

# COMPASSION

(II COR. ch.8 and ch.9)

(Scripture references at end of each para)

Anxiety that innovations will lead to excesses and deviations is understandable. Emphasis on the external and ceremonial can develop to a stage where it becomes a deviation or even a blasphemy. For example, desire to have fine carved furniture for the table and chairs used at the breaking of the bread can assume an importance that over-shadows the significance of the emblems themselves. Such tendencies often start in small and innocent ways: flowers on the table, decorative cloths to cover the loaf and the cup, fine art work on the plate and the drinking vessel, stained glass windows etc. All these things are very innocent in themselves until for example, one comes to refer to the wooden table as the 'Lord's table,' and the stone or brick building as the 'house of God,' thus taking away from the true house of God purchased with the precious blood of our Saviour, glory that is due to it. Once this stage is reached it's not long before crosses are erected and revered, so-called

pictures of Christ are introduced into literature and displayed in pictures on walls thus tending to blasphemy. One can also understand the anxiety of those who have seen oversights setting up schools whether it be Bible schools, Sunday schools or colleges which have grown to such an extent that the tail now wags the dog.

Many systems start with genuine and sincere motives but eventually get out of hand. Usually they are set up by brethren who wish to deal with an emergency it appearing to them to be the wisest way of doing it at that time. In an area where a group of churches are small and lacking resources, a group of brethren might decide to appeal to brethren of the different assemblies to pool their resources in order for example, to support evangelists, or alternatively to set up a school for training preachers. The danger is that such an organisation could become so powerful that either the individual assemblies do not develop as they should, or when they do develop to such a stage that they could be self-sufficient they find themselves over-ruled by the organisation. In a similar manner a magazine could be promoted either by an assembly or individual brethren through which the views of contributors are disseminated. The influence of the magazine over it's readers could gain such power that it comes to be regarded as an authoritative organ of the church. The question arises, are these things anti-scriptural to start with, or do they only become anti-scriptural when they begin to have an influence which they ought not to have. We can see that a legalistic approach would lead us to conclude either; anything not specifically authorised in the scriptures is anti-scriptural or at the other extreme; anything may be indulged in provided it is not specifically condemned in the scriptures. This subject covers a wide field but the aspect of it with which this article is concerned is the exercise of compassion toward those in physical need.

We are obliged "to work that which is good toward all men especially toward them that are of the household of faith, as we have opportunity."<sup>1</sup> So as the opportunity arises we must to the best of our ability meet it. It is true that the Holy Spirit in his wisdom guided Paul to advise the Corinthian church on a sensible systematic way of collecting money to meet the needs of the poor at Jerusalem. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come."<sup>2</sup> We also ought to be guided by the wisdom of this passage, but it is obviously not a hard and fast rule to be enforced on all occasions. Paul requires Timothy to "Charge them that rich in this present world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute and willing to sympathise."<sup>3</sup> It would be foolish to insist that any money, food, or clothing that the rich wish to pass on to others must be done through the weekly collection of the church. Also, emergency measures call for emergency action as when the brethren "sold lands and houses and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."<sup>4</sup> We must remember that "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath"<sup>5</sup> so that when an "ass falls into the pit,"<sup>6</sup> compassion demands that we in effect break the sabbath. The onus is on us to remember our Lord and Saviour in the breaking of the bread, but if on the way to the meeting place we see a man who has been knocked down in an accident and nobody is there to help him, compassion demands that we attend to that man even though it might mean that we miss the breaking of the bread. It would not be right on the other hand for someone to take this as an excuse for missing the breaking of the bread on the slightest pretext. We can see the wisdom of there being no hard and fast meticulous legislation in these things. Rather we are given guiding principles such as "Not to do evil that good may come"<sup>7</sup> and "Do things honourable in the sight of all men."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gal. 6.10. <sup>2</sup> I. Cor. 16.2. <sup>3</sup> I. Tim. 6.17-18. <sup>4</sup> Acts 4.35. <sup>5</sup> Mark. 2.27. <sup>6</sup> Luke. 14.5. <sup>7</sup> Rom. 3.8. <sup>8</sup> II Cor. 8.21.

It would be wrong for Christians to shelve the responsibility of seeing to the needs of their destitute relatives onto the church, "That the church be not burdened."<sup>9</sup> Also there would be no excuse for a church setting up medical facilities in areas where these are readily available. Also where there are brethren with the facilities for taking-in and looking after orphans the church should not be burdened with the task of setting up an orphan home. We know the possible harmful effects of institutionalisation and that the ideal thing is for brethren to take into their own homes, orphans etc. The ideal and most compassionate thing being to give them as near a normal home background as possible, but in the case of our Indian brethren we are dealing with a situation where the magnitude of the problem is so great that this can rarely be done. Now the ass has fallen into the pit on the sabbath. Do we have compassion on it and get it out or not? These children are much more valuable than many asses, many of them children of our own brethren. This is an emergency which can only be dealt with by emergency measures. Do we say; "There is no scriptural pattern therefore our hands are tied," or do we exercise compassion and have fellowship with them in their sufferings?<sup>10</sup> "As we therefore have opportunity let us do good to all men, especially they that are of the household of faith."<sup>11</sup> (above).

<sup>9</sup> I. Tim. 5.6. <sup>10</sup> II Cor. 8.4.

The information supplied to me is this, that there is an indigenous work going on mainly in Andra Pradesh, being carried out by our Indian brethren with some support from overseas. This is in both preaching the gospel and helping those who are destitute. There are many many lepers, devoid of medical aid and destitute, outcasts from society. Our brethren are helping them to set up homes and agricultural colonies (sometimes with government aid), which hopefully will become self-supporting. Also brethren have set up homes for the children of these lepers, because it is known that if the children are separated from their parents at an early age there is little risk of them contracting the disease themselves whereas if they lived with their parents by the time they are sixteen they also will probably have leprosy. The parents then knowing the risk to their children and also being unable to support them themselves are grateful when they find those who are kind enough to look after the children for them. Generally speaking Indians will not take the children of lepers into their homes, and the problem is so great there are not enough interested Christian Indians with the facilities to look after them. Therefore emergency measures have to be taken.

A man with a broken leg requires crutches and is grateful for them but, when his leg is healthy, with due respect for the assistance the crutches have given him he then lays them on one side. An infant church may feel that it needs the assistance of an evangelist but when the church is established and able to care for itself then there is no justification for clinging on to the evangelist. Whilst our brethren in India are in this plight they need these homes. It may be they develop to the stage when these homes are no longer required and then with loving respect for the help they have received from them they can lay them on one side. On the other hand there would be no excuse for setting up such homes in the affluent countries of England and U.S.A. where there are more than enough brethren to relieve the churches of the burden. However, we who are relatively rich must be ready to "sympathise and willing to distribute"<sup>12</sup> to those who are really destitute<sup>11</sup> even though they may be in a far distant country, just as the brethren in Corinth were encouraged to contribute to the needs of the brethren in far distant Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> Now the questions begin to arise in our minds. How should we do it? To what extent should we do it? Shall we send money? How shall we send the money? To whom should we send the money? Shall we pay for medicine or shall we send medicine? Shall we pay for the services of a doctor or a nurse or shall we contribute to the support of a doctor or a nurse whilst

the need lasts? Shall we agree to the money that we send being used for food or shelter or implements that they can use to grow their own food? When will it become unscriptural or anti-scriptural? (How many hairs must a man have on his chin before we can call it a beard?). These are issues which we must all face and concerning which we must all make decisions for which we will all be personally responsible. To what extent do we have fellowship with our brethren in their dilemma and to what extent do we, in compassion, extend assistance to those who are not our brethren. It may be that some with clear conscience can take certain actions and others not, but each brother and sister "stands or falls before his own Lord."<sup>13</sup> We are however accountable should we do something which causes our brother to stumble.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I. Tim. 5.16. <sup>12</sup> I Cor. 16.3. <sup>13</sup> Rom. 14.4. <sup>14</sup> I. Cor. 8.13.

I feel however obliged to point out the dangers of 'anti-ism.' It may be that a brother or sister' conscience will not allow them to pay someone to render medical aid whereas on the other hand they will throw their home wide open to people whom they know to be destitute and in need. Such a person is to be commended and no one has a right to stand in judgement on them. Equally another person might not have the ability or facilities to assist those about whom he is concerned but he is able and prepared to pay someone else to do it and so have fellowship with them in that work. But those who finish up doing nothing at all because of their anti-ism or otherwise, they are spiritually sick.<sup>15</sup> Brethren, don't allow scruples of conscience to become a cover for indifference or indolence.

<sup>15</sup> II Pet. 1.9

The disciples particularly Judas expressed concern that the oil used for anointing Jesus could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus' retort was that "The poor ye have always with you"<sup>16</sup> because He knew that, for one thing, Judas did not care for the poor.<sup>17</sup> If he was really concerned about the poor then he had had plenty of opportunity for assisting them and had not taken it. If you have opportunity to assist the poor whichever way your conscience permits you to do it then get on with it and do it that way, providing you are "not doing evil that good may come."<sup>17</sup> (The same applies to our concern for the lost in preaching the gospel). There is on the one hand the danger of losing our first love.<sup>18</sup> Forgetting the love engendered within us by he who "Loved me and gave himself for me"<sup>19</sup> which engendered within us the desire to serve him with the whole of our being. On the other hand there is the danger of saying that love and faith are the only things that matter and whether we carry out with precision the commands of our Lord with regard to, for example the breaking of bread and baptism it does not really matter as long as we have faith and love, forgetting that he said "If ye love me ye will keep my commandments."<sup>20</sup> A wilful refusal to carry out any of our Saviours' instructions is evidence of a lack of love for him. Let us both love him and because of our love for him endeavour to carry out all his requests. This involves doing every good work whether it is in preaching the gospel or helping the physically needy. Paul told the Thessalonians "Comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."<sup>21</sup> How can a person claim to have faith in Christ or love for his brethren if he does not assist them in both their spiritual and physical needs? It is notable that when James says "Faith if it hath not works is dead in itself"<sup>22</sup> he was not dealing with ceremonial doctrine and the preaching of the gospel, (though it would apply equally in such cases) but he was dealing with "If a brother or sister be naked, and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, go in peace, be ye warmed and filled: and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what does it profit?"<sup>23</sup> Practical assistance is an essential part of our Christian life. It is true religion. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"<sup>24</sup> and this

does not mean just knocking on the door and saying, 'Hello.' Who can persuade the sceptic that one has had a change of life if one doesn't do "Works worthy of repentance?"<sup>25</sup> Has it never struck us that the reason why the Hebrew writer advises us to assemble together is in order to "provoke one-another unto love and good works."<sup>26</sup>

It is so easy to concentrate on worship and study as though they were the panacea for all our spiritual ills that we forget to be benevolent, yet the same Hebrew writer says "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices is God well pleased."<sup>27</sup> It is to our shame that we should need reminding of this, because having experienced the love of God and learned from him what love is all about, by the selfless sacrifice of our Saviour, we should automatically love one-another. "But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one-another,"<sup>28</sup> "and that not in word only but also in deed."<sup>29</sup> The very purpose of Jesus dying on the cross was in order to regenerate us unto love and good works. "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them."<sup>30</sup> The good works that we do are the evidence and the only evidence that we have been created anew in Christ Jesus. The evidence of Dorcas' love was in the clothes which she had made. The clothes that the widows, who were weeping over her death, held in their hands.<sup>31</sup> They knew that Dorcas had loved them. With her sacrifices God was well pleased. She had fulfilled "THE LAW OF CHRIST."<sup>32</sup> In the same manner we should bear one another's burdens. In Ephesians Paul advises "Him who stole to steal no more but to labour working with his hands the thing that is good that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need."<sup>33</sup> He contrasts their previous manner of life they "past feeling gave themselves up to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness"<sup>34</sup> with the saying "But ye did not so learn Christ."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 26 & 11. <sup>17</sup> John 12. 5-8. <sup>18</sup> Rev. 2.4. <sup>19</sup> Gal. 2.20. <sup>20</sup> John 14.15. <sup>21</sup> II Thess. 2.17. <sup>22</sup> James 2.17. <sup>23</sup> James 2, 15, 16. <sup>24</sup> James 1.27. <sup>25</sup> Acts 26.20 and Luke 3.7. <sup>26</sup> Heb. 10.24. <sup>27</sup> Heb. 13.16. <sup>28</sup> I. Thess. 4.9. <sup>29</sup> I John 3.18. <sup>30</sup> Eph. 2.10. <sup>31</sup> Acts 9.36-39. <sup>32</sup> Gal. 6.2. <sup>33</sup> Eph. 4.28. <sup>34</sup> Eph. 4.19. <sup>35</sup> Eph 4.20.

How did we learn Christ? When Jesus said "Believe me for my very works sake"<sup>36</sup> did he mean that when He healed people He only did it to prove His Messiah-ship or was it that He really did care? In the ministry of the Messiah we see the multifaceted wisdom of God. Luke tells us that when Jesus saw the widow of Nain with her dead son "he had compassion on her and said unto her, "Weep not," and "He came nigh and touched the bier."<sup>37</sup> How often in the scriptures do we see compassion of Jesus prompting actions which bespoke his love? When the multitude had followed Him for three days it says "He had compassion on the multitude because they had nothing to eat."<sup>38</sup> Jesus didn't need to touch the blind mens eyes He only needed to say the word but "Being moved with compassion he touched their eyes."<sup>39</sup> To John's enquiries he said "Tell John what things ye have seen and heard! The blind received their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up the poor have good tidings preached to them."<sup>40</sup> How did we learn Christ? Has it altered our former manner of life? When one member suffers do we all suffer?<sup>41</sup> Are we moved with compassion to do works which betray the love of Christ which is in us? Have we "escaped from the corruption that is in the world by selfish desire and become partakers of the divine nature?"<sup>42</sup> If we have not added to "Our godliness love of the brethren and in our love of the brethren love,"<sup>43</sup> and if we relegate the teaching of this sort of thing to a secondary place, then we are "blind seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from our old sins."<sup>43</sup>

We have need to wake-up, otherwise we might not "make our calling and election sure."<sup>43</sup> Paul in writing to Titus requires him to have "men who are able to stop

mouths of those who overthrow whole houses"<sup>44</sup> particularly those who were meticulous in the carrying-out of humanly ordained rituals, "jewish fables,"<sup>44</sup> who when they had opportunity to do "any good work always failed the test."<sup>44</sup> In that letter he reminds them that "Jesus gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works."<sup>45</sup> Note that it is concerning the good works that Paul says "these things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no man despise thee?"<sup>45</sup> Good works are essential. Regeneration is essential. Love must be the motivating force that brings about the good works.<sup>46</sup> Without it our good works are empty, and without it our good works will not profit US anything.<sup>46</sup> Without love there is the danger of exaggerating the good we do as did Ananias and Sapphira.<sup>47</sup> There is no room for boasting, "Not of works that no man should glory."<sup>48</sup> We should by our good work GLORIFY GOD.<sup>49</sup> Jesus tells us to "let our light so shine that they will glorify our Father in heaven."<sup>50</sup> If a change is not evident in us if good works do not follow, how will they glorify our Father?

<sup>36</sup> John 14.11. <sup>37</sup> Luke 7.13. <sup>38</sup> Matt. 15.32. <sup>39</sup> Matt. 20.34. <sup>40</sup> Luke 7.23. <sup>41</sup> I. Cor. 12.26. <sup>42</sup> II Pet. 1.4. <sup>43</sup> II Pet 1.7, 9, 10. <sup>44</sup> Titus. 1.11, 14, 16. <sup>45</sup> Titus. 2.14, 15. <sup>46</sup> I Cor. 13.13. <sup>47</sup> Acts chapter 5. <sup>48</sup> Eph. 2.9. <sup>49</sup> I Pet. 2.12. <sup>50</sup> Matt 5.16.

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall find non occasion of stumbling in me."<sup>40</sup>

(The above article has been sent in by brother Ashurst in response to the recent