



Teaching Your Family Compassion

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:26-27 ESV)

A probing question

One of these days someone is going to ask our children about the kind of faith their parents lived. They'll be asked, "What did 'faith' or the practice of 'religion' look like in your home?" What will our children say? How will they describe the stuff of our faith? That's the subject of James 1:27—the stuff of faith.

Compassion is what brings people to God

Note the word "visit" in v. 27. It means to look after and/or provide help for. It's not just about socializing with widows, orphans, and others who may have a different level of resources than yourself; it means to care for. The word was used in Luke 7:16, when Jesus raised the widow's son in town of Nain. After seeing this miracle it was said, "*God has visited his people!*" Ultimately, God's visit to earth in the person of Jesus was out of compassion. On the cross, Jesus compassionately was paying the sin-debt of our disobedience. He did for us what we could never do. "The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy." (Piper)

Compassion is what God's people do to bring others to God

Any act of compassion that Christians perform is not to attain heaven; but to live out the reality of the Gospel in our lives. True religion is about uniting our soul with God and participating in His Divine nature; it is Christ being formed in us so that His work can be seen from our lives. We do this best when we help the helpless. God wants His people to help the helpless; even when those who are helping feel the hurt. James 1: 2-4 speak of finding joy in suffering; and one of the ways we do that is by serving even while we suffer. Christianity is about a faith which works!

In the year AD 251, the Roman Empire was ravaged by a plague which at its peak killed 5,000 per day. One city in Egypt lost a 1/3 of its population. Remember that this was

in the day before modern medicine and disease prevention, etc. The sickness held sway until it ran its course. Historians say that at the height of this plague, people abandoned the city, terrified of being infected. "The rich fled to their country estates, hoping the isolation would protect them. Doctors, realizing the futility of their treatments, abandoned their charges." (Sommer 2007, 261) The pagans fled. But the Christians stayed! Listen to these words from Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria:

Most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast to each other and visited the sick fearlessly, and ministered to them continually, serving them in Christ. And they died with them most joyfully, taking the affliction of others, and drawing the sickness from their neighbors to themselves and willingly receiving their pains. And many who cared for the sick and gave strength to other died themselves having transferred to themselves their death.

What's amazing is that in the previous year many Christians—the ones who were sharing compassion during this plague—had been persecuted by the Roman government for their Christianity! Those who had been hurting were the first to help the helpless!

Now, I am not suggesting that we march right out of church and recklessly expose our children to risks! But here is the take home question:

How do we confer compassionate Christianity on our children?

1. Parents, are we scheduling family time for acts of mercy and compassion? Are our calendars too filled with leisure and recreational activities that we lack any margin for feeding and clothing those who need it? What if we "fasted" from eating out or some other family expense and give that money anonymously to someone in need?
2. Is there a compassion trip we could take as a family to meet needs with love? Several families use summer vacation for missions trips together! Right on!
3. What about scheduling time on Monday or Wednesday afternoons; or the first Saturday morning of every month to help distribute food at *Salt & Light?* (355-5654)
4. What about finding out how you can be involved with *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* summer ministry opportunities? (378-4518)
5. At this fall's *Weekend of Service (October 17-18)*, we are planning several "Family Friendly" projects so that our children can be involved in serving.
6. Out in the foyer today, you'll see the faces of children who would be welcome recipients of authentic religion, should God lead you to financially support them.
7. Pick something and put your faith to work! If our children don't see it; they won't do it!