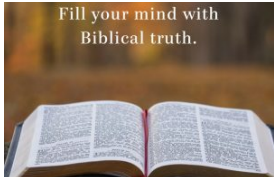


American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart March 2021

COMPASSIONATE CONVICTION

By: Lowell A. Ivey



I will never forget a sermon I heard at a meeting of my regional church. ... He preached on humility from Proverbs 3:33–34. In that sermon, the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus spoke gently and powerfully and directly to me, convicting me of my pride and persuading me of my need for a heart more conformed to the meek and lowly heart of my Savior.

The truth, spoken in the love of Christ, has tremendous spiritual power to penetrate even the most hardened and obstinate hearts. God’s truth never comes to us as a mere compilation of doctrinal propositions. It comes as a flesh-and-blood person, as the very incarnation of the Father’s eternal love for us in history, as the eternal Word made flesh

to dwell among us, and in us, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In Christ, God demonstrates His love for sinners by revealing that love in the gracious character and in the atoning, reconciling work of His Son (Rom. 5:8). The truth of Christ’s death and resurrection comes to us as a living revelation in time and space of the gentleness and compassion of the triune God. This is the pattern that shapes not only what we believe but how we speak and live ...

To be a Christian is to be Christlike— full of grace and truth. Or to put it another way, a Christian bears witness both to the grace and the truth that are in Christ. In that way, we make known a whole Christ, a full Christ, a complete Christ, the only kind of Christ able to save, sanctify, and glorify sinners perishing in unbelief and ensnared by Satan, the god of this world.

What this requires, in practical terms, is that we seek to be whole Chris-

tians. A whole Christian is a Christian whose convictions are grounded in compassion and whose compassion is fortified with conviction. To be in Christ is to be united to a Savior whose heart was “moved with compassion” when He saw the confusion and ignorance and moral perplexity of those He came to seek and to save. ... His compassion was so great that He proclaimed the truth of the gospel, calling those in darkness to turn to Him as the Light of the World, the One who came speaking the very words of eternal life.

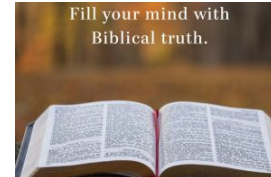
Compassion is defined by the person and redeeming work of Jesus Christ. How do we know what compassionate conviction looks like in real life? By studying the life and ministry of our Savior. To see Jesus is to see the very heart of God opened up and clothed in our human nature. It is to see a compassion with no beginning, having its roots in the soil of eternity. It is to see a compassion that can never end but will

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continue to bring forth fruit forever in the new creation. The incarnation, sinless life, ministry, miracles, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ all testify to the compassion that was in the heart of God the Father before the foundation of the world. That compassion is revealed to us most clearly in the Scriptures and is confirmed by the Spirit's testimony in our hearts that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

How then do we, as the children of God, express our convictions in a way that is consistent with the compassion of Jesus Christ? We do so by remembering that we are called to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We speak the truth with a compassionate purpose. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (v. 29). Corrupting speech

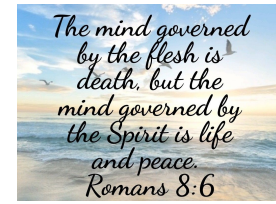
is, literally, speech that causes decay. It is the opposite of life-giving speech. It is speech that seeks to tear down and destroy, not to build up or to cultivate spiritual growth. Compassionate speech is edifying speech. It is speech that affirms both the truth that is being spoken and the human dignity of the person being spoken to or about. Compassionate speech is both propositional and personal. It affirms what is true without destroying or cursing the image of God (James 3:1–12). If we are in Christ, we speak as those who long to see Christ formed in the hearts of those who hear what we have to say (Gal. 4:19).

This is especially true in our age of electronic communication. The internet has made the message of the gospel more accessible than ever. But with every new medium of communication comes new and unique challenges and temptations. The great danger of speaking to others from behind the impregnable barrier of an electronic device is that we too easily forget the personhood of those on the other

side of the screen. A Christian ethic of digital communication requires us to remember and acknowledge the eternal significance of our speech and to strive always to speak with compassion, even when we cannot see—and may never meet—the recipients of our online words.

Does this mean that a compassionate Christian will never say anything that might offend? No, Jesus was put to death for speaking the truth in perfect love. Truth by its very nature is offensive to the carnal mind, the mind that is hostile and opposed to Jesus, who is both truth and love incarnate. But there is a difference between speaking an offensive truth and speaking the truth in order to offend. To be in Christ is to have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you. Has Christ shown compassion in revealing His grace and truth to you? If so, let His compassion teach you not only how to hold but also how to share your convictions in a way that brings honor and glory to Him.

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