

Title: Driven by compassion

Reading: Matthew Chapter 9:

Without a doubt my dear Brethren and sisters one of the chief characteristics of our Heavenly Father that we see manifested in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ is that of **compassion**. We find it in today's New Testament reading:

Matthew Chapter 9 and verse 35 - 36

*“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he (Christ) saw the multitudes, he **was moved with compassion** on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd”.*

Now there are a number of Greek words rendered “compassion” in the New Testament, but the Greek word used here for “*compassion*” is the most common one. It invokes the idea of a deep-seated emotional response to some situation, for Strong describes it as one's bowels moving. Now the bowels to the ancients were thought to be the seat of love and pity. The inference then from this word is that when the feeling of “*compassion*” is generated it causes the one so moved to want to help or show mercy. Thus the characteristic of compassion is not a passive feeling only, but an active and motivational feeling that demands a practical outworking and that outworking is more often than not immediate.

Yet B & S we live in a fast paced age with such complicated and busy lives that it is difficult for us to react spontaneously to such needs. Indeed if we are not careful then we would see such events that require an immediate response as intrusions into our lives that are to be rather avoided. How often have we heard about a situation or problem with a brother or sister and feel we ought to lend a hand, but due to other commitments we can never find the time or we simply forget about it until it is too late. Thus our ability to manifest “*compassion*” is greatly hindered by the practicalities of our modern lives, never mind our own selfish nature.

Returning to that, **36th verse** we find the two reasons that the Master was so moved by compassion was **firstly** “*because they (the people) fainted, and (secondly the people) were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*”.

The lost sheep of the house of Israel were weary of their lives both physically and more importantly spiritually due to the fundamental problems of sin and death. We read in this verse that the ecclesia in that day was scattered abroad as a result of having no shepherd.

The Sadducces, Pharisees and the scribes in the ruling elite who were meant to be shepherds had no care for the sheep of the ecclesia, for they were only concerned about their own little group.

The question comes’ to us my dear B & S is this true of us as individuals? Are we only concerned about our own friends and social group in the ecclesia?

The Pharisees who we find earlier in this ninth chapter of Matthew regarded the people as beyond redemption and unworthy of their time and effort.

In John Chapter 7 and verse 49 we read

“But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed”.

The idea behind that word “*cursed*” is to be lying under a curse from Almighty God in other words being set aside for divine vengeance. This B & S was how the shepherds of Israel thought concerning the sheep, their own brethren and sisters. *Could the same be ever said of you and I?*

We read also in Matthew Chapter 23 and verse 4

“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers”.

Again we see the very opposite of the Master who was one moved by compassion to relieve the burdens placed upon these fainting sheep. What about us - my dear brethren and sisters *are we inadvertently due to our attitudes and ideas placing unnecessary burdens upon our brethren and sisters? Then judging them harshly when they are unable to move them by themselves or live up to our standards?*

Now there are two main foundational reasons that the ruling elite of Christ's day felt this way. The **first** is *pride* and the **second** is a *fear of defilement*. Basically my dear brethren and sisters the pride of the Pharisees shut off any feelings of compassion that might be generated and their fear of defilement ensured that they would never be motivated to action on behalf of others not in their elite group.

Our Heavenly Father B & S **hate's pride**, quite probably above all else for it elevates a person above his fellows and centers their lives around only themselves. The result of this is simply they are consumed by themselves, their own needs and desires, nothing else and nobody else is important except in relation to furthering themselves and their aims.

In Romans Chapter 12 and at verse 16 we find this exhortation

“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits”.

We are being exhorted here to be both humble and impartial in our dealings one with another as a defense against developing pride. The **first** of four exhortations in this verse is to develop a unity of feeling, interests and direction with all the brethren and sisters in our ecclesia. The **second** is not to glory in exalted matters whether those relate to yourself personally or to the work in the ecclesia you perform.

The **third** of these short exhortations in this **16th verse** speaks of accepting others no matter who they are in Christ; it also carries the idea of seeking to perform those services that are truly humble in Christ's service. The **final** exhortation here is against an introverted pride with which we judge ourselves according to our own estimation and standards and judge others judge others insights, opinions and judgements as of lesser ability.

All of these characteristics the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle Paul exhorts us to develop here in Romans twelve are the antidote to the attitude of the Pharisees those false shepherds of Israel. For if we can concentrate on these things B & S we will be intimately involved in one another's lives and have an anxious care for all of the ecclesial family.

Sadly the Pharisees and the ruling elite of the first century in Israel because of their *pride* had no compassion on the people in that they felt no empathy or sympathy for them and this gulf was confirmed by their **fear of defilement**. This can easily be demonstrated for us in the following verses from our chapter:

Matthew Chapter 9 and verses 10 – 13

*“And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, **Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?** But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”.*

The Master gives these legalists an exhortation “*but go ye and learn*” the word “*learn*” here in the Greek is in the imperative form, so the Master is commanding them to return to their scriptures and gain understanding. Indeed this phrase “*go and learn*” was a rabbinical one that indicated that the Pharisees needed to study the text further. The text he was referring them to was **Hosea chapter 6 and verse 6** “*for I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*”.

Almighty God had revealed through the prophet Hosea that the apostates of his day had lost the heart of temple worship even though they continued to practice its rituals. The Master clearly implies that the Pharisees had done the same thing. They were preserving the external practices of worship carefully, but they had failed to maintain its essential heart. Their attitude toward the tax collectors and sinners showed this. Our Heavenly Father, on the other hand, cares more for the spiritual wholeness of people than He does about flawless worship.

This passage in Hosea is all about restoring and preserving a right relationship with our Heavenly Father. My dear brethren and sisters we can trivialise the breaking of bread by just going through the motions as the Jews did here. In doing so we not only render it meaningless, but we de-personalise the act and turn the very method of instruction into idolatry.

The ritual method of instruction evident in the sacrificial system under the law and in our breaking of bread was an ingenious way to teach truth in that it highlights the relationship between our Heavenly Father and his children above all else. If we think about this in relation to what we shall shortly do my dear brethren and sisters.

Turn with me to 1st Corinthians 11 verses 23 – 26

*“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, **Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, **This cup is the New Covenant in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come**”.*

See even in these simple emblems of bread and wine, all the way through this relationship between the Master personally and his disciples’ is being stressed with great meaning. The meaning undoubtedly is that of personal love and faithfulness of each one of us in returning in reciprocating that **faithfulness and love** of the Master towards each of us individually. After all that is exactly what Hosea six and six was all about and this is what the Lord Jesus Christ wanted the Pharisees to realize.

If we just go through the motions week by week then this precious ritual in partaking of these emblems is not only rendered meaningless to us individually. It is reduced to idolatry through being increasingly de-personalized in that it is only continued as a means of pleasing and rendering blessing.

Thus the underlying idea behind idolatry is to bypass the relationship in order to manipulate life, as it seeks to manipulate Almighty God by removing him from the relationship. Pagan idols were worshipped for what they were thought to be able to do for the worshipper, but Israel’s God was not to be worshipped for what He can do. Rather He is to be worshipped **for who He is**, again stressing the relationship aspect of us being in the Lord Jesus Christ his son.

The question then comes’ to each of us brethren and sisters are we guilty of just going through the motions as we partake of bread and wine?

The exhortation for us brethren and sisters is this, our Heavenly Father desire's, is that we lovingly trust and obey him and that we must practice true worship and truly enthrone him in our lives. **Our God B & S is trying to mould us in his image**, this is a fundamental reason why idolatry does not work, because through it we are trying to create him in our image and so negating the very purpose of the Father.

Let us look at the example of how the Apostle Paul viewed his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ for in that we have a faithful framework that we each might work towards developing the same mind and love towards the one we are to remember shortly.

In Galatians Chapter 2 and at verse 20 we read

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith (or the faithfulness) of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”.

Here we see how his relationship with the risen Lord affected Paul personally in that he regarded himself crucified with the Master and that he no longer lived to himself, but lived after the example of Christ Jesus our Lord. All that we see in our other only ritual of baptism my dear brethren and sisters, but it is the end of this **20th verse** that is of interest too us.

For here at the end of the **20th verse** is the motivational principle in the life of the Master that now finds reciprocation in the life of Paul and which ought also to be true in the lives of each one of us. In that we read *“I live by the faith (or the faithfulness) of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”.*

The thing that so overwhelmed the Apostle Paul was the love that the Lord Jesus Christ had for him. The Apostle saw the **love of Christ** as the motivating principle in his life and not the compulsion of the Mosaic Law. Thus the Apostle's new life in Christ is based upon the faith of Christ in the **first** instance then his faith in Christ in the **second**.

Then comes the reasoning we have for the Apostle Paul's implicit faith and trust in Christ for we read *“who loved me, and gave himself for me”* in the final part of this verse.

Note carefully the personal nature of the link between Paul and Christ with the word “*who*”, which again stresses the living relationship he has with the Master.

The Eternal Spirit through the Apostle manifests to us here that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was the supreme sacrifice of love. The word love is “*agapao*”, speaking of that divine love that has chosen to esteem Paul, Now in the Greek this is an Aorist (*continuous*) active participle, or a daily principle of life of the Lord Jesus Christ. My dear B & S what we have here is the continuing motivating principle by which he works providentially in the lives of the saints now.

This verse ends with the outcome of this tremendous love shown towards the Apostle Paul in that the Master “*gave himself for me*”. Again with the use of the word “*me*” we see the impact that this living relationship had upon the Apostle Paul. It is evident in the way he speaks of the Master here that he values that relationship before all others and so B & S must we.

The word “*gave*” in this **20th verse** means “*to yield oneself into the power of another*” and in this case the Lord Jesus Christ did so in two senses. **Firstly** he yielded himself to his Heavenly Father’s will in Gethsemane and **secondly** he lay down his life submitting it to the Jewish and Roman authorities that crucified him. Now in the Greek this word “*gave*” is also an Aorist (*continuous*) active participle like the previous word “*loved*”. Thus it is still a daily principle in the everlasting life of the Master as he continually gives of himself to those in him, as he daily works to bring many sons unto glory.

So as the Lord Jesus Christ yielded himself to his Father’s will, so then each one of us are called upon my dear brethren and sisters to **firstly** yield ourselves unto the Master and his will. **Secondly** we are called upon to yield or submit ourselves one to another.

In first John Chapter 3 and at verses 16 – 18

*“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and **shutteth up his bowels of compassion** from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth”.*

Note carefully B & S how the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is described by implication as an act of compassion that is to find an outworking a manifestation in our everyday lives in our dealings one with another. We too then B & S are to be moved in our inner beings by this feeling of compassion (*same Greek word*) for one another, that was manifested in Christ that compelled him to give himself for us in love.

Did you know that being of a compassionate disposition was one of the qualifications for being a priest and in particular in being the High Priest?

For we read in Hebrews Chapter 5 and verses 1 – 3

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins”.

Now it has to be **noted** here that the word for “*compassion*” in the Greek in **verse 2** is a different and unrelated word. Here the word means, “*one who is not unduly disturbed by the errors, faults, sins of others, but bears them gently*”. It speaks of the ability to have a balanced reaction to problems, errors, sins and faults of others, so as to provide the correct response to the needs of the person. In that the priest was called upon to be neither too lenient nor too harsh in his dealings with the people he ministered to.

This was something that legalists, such as the Pharisees could never do. In that any slight disturbed them so greatly that they were personally unable to either bear the sin gently or recognize that they too were compassed with infirmity. Consequently they were not truly spiritual, as they were unable to restore the lost sheep in the spirit of meekness required.

Sadly B & S if we are honest we find the same Pharisaical spirit amongst us today and even if we consider ourselves not personally of such a spirit. I think deep down you would find that each of us has one or two sins, possibly more that we would feel very uncomfortable with and possibly be unable to bear gently. Yet if we are to be kings and priests of the age to come my dear brethren and sisters we must learn now to bear one another’s sins gently.

Now please do not misunderstand me here B & S we are not advocating a spirit of indifference towards sin that claims sin does not matter and that only love is important. What appears to be the case here is that those who are spiritual are able then to practice the priestly function of working with our Heavenly Father. In order that they might restore an individual who has sinned or who has drifted away as a lost sheep back to an acknowledging of the truth and a right relationship with our Heavenly Father and their brethren.

There will be brethren and sisters I am sure in this room those that have either been in the place of the sinner or the one out of the way and those in the shoes of the priest those trying to restore them to health. *Was that how you were either dealt with? Or did you gently bear the sin of another in order to restore in the spirit of meekness?*

Such a moderate and balanced approach my dear brethren and sisters means that we need too really consider ourselves and our own infirmity that we might understand the weakness of others. Now it must be acknowledged that none of us will have that balance correct as our beloved Master had that is why he is called “*a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God*”.

Yet although we will more often than not fail to get the balance right it is important that we recognize the need to try and develop such **compassion** in our dealings one with another. For in doing so B & S we will at the very least help to rid ourselves of the Pharisaical, legalistic extreme response to sin that would blot everyone out of the ecclesia, except those like ourselves.

At the same time we will truly be functioning as levitical priests one towards another, as we daily minister in the holy place, even the ecclesia, which we read elsewhere is the temple of God. B & S let us not then do as the Pharisees did and shut the bowels of our compassion, neither let us fail to act through any fear of:

- Defilement from the sin of others
- Rejection or embarrassment
- Lack of faith

Our Heavenly Father is five times called in the Psalms a God **full of compassion**.

Indeed the same word is found in that wonderful proclamation of the Yahweh name in Exodus 34. There we find that our Father is “*merciful*”, which is the same word and if you would like to check in your own time, you would find it is the principle characteristic of our God listed.

The Lord Jesus Christ was driven by compassion as is evident in Matthew Chapter nine in the five illustrated healing and restoring miracles. Yet at the end of Chapter nine immediately after the point of the Master being moved by compassion on the multitudes due to their lack of a shepherd, he quietly speaks and exhorts his disciples.

In Matthew Chapter 9 and at verses 37 – 38

“Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”.

Normally such passages are viewed in the light of the preaching work and that is clearly evident. But it also is an exhortation to put to the teaching and ministering work within the ecclesia, as is clear from the fact that the nation of Israel was the ecclesia of its day.

The ecclesia needs ministering priests those who will act as under-shepherds of our Heavenly Father’s flock. Those who will out of a **compassionate disposition** feed the sheep willingly taking oversight with an eager readiness to manifest themselves not as lords, but as faithful types of the chief shepherd.

Now as we come to remember this supreme act of love in these simple emblems of bread and wine that speak of the work of the great shepherd. Let each one of us brethren and sisters individually recognize the one who personally “*loved us and gave himself for us*”. Indeed let us endeavour to acknowledge our relationship with the Master and seek to deepen it at every opportunity and that we each might learn to love one another as he clearly loves us.

So my dear brethren and sisters as we partake in this wonderfully meaningful ritual, laid down by our Lord nearly two thousand years ago let the following two passages enter your minds.

In 1st Peter Chapter 3:8 and Ephesians Chapter 4:32

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”