

Marks of a Healthy Christian Pt. 3

Romans 12:9-16 (12/01/13)

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When King David was close to death, he gave Solomon 112 tons of gold and 260 tons of silver to build the Temple. At today's rates, no matter how you slice it, that's a lot of moolah! As I thought about the last two marks of a healthy believer here in Romans 12:9-16, compassion and humility, I thought, wow, these are worth more than any amount of gold and silver. These are priceless. They are beautiful graces of the heart. To know Christ and to have these two graces growing even to a small degree in your life would make you rich indeed!

We've looked at the first five marks of a healthy believer. Verse 9: Genuine love that hates what God hates and loves what God loves. Verse 10: Relationships that give honor to others. Verse 11: Keeping our hearts fired up in zeal for serving Christ. Verse 12: Enduring trials by seeing God at work through every trial you encounter. Verse 13: Opening our hearts and resources to give and meet the needs of people God brings into our lives.

Now we come to the last two – Healthy Compassion and Healthy Humility, verses 14-16. These are the gold standard of godliness, of holiness, of Christ-like living. Paul highlights them in two other passages:

Ephesians 4:1-3, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all **humility** and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Colossians 3:12-13, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of **compassion**, kindness, **humility**, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

You don't read about these in the Koran. No self-help program, humanist manifesto, or psychological theory comes close to these. In fact, none of us can pull these off. We must have Christ ruling and reigning in our hearts to see these graces growing and transforming us. And even then, it's a battle in our self-serving hearts to practice true compassion and humility.

MARK #6 HEALTHY COMPASSION *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Vv.14-15*

Compassion is the capacity to see and feel life from another person's perspective, whether they are friends or enemies. Christ came in our flesh and had compassion on people. He wept with Mary and Martha at Lazarus' tomb. He knew the crowd was hungry and so fed them. He can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). True compassion means forgetting yourself, which is something that is very difficult to do, but so freeing when we do it.

But how do you have compassion on people who attack you or persecute you? People who are really your enemies? Our first and natural response when someone attacks us or offends us or criticizes us is to react and even curse them, at least in our hearts. It's normal. When someone cuts you down, you want to yell, "Same to ya, fella!" People don't get all excited when a hockey player helps his opponent up, but let a fight explode and the crowd goes bonkers! Natural man loves a good fight!

God tells us twice to bless our enemies and then adds, "Don't curse them." 1 Peter 3:9 says the same thing: "Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but *giving a blessing instead*; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."

Does God really mean we are to bless people who make life miserable for us? We should report physical abuse to authorities. God ordained human government to protect us from evil people. And I've read of some child abuse that makes me want to take someone's head off. But here's a key to living in a Genesis 3, fallen, broken, evil world – Sin #1 never excuses sin #2. When people sin against me, I am not excused to sin back. All we have to do is look at Christ, who was reviled and mocked and crucified and He blessed his enemies and prayed for them.

Listen to His counsel in Luke 6:27-28, "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either." In Matthew 5:43-46 Jesus said it's no big deal to love people who love you. The real test is how you respond to your enemies.

Church History is full of God's people being persecuted, even tortured. The Roman church burned all three Pre-Reformers – Hus, Savonarola, and Wycliffe's bones (they dug them up after declaring him a heretic years after he died and burned his remains). No one is going to roast you at the stake this week, but someone may roast you with words. It may be at work, or between you and a parent or family member. If you take a stand for Christ, someone's not going to like it. 2 Timothy 3:12 assures us that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. You may be cut out of the will, or fired from your job for taking a stand. A girl friend may mock your testimony for Christ!

So what should you do? Bless them. Have compassion on them. Pray for them. Say good words to them. Do them good. When they take us off to jail for hate crimes, we're going to need to get the cup cakes and pecan pies flowing down there to the officials. Eric will talk about overcoming evil with good in January, but it starts here with compassion, the capacity to see and feel life from another person's perspective.

How do you really pull this off? You need self-control, first of all, to not curse this person, even in your heart. Cursing means you'd like this person to go straight to hell and suffer forever. That's God's business. Proverbs 10:19 says "He who restrains his words is wise."

And then, we need a godly perspective. Martyn Lloyd Jones says this is the apex of Christian living. We have died with Christ, we have been raised with Christ to supernatural living, and we can positively bless our enemies. We must not be ruled by other people's treatment of us, but rather by how God loves us. You are not the victim here, but the godly, compassionate aggressor. The only way to not curse and hold these people in contempt or grind them in the teeth of our anger is to aggressively, consciously bless them, like Jesus did and like Stephen did.

Compassion sees past the offense to the need. That's the key. What is driving this person? What does he or she really need? I can't take other people's treatment of me personally. I can't wear my Christian feelings on my sleeves. That poor person may not know Jesus! They may not realize they are going to give an account to God Almighty. They may be lost and hell bound. And so in compassion I must pray for them, speak kindly to them. When William Tyndale was in prison for a year and a half for his faith in Christ, he won the jailor and some of his family to Christ. There is no better way to bless people instead of cursing them.

How do you show compassion to people who are either greatly blessed or greatly hurting? We're to get excited about other people's blessings and sincerely grieve with other people's hard times. This goes against our natural responses and we too often fail to do this. When other people experience great blessing and are excited about all the goodness God is pouring into their lives, what is your natural response? Your co-worker gets a raise, but not you. They get a promotion, but not you. He wins the heart you were hoping for. Instead of joy, you may have twinges of jealousy. Steve Forbes' grandfather who started Forbes said, "Jealousy is cancer of the mind." And when people fall into hardship or something bad comes their way, how easy to gloat rather than grieve with them, especially if they are a competitor.

There's a story about two shop keepers who were bitter rivals. Their stores were across the street from each other and they would spend their days keeping a keen eye on each other's businesses. If one got more customers, he would gloat over his rival's loss. One night an angel came to one of them in a dream, "God has sent me to teach you a lesson. He is going to give you whatever you ask for, but whatever it is, your rival will get twice as much. If you ask for wealth, he'll get twice as wealthy. Long life, wonderful family, he'll be given twice as much." The merchant thought a moment, frowned, and replied, "Give me one blind eye." Now you may be thinking, "How despicable!" But be careful; it's too easy to let your own thoughts drift the same way, especially where jealousy lives.

Compassion means seeing and feeling from another person's perspective. To wholeheartedly enter into another person's joys or sorrows, without jealousy or that ugly, godless certain pleasure in another's hardship, means we completely forget ourselves. Self really wants to push in there and tell others all about our blessings and our hardships, rather than listening and entering into their world. Bless people who are nasty toward you. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. That is self-less, Christ-like compassion.

MARK #7 HEALTHY HUMILITY *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. V. 16*

Humility is the soil in which all the other graces grow. Without humility, there's no real unhypocritical love or kindness or gentleness. Again, this is just a beautiful grace of the spirit. It's the opposite of pride. Pride struts around like a know-it-all. Humility quietly cares and shares as needed. Proverbs 11:12 says, "When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom." And Proverbs 13:10 warns us, "Through presumption or pride comes nothing but strife, but with those who receive counsel is wisdom."

Humility is really a tricky quality of heart. It's not a tone of voice. It isn't telling everyone how worthless you are. It isn't a way of standing or walking. It isn't weakness. It isn't keeping quiet when you should speak up and take a stand. It isn't being self-conscious. It isn't proud of itself. "I'm proud of how humble I've been over the last few months. In fact, I think I'm humbler than you!" Humility certainly isn't out to impress others. The best way to be humble is to just forget yourself altogether, but that, too, isn't easy. These verses give us three insights into humility.

Humility leads to resolving conflicts. "Be of the same mind toward one another" implies that it is possible for believers to have destructive disagreements among themselves. In Philippians 4 you have two ladies who simply were not getting along. We don't know what happened between Euodias and Syntyche. Warren Wiersbe suggests they both wanted to be president of the missions guild or the choir. Somehow pride had crept in between them, someone offended someone, and now they weren't talking. They each used separate doors when they came to meetings and made sure they sat on opposite sides of the room. Paul had to counsel them to have the same mind. And we aren't exempt from such attitudes; there have been many believers who have gotten sideways with one another. Paul's counsel is needed today, "Forget yourself. Have the same mind. Be at peace. Be united."

Every fight, every war, every divorce, every conflict between Christians has pride in there somewhere. If you go, "Whoa, I thought Christians were all nice and kind and love-dovey and always sweet and almost perfect," all you've got to do is look into your own heart. We are all sinners saved by grace, growing by grace, but still fighting sin and self-centeredness in our own hearts, and the possibilities of conflict are endless.

Paul gives the same exhortation in Philippians 2:2, "Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other (NLT)." Humility is a heart attitude that doesn't hold grudges and stew in bitterness because of how somebody else treated you. Humility submits to Christ first of all. Then, even when there are different personalities, opinions, gifts, and abilities, humility allows people to work together as a team and submit to the whole purpose of honoring Christ. There is something so much bigger than my petty differences with someone else. 1 Peter 5:5, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the

elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' "

Humility never feels too important to serve others, regardless of their human status. "Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly." Is anything more obnoxious than the Pharisees who thought they lived on another planet from the common herd? How do you like it when you're made to feel like an idiot when others condescend to actually help you? Some people can be so patronizing, like, "Ah, you poor thing. I've had it all together for years and obviously you don't, so I'll give you a helping hand." Imagine the Samaritan on that Jericho Road. No fanfare, no show, no trumpets blaring, no making the guy feel like he was really messing up the Samaritan's schedule. No, the Samaritan just pulls over, slides off his donkey, and starts helping the poor fellow. He wasn't looking for the Jericho Times to name him Mr. Compassion of the Year.

Philippians 2:3-5 in the NLT is perfect here, "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

Humility never tries to impress others with their knowledge. Vs 16: "Never be wise in your own sight." There is so much pride in knowledge. Paul warned, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 10:8). Proverbs 3:7, "Do not be wise in your own eyes." Proverbs 26:12, "Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There's more hope for a fool than for him." Every once in awhile, this type of person sneaks into the church. "I have a PhD and know all things." And someone else will respond, "I have two PhDs and know more than you do!" They know so much they can hardly get their heads inside the door. There is nothing wrong with knowledge and PhD degrees. We all need knowledge, and degrees reflect good passion and discipline. But if your knowledge puffs you up or gives you a sense of self-importance in your own eyes, you have fallen into this "fool" category. Here's a test: Can you allow other people to not know that you already knew what you just heard? Pride eggs us to impress others with our knowledge. It takes the grace of God to carry a lot of knowledge with humility.

So how can such important and smart people like us learn humility? Meditate on three things:

1. Who made you?
2. Who redeemed you?
3. Who are you apart from the grace of God?

Compassion and Humility. These are worth more than all the gold and silver in that ancient Jewish Temple. Let me tell you, it is difficult to live in compassion and humility daily. Pride grows in my heart like weeds in the garden, and Satan loves to fertilize them. If you are anything like me, we need forgiveness for our arrogance and selfishness, for our ugly jealousies, hurtful words, and proud thoughts of ourselves. We have to work at thinking about others more than ourselves. I'm glad God doesn't accept us based on our perfect godliness, but rather based on Christ and His perfect godliness. I'm so grateful we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! Are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation?

Take these seven marks of a healthy believer, confess how far short you come, but then let's pray that God would grow these marks more and more in our lives.

- Is your love genuine, hating what God hates and loving what God loves?
- Are you quick to honor others?
- Are you fired up about serving Christ?
- Are you enduring trials with joy, knowing God is using your trials to mature you?
- Are you joyfully giving of your resources where there are genuine needs?
- Can you forget yourself and see and feel life from another person's perspective?
- Are you fighting your pride by keeping a teachable, learner's spirit?