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Compassion for Our Neighbour, and the Question of Eternal Punishment

Reflections [Parables and the Teaching of Jesus](#) 17 December 2012

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

[Mark 15:21](#)

Barclay writes that Christ's judgement "does not depend on the knowledge we have amassed, or the fame that we have acquired, or the fortune that we have gained, but on the help that we have given." How might this bear upon our pursuit of the Faith?

We try to fish without getting our lines wet. We need to reach out, and be fully conscious of those around us. That is how we become aware of the people whom we can comfort, one way or another; that is how we discover our neighbours, of whom Jesus told us. And when we find them, we need to be able to empathise with them.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite simply walked past the wounded, and probably dying, traveller, because they considered helping him just another task, and judged that other matters in hand carried a higher priority. The Samaritan also had his own concerns to attend to, but he went out of his way to care for the traveller, because he felt the man's pain, his desperation, his desolate state, within his own heart.

We need to put ourselves in the place of the person in need, and feel within us all the untold misery that person is bearing. Like Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus carry the Cross to Calvary, we should cultivate an attitude that helps others carry their cross.

When we look around us, we will find opportunities for such acts of compassion. It is not easy to follow Jesus, and pretensions are of no use to Him. What we do for others reflects what we truly think of His teaching: to feed the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless, care for the sick, and walk that extra mile with anyone in need.

Is eternal punishment being explained away?

McGarvey holds that the fate of the wicked is punishment: punishment being the misery and suffering purposely inflicted upon the wicked. Such punishment, he insists, is not transient, but resilient and everlasting.

We are saved by the prevenient and operative grace of God. The question then arises: if we have thus been saved, and have come into faith, how could we still suffer eternal punishment? When we merely claim to have faith, what we often have is no more than intellectual assent, an agreement with known Christian teaching; such a faith remains incomplete. The prevenient grace of God, which first helped us take our decision to follow Christ, becomes the operative grace of God in the very event of our conversion. God, however, continues to bestow His cooperative grace, and collaborates with the renewed human person in the achieving of regeneration and growth in holiness. Having liberated the human will from its bondage to sin, God is now able to work together with that liberated will. When we submit to His grace, and are willing to collaborate with Him, we receive salvation. Those who refuse to do so will receive eternal damnation.

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