

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Playing the Sympathy Card

Charles Fry

God's word endorses mercy, as Jesus said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*" (**Matthew 5:7**). The prophet Hosea wrote that God desires "*mercy, and not sacrifice*" (**Hosea 6:6**), which Jesus echoed (**Matthew 12:7**). The Lord wants mercy more than rituals performed by worshipers. James warns us that "*judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment*" (**James 2:13**). God demands that his people be merciful. He practices mercy, compassion, kindness, and all their synonyms and teaches them as attitudes and actions for everyday Christian living. Sometimes though, as with all good things, the Adversary works at twisting sympathy to his advantage. Thus Christians are always to be careful not to be manipulated when wickedness is packaged with a wrapper calling for pity.

The first time the Serpent played the sympathy card was in the Garden, **Genesis 3:1ff** when he feigned sympathy for the human pair in the Garden. Pretending to sympathize with an absurd fiction of divine denial, suggesting that God was holding them back and denying their best future, the Serpent effectively manipulated the Woman to steal what God had withheld in the midst of abundance sufficient to every need and adequate to satisfy every good appetite. The pretense of sympathy facilitated deception, which led to a disastrous loss of life and liberty. A pretense of sympathy continues to be a tool of deception to gain power over people.

Sometimes the sympathy card is played deceptively in another way, appealing to kind people to be compassionate when resolve is called for. When Moses gave his farewell speeches to Israel in their fortieth year of travel out of Egypt, he specifically commanded the people who were going into Canaan to utterly destroy and "*show no mercy*" to seven nations God had marked for destruction (**Deuteronomy 7:2**). Israel had been warned from the beginning of their journey toward Canaan that they must not compromise in any way with the nations God was dispossessing in their behalf, because

compromise would certainly lead to Israel's corruption (see **Exodus 23:32**, for example). God commanded his people to show no mercy because the evil acts of those specific cultures could only subvert their neighbors, spreading perversion and oppression. They needed to be eradicated, not just for land, but for the future of humanity. The character of the nations of Canaan in that era is demonstrated by the pillaging slave raids of the Amalekites when Israel seemed vulnerable as they exited Egypt (**Exodus 17:8ff**) and the similar raids of the Canaanites when Israel was in their final preparation to enter the land (**Numbers 21:1**). Cynics willfully overlook the

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predatory and utterly selfish foundations of the pagan cultures of Canaan that God marked for destruction. If the Israelites sympathized with the Canaanites in their wickedness, the outcome would inevitably be Israelites becoming just like Canaanites, heartless and selfish and abusing the powerless.

The account of Rahab at Jericho (**Joshua 2** and **Joshua 6**) demonstrates that God's "show no mercy" policy for Canaan was specifically oriented toward those who refused to submit (**Hebrews 11:31**). A turn toward God presented an opportunity to show mercy. The horrific wickedness of the Canaanite nations was not to be sympathetically spared in misguided mercy, but anyone who turned from that wickedness toward righteous behavior could be saved. That, indeed, is an

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appropriate expression of mercy, following God's will to bring about changed hearts and lives.

As God told Israel to show no mercy to the disobedient nations of Canaan, he also told his people to have no pity for the prophet or teacher who seduced others into the immoral idolatries favored by other nations. **Deuteronomy 13:8** forbade Israel from having pity even toward a family member who attempted to mislead anyone into the excesses of idolatry. Some things cannot be tolerated, and leading others into sin is one. A compassion that leads to compromise and acceptance of sin is misguided and can only result in greater tragedy than the potential difficulties of honestly identifying sin as sin. The devil knows very well how to play the sympathy card to promote acceptance of rebellion against God, whether it is the pretense of sympathy to win hearts or the misdirection of sympathy to tolerate continued sin.

Christians are not called to dispossess nations and occupy Canaan like Israel coming out of Egypt. Christians are called to preach Christ to the nations, and the weapons of this world will not accomplish that goal. Christians are called to battle *"arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God,"* in order to *"take every thought captive to obey Christ"* (**2 Corinthians 10:4**). Misdirected sympathy prompted by people who promote feelings over truth, and urge misguided compassion over obedience to God and his created order, only perpetuates destructive behaviors and enables sin to flourish and ensnare more and more.

Paul in Romans **1:17-32** presents a veritable laundry list of rebellious decisions pursued by people who reject our Creator, a list worthy of thoughtful attention. It concludes with condemnation not only of everyone who chooses rebellion against the Creator, but also those who *"give approval to those who practice them"* (**Romans 1:32**). God absolutely wants people, certainly Christians, to be merciful, but disaster follows when the sympathy card is played to shame good-hearted people into accepting sin and pretending sinners don't need to change.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by

snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh (**Jude 1:20-23**).

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We are His Workmanship

Blake Stanley

Have you ever completed a task, reached a goal, or built something you looked back upon with some satisfaction? Not a feeling of pride or lifting yourself up but just a feeling of satisfaction. Maybe it's part of your home that you renovated or improved. It could be an object that you built or sewed. Perhaps it's the passing of an exam you studied hard for or a promotion you received at work, or even just mowing the lawn. You finish, look back upon the work, and think to yourself, "That's good."

It seems to be a natural tendency, perhaps instilled in us by God, to look back upon completed work this way. Our God did this during the process of creation. At several intervals on the third through sixth days of creation, God looked back upon His work and *"saw that it was good"* (**Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25**). Upon finishing the entirety of creation, He looked back upon the entire work and saw *"indeed that it was very good"* (**Genesis 1: 31**).

It is interesting to think of God reflecting on His work. It is something that we do, but to think of God who is so powerful to create -- not build but create -- all things, and here He is reflecting on the work, admiring what He made, and being satisfied with what He created just as He had created it. In the midst of all this work, He places man in the garden to tend the creation and a being to walk with in the Garden. It was perfect, and it was everlasting.

And then came sin. This damaged so much of what God created. In **Genesis 3:16-19**, God announces to the serpent, Adam, and Eve the consequences for bringing sin into the world. Children would be born through pain. Toil would be required to produce the food needed for life. Life would be finite. Their bodies would return to the dust from which they came. Also, as a consequence for their sin, Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden, separated from God. Even the earth itself was changed. The ground was cursed and would

bring forth thorns and thistles. It is impossible to accurately imagine what creation looked like before sin, but there was a difference. The ground was less yielding and less willing to provide food all because of sin that one man, Adam, brought into the world (**Romans 5:12**).

Fully relating to God here is impossible. We have never created such a thing as God has, nor will we ever. But we can imagine, or maybe even have experienced, a time when a work we took satisfaction in was ruined by someone or something else. At best, it is frustrating. At worst, it can be heartbreaking. If the cause is a person, and his or her actions were careless or had some purpose or intent behind them -- it wasn't merely an accident -- it can cause us great grief. We not only see what we worked for damaged or destroyed, but we also have the accompanying hurt of another giving us no consideration or concern for what we've done.

There are times in the scriptures when God used metaphors to show that He views our sin in such a way. One example is in **Isaiah 5:1-7** where He compares the nation of Israel to a vineyard. He had built this vineyard on a good hill with good ground, the choicest vine used, the ground cleared, the press built, etc. All that work and the yield is wild grapes.

Another example is in **Ezekiel 16**. There, God compares the children of Israel to a newborn girl that He found cast away in a field, uncleaned from birth, its navel chord still hanging from its body, and struggling in its blood. She was abandoned, and no one wanted her. But God took the child in, made her thrive, washed her, clothed her in the finest cloth, adorned her with jewels, gold, and silver, covered her in silk, and fed her with pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. She was beautiful. But when she matured, she gave herself to other gods.

In each of these instances, God put in the work, not for himself but for someone else, for His people. Their response was to turn away from Him towards sin, ruining or casting aside what He had created or provided. We can see at other places in the scriptures how God views this with a sense of grief. In **Genesis 6:6**, as God viewed the world's wickedness of man across the earth, Scripture says, "*And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.*" He saw what had become of His creation, of what others had done in His creation, and He grieved.

This is important to remember as we are all faced with the temptation to sin. Sin isn't the breaking of some arbitrary rule created by an authoritarian God. Sin results in the defilement

of what the Lord created. It separated His creation from Him and resulted in the entirety of creation being subjected to futility (**Romans 8:22**). When we choose to sin, it grieves our Lord, for we are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works, not for sin.

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Glory to God!

The church in **Brookfield, MO** was overjoyed when **Andrew Bunton** was buried with Jesus in baptism.

The angels rejoiced with the brethren in **Pleasant Hill, IA** when **Gabby Hermon** was baptized for the remission of his sins on July 5.

Blessed Are the Dead

Delbert Deister, 100, passed away at home in **San Jose, California**, on June 5, 2023. Delbert was born in Topeka, Kansas on November 28, 1922, to **Henry and Lillian Deister** and raised as an only child on a farm. Delbert married **Iris Herndon Deister** on September 30, 1946. Seeking a warmer climate, Delbert and Iris moved from Colorado to California's "Valley of Hearts' Delight." Delbert was a loving and attentive father. He would lead evening Bible story times for the family. After Bible time, he would get down on the floor and play with the children. They remember the 'children's story time and songs' he led at church. Many still remember the lessons and songs they learned from him.

The church family also was a tremendous influence on Delbert. All the families of the church worked together to convert an old house into a meeting place for the congregation. These families formed a circle of friendship that built up our family and provided the support for our dad to grow and become what he could be to the glory of God. He used his talents to support the growth of the congregation, including serving as a deacon and elder. We remember with appreciation many dinners with all the families. We can't forget camping in Sequoia one time. Each family made a sign for their

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campsite: Deister's Dugout, Grantham's Grotto, Hammar's Hideaway, and Munger's Manor.

Iris preceded Delbert in death. He is survived by his four children, their spouses, his seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and two grandchildren of the heart.

Special Meetings

2023 Meetings

- August 27.....White Oak, rural Ethel, MO
September 2-3.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA
October 6-8.....Fall Campout, Unionville, MO
October 14-15.....Riverside Road, Ozark, MO

Northern Missouri Fall Campout

The churches in **Martinstown** and **Unionville, MO** plan their second annual **Fall Campout** for **October 6-8**. For a meeting flyer, please scan the QR code to the right with the camera on your phone or tablet. Congregations, please feel free to print and post the flyer. Teachers, topics, schedules, and information about accommodations are included in the flyer.



Weekend Meeting, Ozark, MO

The **Riverside Road church of Christ** plans a special weekend meeting for October 14-15. Their theme is "This is the Way -- Walk It!" The flyer for the meeting can be found using the QR code to the right.



2024 Summer Meeting

The **Church of Christ on Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO** is

pleased to announce their plans to host a **one-week study** in the **summer of 2024**. More details will be available in future months.

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