

Christ's Religion of Compassion

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Scripture reading: Matthew 9:13 But go ye and learn what [that] meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

We have a God who is a loving father who pities his child, even though that sinful child is defiled. He *waiteth in kindness, pities our blindness, longeth to welcome, though often reviled. God in compassion regardeth our plea.* We want to dwell upon this compassion and understand the words of Jesus to the Hebrews. Let us truly tune in to His challenge that is brought to us in these words: *Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.* These words Jesus quoted from the book of Hosea. Here He is saying so emphatically to the Jews who were nigh unto filling their cup of iniquity:

Hosea 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

The knowledge of God. Learn what this means: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. I desire that you will have the knowledge of God." We want to spend time on this. Do we have a knowledge of God? Not just a knowledge of His truth but a knowledge *of God*. Jesus refers to this knowledge:

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

This is the heartthrob of the statement "*I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God...*" I desire this for My people, God says; but My people are missing the point. Jesus was referring this to the Jews of His time. He says, Go to and learn what this means. God wants us to have life eternal, and it is in the knowledge of God. Let us see the context when Jesus actually spoke those words:

Matthew 9:10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw [it], they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? 12 But when Jesus heard [that], he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13 But go ye and learn what [that] meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Here is a challenge to the mind that is highly educated in the truth of God, like these Pharisees were. They held themselves in the position of being the chosen of God; and there was this person whom they were supposed to accept as the Messiah, coming along and sitting with the publicans and the harlots. That is not satisfying to the mind of those who are God's people.

1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin [which is] not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. 18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. 19 [And] we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. 20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, [even] in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

Here is something that we need to really appreciate, because this is what God desires – that we may know God, that we may have the knowledge of God. The apostle here speaks of sin. He says there is a sin that is not unto death, and a sin that is unto death; and they are not to pray for the people who have committed the sin unto death. And as he tries to get this point across, he says, *All unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* There he talks of a person who is born of God, who does not willingly sin; he is begotten of God and he keepeth himself. So it is this knowledge of God that the apostle speaks of.

The Knowledge of God

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, [even] in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

What is eternal life? To know God. We are trying to appreciate what the apostle is saying here. In the knowledge of God we are to understand something. This is what Jesus said, Go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy rather than sacrifice, and the knowledge of God. We need to get an understanding of what this means. It has to do with the knowledge of God. There is a sin *not unto death*, and this knowledge has to do with the knowledge of God. What is a sin that is not unto death, and what is a sin that is unto death?

Moses asked the Lord, Show me Your glory. Remember, God's glory is His character. So we want to get to know God, to get to know His character. And in Exodus we see expressed in His character an interesting segregation of the sin that is unto death and the sin that is not unto death:

Exodus 33:18 And [Moses] said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. 19 And [God] said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Here you get the connection: *mercy – I desired mercy, and not sacrifice*. Then comes the occasion when God put His hand to protect Moses in the cleft of the rock.

Exodus 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,

Is there anything left out here? What is transgression? What is iniquity? Lawlessness. What is sin? Various different things that we do contrary to God's will. God is able to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin, but He *will by no means clear the guilty*.

Interesting. You can be a sinner, transgressing, having iniquity and sin, and yet God can show mercy. But to the *guilty* He cannot show mercy. This is an interesting segregation of terms of understanding. But we are trying to understand what the apostle John said regarding the sin unto death and the sin not unto death. Can you discern in these words of God's character, in the knowledge of God who desires mercy and not sacrifice, a sin unto death and a sin not unto death? If He cannot by any means clear the guilty, then that must be a sin unto death that He cannot clear. They are dead, finished. But He is prepared to deal with and forgive sinners who have iniquity and transgression and sin. There is a suggestion in the knowledge of God. The apostle John said, Those who commit the sin unto death, do not pray for them. Let us examine God's word in reference to this. God's word is going to illuminate our minds, not any human being. This is not human reasoning. This is God's word. There is a sin unto death that you are not to pray for.

The Sin Unto Death

Hosea 4:17 Ephraim [is] joined to idols: let him alone.

In other words, don't worry about them anymore. They are joined to their idols, leave them alone. What follows is an exact reference to a sin unto death that needs not to be prayed for:

Jeremiah 7:13 And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; 14 Therefore will I do unto [this] house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, [even] the whole seed of Ephraim.

He is making reference to the ten tribes who had already been cast out. Then he says to Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 7:16 Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.

Very interesting. I will not hear thee, says God; don't pray for it. This is what the apostle John said. There is a sin unto death; don't pray for them. What is the sin unto death? Ephraim is joined to his idols; don't pray for them. And he says to Jeremiah, Don't pray for these people. Why? They would not listen. In spite of all His care, and all the time that He spent in trying to help them, they rejected it and opposed it. After a long period of reaching out to help them, they committed a sin unto death.

By continual resistance the sinner places himself where he knows nothing but resistance. When he disregards the calls of God's mercy, and continues to sow the seeds of unbelief, the dread mark is placed over his doorway, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone". {4BC 1174.5}

This is a sin unto death. Don't even pray for them. Why? What is the problem? They continually resist and therefore place themselves in a position where nothing but resistance is their reaction. *Nothing but resistance.*

When he disregards the calls of God's mercy, and continues to sow the seeds of unbelief, the dread mark is placed over his doorway, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone". {Ibid.}

The evils that had overspread the land had become incurable; and upon Israel was pronounced the dread sentence: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." "The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come; Israel shall know it." Hosea 4:17; 9:7. {PK 285.2}

Do we have it very clear what the apostle John said? There is a sin unto death, and there is a sin not unto death. The knowledge of God comes here into total focus. And as we have just been reading it, there is a position where God in His mercy and kindness continues to appeal and appeal and give them opportunity after opportunity; but as He continues to do this, a development takes place in the soul or in the nation that makes them incapable of ever receiving the mercy of God. That is the sin unto death. *Incurable*. Not even God can cure it. And it is because there is a condition of being which resists and resists the voice of God, until you cannot hear it anymore, and you do your own thing. This is the sin unto death; don't pray for them. Why?

Psalm 51:16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give [it]: thou delightest not in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

What is a sin unto death? It is when the broken and contrite heart is not there anymore. Because only a broken and contrite heart that feels its sin, as King David did, can receive the mercy of God. David said, *My sin is ever before me*; and he was ever kept in a state of brokenness and contrition. That was a sin not unto death, no matter what that sin was! Remember the horrible sin that he committed. And then there were other occasions, such as the time when he counted Israel although he was not supposed to count them, etc., etc. There are many things that King David did that were severe sins; but they were not sins unto death, because he had the condition of a contrite and broken heart for the sins that he had committed. And that broken and contrite heart God will not despise.

In Matthew 9:13 Jesus speaks to these people who were at the very cusp of rejection again, to the point of incurable rejection. He is appealing to them and says to them: Go and learn what this means, I will have mercy, and not judgment. He is referring to the knowledge of God. I wish you had that, He says; learn what that means. He then says the same thing over another incident that took place with the Pharisees:

Not Condemning the Guiltless

Matthew 12:7 But if ye had known what [this] meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

This is interesting. Condemning a sinner who has done a sin unto death is okay; but this is a sinner whose sin is not unto death. Let us read the context.

Matthew 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw [it], they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. 3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; 4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

This particular event, David came to the priest as he was being persecuted by King Saul, and the high priest did not know what the situation was. David gave a false impression, and he was hungry along with all his men. So the high priest gave him the bread which only the priests should be eating. And Jesus uses this occasion and says: *But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*

We are here challenged, as the Pharisees were challenged by Jesus, to learn to understand what this means, to learn to understand God who is merciful and kind to the sinner, but who will by no means clear the guilty.

The religion of Christ has very high standards. It is all encompassed in the words, *Be ye holy, for I am holy; be ye perfect*, even as God is perfect. Here are the high standards that Seventh-day Adventist Reformers are upholding, similarly to the high standards that the Pharisees were upholding. For these people who embrace the religion of Christ and the high standards of perfection, there is a very important knowledge of God that needs to be received and opened up to and understood, because if anyone has the high standards, the holy expectations, the perfection in his beliefs, and is striving to reach that, but he sins and makes serious mistakes, the following words come into focus in regards to the knowledge of God:

1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.

Here is a high standard – not to sin at all.

1 John 2:1 And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world.

This simple Bible reading displays to us the religion of Christ – we must not sin and must uphold high standards. But if any man sin, there is another part of the knowledge of God that comes into focus; and that is that *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and also for the sins of the whole world.* So if any man sin, and he has not sinned the sin unto death, and he is a believer in the propitiation of Christ, what is God's attitude?

God's Attitude to the Sinner Defiled

How careful is the Lord Jesus to give no occasion for a soul to despair. How He fences about the soul from Satan's fierce attacks. If through manifold temptations we are surprised or deceived into sin, He does not turn from us and leave us to perish. No, no, that is not our Saviour. Christ prayed for us. He was tempted in all points like as we are; and having been tempted, He knows how to succor those who are tempted. {7BC 948.2}

The person who has sinned is condemned; he has violated God's law; he feels terrible, broken. Don't despair, this is the religion of Christ; this is the knowledge of God. He is ever so careful not to give us occasion to despair.

The blood of Jesus is pleading with power and efficacy for those who are back-slidden, for those who are rebellious, for those who sin against great light and love. Satan stands at our right hand to accuse us, and our Advocate stands at God's right hand to plead for us. He has never lost a case that has been committed to Him. We may trust in our Advocate; for He pleads His own merits in our behalf. Hear His prayer before His betrayal and trial. Listen to His prayer for us; for He had us in remembrance. {7BC 948.5}

He wouldn't have prayed for those who are already past recovery. He prayed for those who can be recovered.

What fullness, what love and assurance are found in these words from the lips of God Himself, proclaiming His Love, His pity and interest in the children of His care: "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6, 7). {RC 281.2-3}

The Lord is full of compassion for His suffering ones. What sins are too great for His pardon? He is merciful, and as such is infinitely more ready and more pleased to pardon than to condemn. He is gracious, not looking for wrong in us; He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust. In His boundless compassion and mercy He heals all our backslidings, loving us freely while we are yet sinners, withdrawing not His light, but shining on us for Christ's sake. {RC 281.4}

Isn't that interesting? You can be a sinner, you may be faltering under the deceptions of Satan and sinning; but God does not withdraw His light. Don't we often think that when a person is sinning he can't see straight anymore? The fact is that God continues to shed the light upon him. Why? Because He is merciful, trying to help the sinner.

Will you . . . always trust in Jesus, who is your righteousness? The love of God is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, which is graciously given unto you. You are one with Christ. He will give you grace to be patient, He will give you grace to be trustful, He will give you grace to overcome restlessness, He will warm your heart with His own sweet Spirit, He will revive your soul in its weakness. Only a few days more to be as pilgrims and strangers in this world, seeking for a better country, even an heavenly. {RC 281.5}

It is extremely important that we open our hearts to this, not only for the sake of our own sinfulness, but for our attitude one to another. These facts of God's knowledge that we have contemplated so far, you don't want to doubt them. It says *He will give you grace to overcome restlessness, grace to be trustful*. Can you trust these words?

Our Attitude to One Another

The question is: What is our religion? What is our attitude in the light of this? As reformers, as restorers of paths to dwell in, with very high standards, what is our disposition to those who are surprised and deceived into sin? They fall into error, they have faulty characters that display themselves before us; when we fellowship together and we see each other stumbling, falling, with all sorts of character defects; and when a person really does commit a sin like King David, what is the attitude of this kind of religion that has such high standards? We see it displayed in many of the ranks of reformers today. What is the first thing they do when a person has sinned grievously? They censure. This is the religion that does not understand the words of Jesus "I will have mercy rather than sacrifice." I have come to restore sinners, says He.

They [the educators] should be taught that the gospel of Christ tolerates no spirit of caste, that it gives no place to unkind judgment of others, which tends directly to self-exaltation. {RC 276.5}

"We are the church of God; we are pure and righteous; we can't have any sinners in the church." This is the mentality. *Unkind judgment. It tends directly to self-exaltation.*

The religion of Jesus never degrades the receiver, nor makes him coarse and rough; nor does it make him unkind in thought and feeling toward those for whom Christ died. {Ibid.}

Some are in danger of making the externals all-important, of overestimating the value of mere conventionalities. {RC 276.6}

Anything that would encourage ungenerous criticism, a disposition to notice and expose every defect or error, is wrong. {RC 276.7}

This is the opposite to the religion of a condemnatory spirit.

It fosters distrust and suspicion, which are contrary to the character of Christ, and detrimental to the mind thus exercised. {Ibid.}

It's contrary to the religion of Christ.

Those who are engaged in this work gradually depart from the true spirit of Christianity. {Ibid.}

The true spirit, the true religion of Christ. When we start encouraging *ungenerous criticism, a disposition to notice and expose every defect or error*, and as we foster *distrust and suspicion, which are contrary to the character of Christ*, we *gradually depart from the true spirit of Christianity*.

The most essential, enduring education is that which will develop the nobler qualities, which will encourage a spirit of universal kindness, leading the youth to think no evil of anyone, lest they misjudge motives and misinterpret words and actions. The time devoted to this kind of instruction will yield fruit to everlasting life. {RC 276.8}

This is life eternal, to know God in His compassion. Anything different to that is going to take us away from the religion of Christ. This is so emphatically laid out before us, and we need to pay close attention to it, because this is the religion of Christ as opposed to the religion of the Pharisee or the Laodicean, who is so strict in everything and yet does not have that religion of compassion. We are instructed

Titus 3:2 To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, [but] gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

This is the religion of Christ: *to speak evil of no man*, and not to be brawlers, not to be argumentative, but to have this meek mentality, realising that sinners as we are, and sinners as all around me may be, I will not search out these dark things.

This is the religion of Christ; this is what you do with someone who has fallen into sin:

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual...

Do what? Censure them?

Galatians 6:1 ...ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness;

The opposite to self asserting itself;

Galatians 6:1 ...considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

This is the religion of Christ, the religion of compassion. We are to deal compassionately with those that we see in error, not even a disposition to reach out and condemn them in any way, but to *restore* them. This is the religion of Christ.

The Pharisees of Christ's day were challenged, and Jesus said, See whether or not you can understand that I will have mercy rather than sacrifice. I will not condemn the guiltless. But they have sinned. *We* have sinned; we are all sinners; we all have character defects that come into play, and we don't like each other's character defects lashing out upon ourselves. We don't like that, and we tend to estrange one from another because we see faulty characteristics. This is not the religion of Christ. The religion of Christ is one that does not look for the error of others; but what does it say? Let us explore this in conclusion.

Religion of the Natural Man

Could the Pharisees of Christ's day understand what He was trying to get them to understand? One such Pharisee, who was afterward converted, cites his case in the following scripture:

Philippians 3:4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees who had such an attitude, do you think they could understand His words "I will have mercy rather than sacrifice"? And you yourself can be in the flesh, in your natural state, and be a very, very fastidious law-keeping soul, like the Pharisees were. But it is the flesh. Religion can become assimilated with the flesh; but it is not the religion of Christ, because the flesh will always raise itself as the proud rich-and-increased-with-goods, have-need-of-nothing, pharisaical Laodicean. This is possible with the high standards and the natural man picking up those high standards. It is possible for an astute

religionist to be in the flesh. The Pharisees related to God from their natural, human state. Could they understand the religion of Christ?

1 Corinthians 2:14 ...the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him

Bear this in mind. When the natural man picks up God's high standards in the Ten Commandments and in all of His expectations like the Pharisees did, the compassion and mercy that God wants cannot be understood. The Pharisees did not understand it when Jesus dealt with the woman that was caught in adultery. These people may have a zeal for God, but it is according to the flesh. It is what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 10. Although they think that they have a knowledge of God because they have a knowledge of all His standards, what is the condition of these people?

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. 2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

You and I today are called upon to examine ourselves whether we be in Christ. Is my natural man governing my religion? Is my natural man governing my relationship with my fellow believers? or have we embraced Christ Jesus and with Him relate to our fellow believers as we are called to do in 2 Corinthians 5?

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

Living unto Him whose compassion we are getting to know.

The Word of Reconciliation

This is what we are to follow:

2 Corinthians 5:16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [him] no more. ... 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

What has He committed unto us? The word of reconciliation; so that if I have sinned miserably I don't become so disheartened that I think I'm lost for ever.

No; the reconciling grace and mercy of God is part of the religion of Christ as well as His high standards. And as I meet together with other brothers and sisters, do I hold myself aloof from them because they may be sinful? The word of reconciliation has been committed unto us. Study what this means.

It is most difficult, even for those who claim to be followers of Jesus, to forgive as Christ forgives us. The true spirit of forgiveness is so little practiced, and so many interpretations are placed upon Christ's requirement, that its force and beauty are lost sight of. We have very uncertain views of the great mercy and loving-kindness of God. He is full of compassion and forgiveness, and freely pardons when we truly repent and confess our sins. {TMK 180.2}

Peter, when brought to the test, sinned greatly. In denying the Master he had loved and served, he became a cowardly apostate. But his Lord did not cast him off; He freely forgave him. . . . Henceforth, remembering his own weakness and failures, he would be patient with his brethren in their mistakes and errors. Remembering the patient love of Christ toward him, affording him another opportunity to bring forth the fruit of good works, he would be more conciliatory toward erring ones. {TMK 180.3}

The Lord requires of us the same treatment toward His followers that we receive of Him. We are to exercise patience, to be kind even though they do not meet our expectations in every particular. . . . The last six commandments specify man's duty to man. Christ did not say, You may tolerate your neighbor, but, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." {TMK 180.4}

The love of Jesus needs to be brought to bear upon our lives. It will have a softening, subduing influence upon our hearts and characters. It will prompt us to forgive our brethren even though they have done us injury. {TMK 180.5}

No matter how great an injury they have done to us, we will *forgive our brethren even though they have done us injury.*

Divine love must flow from our hearts in gentle words and kindly actions to one another. The fruit of these good works will hang as rich clusters upon the vine of character. {Ibid.}

Rejoicing in Christ as your Saviour, pitiful, compassionate, and touched with the feeling of your infirmities, love and joy will be revealed in your daily life. If you love Him who died to redeem mankind you will love those for whom He died. {TMK 180.6}

This is the compassionate religion of Christ. May we pick up this lesson and be God's true people, God's true church.

Amen