

Have you ever been in need of help and a stranger came to your rescue? I have, several times.

One of those times was many years ago while on a trip to Georgia. My wife and I were driving the Atlanta beltway when our car broke down. It was a hot summer afternoon and our car overheated. This was long before cell phones were invented.

Traffic was heavy and moving fast. Yet a family in a van saw us and stopped to help. They took us to the next exit, to a garage where we could call for help. They had compassion and showed us kindness. We were so grateful that they noticed our trouble and stopped to help.

I don't know if they were Christians, but they were acting like God. Our God is that kind of God. You see, we are all broken down on the road of life. Sin has stranded us, leaving us with no way to connect with God. And we are helpless to solve our sin problem.

But God saw mankind in need of a savior and kindly sent us Jesus, the savior we needed. In Jesus, God extends mercy to us. In Jesus God extends grace to us. The first point this morning is that...

Compassion, kindness, mercy, and grace are characteristics of God. These are normal for God. This is what God is like. This is how God routinely treats all people.

That is why we see these characteristics of God in Jesus. Jesus lived out the character of God on earth.

For example,... **In Jesus we see the compassion of God.**

Matthew 9:36 (NIV) When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

(Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 13:34)

Jesus felt sad for the people in their spiritual darkness and sin. He hurt that they were in such need. In Jesus we see the compassion of God.

In Jesus we see the kindness of God. Feeling compassion for them in their need, Jesus helped them.

Mark 1:34 (NIV) ... Jesus healed many who had various diseases.

Jesus healed the sick and disabled. He fed the hungry. He comforted the grieving. He accepted the outcasts. In Jesus we see the kindness of God.

In Jesus we see the mercy of God.

John 3:17a (NIV) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world...

The mercy of God means He is not treating us like we deserve. God did not end your life the first time you sinned. Nor did God end your life the second time you sinned. God did not end your life the thousandth time you sinned or the ten thousandth time you sinned. Every person

Jesus met was a sinner. Yet He did not condemn a single one of them. He did not overlook sin. He spoke of sin, called people to repent of sin, and warned of the consequences of not doing so. But Jesus did not condemn anyone. In Jesus we see the mercy of God.

And In Jesus we see the grace of God.

Mercy is not getting the bad we do deserve. Grace is getting the good we don't deserve. We see both in John 3:17.

John 3:17 (NIV) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, (There is the mercy.) but to save the world through him. (There is the grace.)

Jesus did not condemn sinners in their sin, even though we deserve condemnation. One day sin will be judged. But God is merciful. God is giving us the opportunity to change our mind, our attitude, and our behavior towards Him. God's mercy gives us the opportunity to repent of our sins. And then God's grace gives us the opportunity of forgiveness.

In Jesus we see the compassion, kindness, mercy and grace of God. If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. If you want to please God, obey Jesus. Jesus commands His followers to live out these four values.

Matthew 5:43-45 (NIV) "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

God had given the OT command to love your neighbor. But God did NOT say to hate your enemy. False teachers had added that part. They did so because they did not want to be kind to their enemies. They wanted to draw a distinction between Jews and non-Jews. So they decided to interpret God's command to mean that only Jews were your neighbor and you could hate everyone else. They ignored what God commanded in the Law of Moses about caring for the non-Jew.

So Jesus is offering a corrective to the common teaching of His day concerning God's command to love your neighbor. His correction reflects the character of God. God loves everyone. God is compassionate and kind to all people. God causes the sun to shine on all. God causes the rain to fall on everyone's crops.

God could make a distinction. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God made a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. He sent some plagues upon the Egyptians and not on the Israelites. God could do that today. God could send rain upon the crops of Christians and send hail upon the crops of non-Christians. He could use the weather to punish some and reward others. But He does not. While there is bad weather, it is not just non-Christians who suffer it. God shows no favoritism when it comes to the weather. God treats everyone the same.

We see this in Jesus when He was on earth. And in this passage Jesus commands his followers to do so also. Jesus instructs us, His followers, to act with compassion, kindness, mercy, and grace towards all people.

Jesus expects us to be compassionate, to feel their pain. Imagine what the other person is feeling. Imagine what it would feel like to be in their situation. Put yourself in their shoes.

Romans 12:15 (NIV) Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Hurt with their hurting. Cry with the crying. Grieve with the grieving. Jesus expects us to be compassionate, to feel their pain.

Jesus expects us to be kind, to help meet their need. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells a parable that shows His followers being rewarded for showing Jesus kindness. And His followers will object, saying...

Matthew 25:37-40 (NIV) 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Helping anyone is serving Jesus. You cannot help everyone, but you can help someone. Do what you can with the resources God has put in your hands. Jesus expects us to be kind, to help meet their need.

Jesus expects us to be merciful, NOT treating them as they deserve. All people deserve punishment for sin. When someone sins against you, they deserve punishment. Don't be the one to give that punishment.

Romans 12:17-19 (NIV) Do not repay anyone evil for evil... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge

We are to let God take care of punishments. Instead of trying to get back at those who hurt us we are to act with mercy, withholding the bad they deserve, just as God has not punished us for our sins.

Jesus expects us to treat them with grace, giving to them the good they do not deserve. None of us deserves forgiveness in Jesus. None of us deserves eternal life. None of us deserves heaven. These are gifts of God's grace.

He expects us to give others what they do not deserve from us. We can give them forgiveness. This may shock some into listening to the gospel and receiving the forgiveness that we have found in Jesus.

That is what they need. All people need the salvation available in Jesus. The most gracious thing we can do is to tell them the gospel.

However, it can be hard for people to see beyond their immediate need. It can be hard to hear of salvation when your stomach is empty, or the electricity has been cut off, or you are being evicted and your kids have nowhere to sleep but the car. By alleviating such needs, we may win a hearing for the gospel.

This is what Jesus did. He saw the people in their need and had compassion on them. He helped alleviate their hunger, their need for medical healing. He withheld any judgment for their sins. He offered a gracious invitation into the kingdom of God which they did not deserve.

Meeting people's needs is a part of being a Christian. That means it is a Southern Baptist value. We see this in article 15 of the Baptist Faith and Message.

XV. The Christian and the Social Order

Every Christian is under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in his own life and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Christian should oppose in the spirit of Christ every form of greed, selfishness, and vice. He should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and his truth.

Ex. 20:3-17; Lev. 6:2-5; Deut. 10:12; 27:17; Psalm 101:5; Micah 6:8; Zech. 8:16; Matt. 5:13-16,43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Rom. 12-14; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; James 2:8.

Southern Baptists uphold the value of compassion, kindness, mercy, and grace. These are also reflected in article 16.

XVI. Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love.

Isa. 2:4; Matt. 5:9,38-48; Matt. 6:33; Matt. 26:52; Luke 22:36,38; Rom. 12:18-19; Rom. 13:1-7; Rom. 14:19; Heb. 12:14; James 4:1-2.

God values all people and calls Christians to value them too. That means we are to show compassion, kindness, mercy, and grace to all people, friend and enemy, family and neighbor, acquaintance and stranger. Jesus draws no distinction between how we treat those around us. God loves all people and calls us to love them with Him.

The best we can do for someone is to share with them the gospel. Meeting their most immediate need may get us to the gospel. Without meeting their need, we may never gain a chance to tell them about Jesus.

Today, God invites you to acknowledge the truth of Jesus. Today, God is showing you grace in revealing your sin and need of His forgiveness. It is available to you in Jesus. Jesus died to pay the penalty of your sins. If you will believe, receiving Jesus as your Savior, and turning your life over to Him as Lord, you will be saved.