³¹

²⁸ See the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27.

²⁹ Roy Adams, *The Wonder of Jesus: He Still Touches Hearts* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2007), 42.

³⁰ Unfortunately, the Bible is full of illustrations that demonstrate how irresponsible people can be by attempting to shift responsibility for their actions to others. Adam referred to Eve, and ultimately to God Himself, for the sin he himself had committed. Likewise, Eve sought to lay the blame on the serpent (Gen 3). Sarah became upset with Abraham when Hagar bore him a child, even though Abraham was following Sarah’s advice (Gen 16:1-5). Esau complained that Jacob “deceived” him and got the birthright, when, in fact, he had sold it to his brother (Gen 27:36; Gen 25:27-34). Aaron disagreed that he had formed the golden calf (Exod 32:21-24). Pilate washed his hands of Jesus’ death (Matt 27:24), etc.

³¹ An example of corporate accountability is found in Exodus 20:5, where God forbade His people to make and worship an idol. If they disobeyed, He would punish the nation for the idolatry of the fathers “to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,” but He would show “love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Deut 5:9). In the wilderness, Moses affirmed that although the Lord is slow to anger, “he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Num 14:18). Achan was held accountable for his misdeeds; so were the other family members (Josh 7:1–26). See also Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:2; Jer 31:29; Matt 12:36; Rom 2:2; 14:12; Heb 13:17.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

In this context, the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25–37) promotes the value of showing mercy and kindness towards others, not on an intellectual or philosophical level, but in a practical way. It “implies that it is an essential response of God’s people to his covenant.”³² Thus, mercy towards others is to be valued much more “than mere cultic acts”³³ of contemporary Pharisees. After calling Matthew to follow Him and eating together with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus quoted the prophet Hosea: “‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matt 9:13; see also Hos 6:6).

Jesus’ antidote to Jewish self-righteous and self-confident behavior was the extension of mercy towards sinners; and this mercy was built on the relationship between Him and His people. It is a mutually agreed-upon reinforcement on both levels, individual and collective, vertical and horizontal dimensions, because it is one of the basic responsibilities in the covenant context.³⁴

³² P. H. Towner, “Mercy/Compassion,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 662.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word, *’ahavah*, in Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, translated as “love” (“and you shall love Yahweh your God”) is a general term that contains such ideas as: “desire,” “affection,” “inclination,” the more intimate cleaving of soul to soul. The believer’s relation to God is based on love (1 John 4:19), and love is the fundamental principle of His law (Lev 19:17, 18; Mark 12:29, 30). To love perfectly is to obey wholeheartedly (John 14:15; 15:10). Christianity calls for all that a man is and has—his mind, his affections, and his capacity for action (1 Thess 5:23). The word translated as “heart” generally refers to the affections, feelings, desires, and will. It is the source of action and the center of thought and feeling (Exod 31:6; 36:2; 2 Chron 9:23; Eccl 2:23).

³³ Towner, 662.

³⁴ See C. E. Rae, “The Political Thought of Samuel Rutherford” (M.A. thesis, University of Guelph, 1991), 160.

God’s mercy and compassion are the basic motives for God’s covenant. Thus, the term *hesed* expresses a complex of ideas which includes love, mercy, and compassion. It is God’s mercy that compels Him to enter into the covenant with Israel (Exod 34:6; Deut 4:31; 13:17; Hos 2:19). God’s actions in freeing the people from slavery and creating the covenant reveal His mercy in historical events. Within the *hesed*—complex, mercy includes loyalty based on compassionate love, a loyalty that protects the covenant, though Israel despises it (Isa 63:7; Jer 16:5; 42:12; Hos 2:19; Joel 2:13; Zech 7:9; Ps 25:6; 40:11; 69:16). The mercy God has decided to give is unmerited (Exod 33:19; Gen 19:16; Jer 42:12); thus in the covenant context, God’s mercy is closely linked to forgiveness (Exod 34:9; Num 14:19; Jer 3:12; Dan 9:9), a more basic disposition of compassion (Deut 13:17), which generates the steadfast love by which God sustains the covenant and repeatedly passes over the people’s sins (Ps 25:6; 40:11; 51:1; 69:16; 103:4; 119:77; Jer.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

In order to reflect Jesus and be loyal to Him in everything, God's church, first of all, must know Him in person and allow Him "to remove from her all things—secular as well as spiritual—and replace them with the Person of Christ."³⁵ In other words, whatever God's people may represent or do, whether inside the church building or outside of it, the love and compassion of Jesus Christ are to be at the center. As Gane indicates, "loyalty is a matter of relationship, not merely of performance."³⁶ A performance of good works that followers of Christ do to others, in fact, are done to Christ Himself, thus showing their attitudes and shaping the relationship with the recipients of their extended Christlikeness.³⁷

Consequently, because of the specific attributes of God's nature, compassionate and merciful responses of Christ's followers towards fellow human beings identify them as the ones who belong to God in the truest sense of the word, because they accept Him not only mentally, but also reflect Him by their daily lifestyle and actions. In other words, their theology and Christology are demonstrated by its application in practical life situations. Christ's compassion sent Him among all kinds of people and all kinds of places in order to help the suffering (Mark 8:2, 3); and believers are privileged to respond in the same way because of the mercy shown to them.

While the purpose that drives Christians to extend Christ's mercy and compassion toward others may still be just an outward show of their charitable deeds and a challenge for other professed Christians, by itself it is the right direction to move forward because God's covenant invites people to respond to His love and compassion. At the same time, a clear biblical statement says: "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jas 4:17). Therefore, the words of Martin Luther King Jr. remind Christians of God's still small voice of conscience that speaks within their heart: "Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity comes along and asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But Conscience asks the question, 'Is it

3:12; 16:5). Membership in the covenant community, with enjoyment of its attendant promises and blessings, originates in the mercy and compassion of God.

³⁵ Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995), 95.

³⁶ Roy E. Gane, "Sanctuary Principles for the Successful Church Community," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/2 (Autumn 2006): 120.

³⁷ See Anna Galenicce, "Seventh-day Adventist Identity and Destiny: Living the Calling," *AAMM*, 10 (2014): 19-31.

GALENIECE: COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right.”³⁸ And it is the will of God to have deeply heartfelt compassion for others in spite of the circumstances, which sometimes may become even hostile.

Concluding Remarks

The Scriptures reveal that God is “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ps 86:15), and that His compassion is infinite and eternal, because “His compassions never fail; they are new every morning” (Lam 3:22, 23). According to the New Testament, Immanuel, the reincarnated God, constantly demonstrated the essence of His Father’s godly compassion (Luke 4:18-19).³⁹

At the same time, the Scriptures point out that compassion is not only an attribute of God, but it should also be manifested among His people. Compassion should be real, authentic, and practical. The Christological approach reveals a special kind of compassion that comes from the heart of God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This type of compassion contains in itself much more than just to sympathize with the suffering, the poor, the lost, the hopeless, the helpless, the victims of injustice, the aliens, the sick, or the bound,⁴⁰ as it is a primary identifier of who God is and what His character is like.

To those, who are led by the Spirit of compassion, mercy, and love, who have continued the ministry of Christ in this world, the whole realm of biblical eschatological events means nothing less than the final and everlasting fulfillment of all the promises of the empathetic Christ in their life. And this future reality will become a tangible reality as soon as Christ finishes His compassionate high Priestly ministry in the heavenly

³⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., “Quotes,” accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.quotes.net/quote/39041>.

³⁹ When Lazarus died, Jesus felt compassion and wept (John 11: 33-35). When Jesus saw suffering people, His heart was moved by compassion and He healed them (Matt 14:14; Mark 1:40, 41). When He was asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus responded that it was “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and then He continued, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:34-40).

⁴⁰ The concept of compassion runs like a golden thread throughout both the Old and the New Testaments (Neh 9:17; Ps 111:4; 116:5; Jonah 4:2; Isa 54:10; Matt 5:45, 46; Rom 11:32).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

sanctuary, “For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab 2:3).⁴¹

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⁴¹ See also Isaiah 30:18 (“Blessed are all who wait for him”); 49:23 (“Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed”); 51:5 (“The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm”); 64:4 (“who acts on behalf of those who wait for him”); Daniel 12:12 (“Blessed is he who waits”); Micah 7:7 (“I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me”); Zephaniah 3:8 (“‘Therefore wait for me,’ declares the LORD”). While some of these passages were not eschatological in their OT context, others definitely are (Dan 12:12; Zeph 3:8), and still others were interpreted eschatologically by Jesus Himself.