

# COMPASSION LINK

Assemblies of God World Missions

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AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN  
COMPASSION MINISTRIES



THEOLOGY OF COMPASSION

VOLUME 8—AUTUMN 2013

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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

I doubt that anyone of us would argue that we should not be compassionate in our attitudes and actions toward others. When we see those who are suffering—pictures of big-bellied children with sores and in obvious distress—our hearts are moved and most of us wish we could do something to help.

“Everyone needs compassion,” as the popular Christian song says, but how do we as individual Christians and we as the church know and understand the scriptural foundation for our response? Do we know how the Father Himself views those in need?

Theology—at times a word that may have us skipping to another volume—is really studying, knowing and understanding God, His character, His actions, His declarations and His mandates. As we study God’s view of the needy, it gives us a foundation and guide for how we too should respond.

We will look at the commandments of our Savior to be proclaimers of the “Word” while intentional in our “good deeds.”

As you reflect on the articles of

## PURPOSE

This publication is a service of the Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) Compassion Ministries Planning Committee providing relevant and current information on theory and practice of compassion ministries in AGWM circles and beyond.

The publication is intended as a resource link between AGWM regions and ministries, and to offer information to our Assemblies of God churches and constituents.

## EDITORIAL STAFF

- JoAnn Butrin Ph.D.
  - Neil Ruda
  - Diane Campbell
  - AGWM Word Processing
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this journal, I trust that you will more fully realize the heart of God for the poor and needy and come away with a refreshed view of God’s amazing love. As the enormity of His love is grasped, it should also become clear that as He has loved, we are “to go and do likewise.”

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## The God of Compassion, Mercy and Steadfast Love

By JoAnn Butrin

Looking to the Scripture helps us understand the heart of God for His people, especially those in need, and helps us see our role, as His Church, in touching them.

### COMPASSION, MERCY AND STEADFAST LOVE

The Hebrew word translated “compassion” is *raham*, meaning to love deeply, to have mercy, to be compassionate. This Hebrew word is also connected to pregnancy, often translated “womb,” the picture of protection for the dependent fetus within the mother. What a picture of God’s compassion, which is intimate, complete and loving! This word is often used in scripture when mercy is shown toward the utterly helpless (<http://skipmoen.com/tag/lamentations-332>; <http://skipmoen.com/tag/jeremiah-1215>).

Compassion is an action word. It starts with emotion and ends with response. It is more than em-

pathy; rather, it a strong feeling that comes, in biblical terms, from deep inside the bowel, welling up to bring about change.

Dr. Peggy Jo Wobbema wrote an excellent article on compassion in her doctoral project, *The Development of an Integrated Pastoral Care Response System to Illness, Crisis, and Grief at North Point Church, Springfield, Missouri*. The article, titled “*The Responsibility of Compassion: A Biblical Foundation*,” appears on the Women in Ministry Web site ([http://ag.org/wim/0904/0904\\_the\\_responsibility.cfm](http://ag.org/wim/0904/0904_the_responsibility.cfm)). Excerpts from her articles are cited here.

*Hesed* is one of the most important concepts revealed in the Old Testament. It rests at the center of the Lord’s self-revelation of His attitude toward His people. The Hebrew word *Hesed* is translated as mercy, steadfast love, or loving kindness. In regard to human activity, *Hesed* signifies the type of love and duty toward God by which the people of God live in

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obedience to His ways. In reference to divine activity, *Hesed* is always in the context of covenant and becomes the central term in expressing the relationship between Israel and God. Maintenance of the covenant is expected on both sides through the duty of mutual service and acts of loving kindness. Because of this, Israel held to a strong conviction that God's kindness and readiness to help them is something they can expect because of His established covenant relationship with them.

The Old Testament reveals God's compassion with other words and pictures. God's compassion is freely (Exodus 33:19; Romans 9:15) and tenderly given, like a mother's (Isaiah 49:15) or father's (Hosea 11:8) compassion for a child. Yahweh boldly declares, "I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19). While His compassion can be thwarted by dis-

obedience (Deuteronomy 13:17; 30:3; 2 Chronicles 30:9), there are times when His disobedient people's only hope is that His compassion overcomes His anger (Hosea 11:8). Yahweh's compassion is rooted in His covenant relationship with His people (2 Kings 13:23). Hope for the future (Isaiah 49:13; Jeremiah 12:15) is

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**Hesed, one of the most important concepts revealed in the Old Testament is translated as mercy, steadfast love, or loving kindness.**

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also rooted in God's compassion. Compassion follows wrath (Jeremiah 12:15; Lamentations 3:32), is new each morn-

ing (Lamentations 3:22–23) and overcomes sin (Psalm 51:1; Micah 7:19) rather than ignoring it (David H. Engelhart, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/compassion>).

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMPASSION

Dr. Wobbema identifies who is responsible to be compassionate and why.

Compassionate care for people is part of the broader duty of keeping God's commandments.

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God's people are to love their neighbors. The *Hesed* of God is the foundational truth on which God's love and care for His people is displayed by those who protect the weak, promote justice, and maintain peace (Leviticus 19:9–18; Psalm 11:7). The compassion that causes an individual to help the weak, the sick, and the disenfranchised

or marginalized in society, is not limited to the children of Israel; it finds greater depth in the life of Jesus and

is one of the cardinal virtues expected of the people of God in the New Testament (James 2:1–13).

Dr. Wobbema points out that a significant part of Jesus' ministry was focused on those the suffering and needy.

The Incarnation reveals the nature of Jesus' ministry. Jesus adapts His message in such a way that it is both understandable and good news, regardless of each person's station in life. The incarnational model Jesus passes on to His fol-

lowers proclaims the importance of serving others. This indicates that He will go to all lengths to communicate His love to the world (1 John 4:9, 10).

The compassion of Christ carries the notion of tenderness and affection. It is a feeling with and for others that is a fundamental and distinctive quality of God. He

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**Jesus adapts His message in such a way that it is both understandable and good news, regardless of each person's station in life.**

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is the God of all comfort and the Father of compassion (Psalm 116:5; 2 Corinthians 1:3–5). Christ's compassion has no limits.

He ignores categories of people that are set within society and touches those who would come to Him—no matter who they are or what they have done. The attitude of Jesus to the multitudes surrounding Him is characterized by the profound compassion He has for their weaknesses (Matthew 15:22; Mark 8:2).

Through the demonstration of His life, Jesus calls the people of God to practice love, kindness, compassion, and servanthood to-

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ward those they encounter on a daily basis. The uniqueness of Jesus' ministry rests in His concern for persons—He truly loves people and considers them worthy of respect and compassion because of what they are—bearers of the divine image of God.

## THE CHURCH'S ROLE AND EMPOWERMENT

The Church is to be the conduit through which people experience the steadfast love and compassion of God. But the Church does not do this alone.

Compassion for those in need is not an “addon” task for the Church. It is the essence of the Church of Jesus Christ. To be incarnational is to be truly compassionate about the needs of others, just as Jesus showed us to be. If one is giving glory to the Father, in vertical relationship to God, then the horizontal or outward extension of that relationship is service to others, and that service is based in love and motivated by compassion

(1 John 3:17, James 2:14–17).

The Church, therefore, is about caring for people—their spiritual, physical, and emotional needs—in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. This is what the Church is intended to be: a living organism that worships and adores the Lord, builds up one another, offers shelter, salvation, reconciliation and restoration in the Lord.

When the Holy Spirit comes to a group of believers, He brings *koinonia*, sweet communion that embodies unity and fellowship. With unity of purpose,

power and anointing, that body of believers is enabled to provide the reconciling message of Jesus' love to the sinner and hope to the downcast. The Holy Spirit's power gives wisdom in righting injustice and coming against principalities and powers which are not of the flesh and not always “seen or understood by human compre-

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hension” (Ephesians 6), (Butrin, 2010. *From the Roots Up: A Closer Look at Compassion and Justice in Missions*. Springfield, MO: Roots Up Publishers).

The Church, a gifted and Holy Spirit-empowered body of believ-

ers filled with the love and compassion of Jesus, released together to touch the world, can bring healing, harmony, and restoration to a needy world, touching with God’s compassion, mercy and steadfast love.

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## **Community Health Evangelism: Bringing Good News to the Poor**

### **WHAT IS CHE?**

**C**HE (Community Health Evangelism) is a true best practices model for integrating evangelism and discipleship with community based development. The first programs were done in Africa in the 1980s. CHE was then taken to other parts of the world where it proved adaptable to a wide-range of situations. Today CHE is being used around the world by churches, denominations, mission agencies, non-government organizations, and national and local governments to lift whole communities out of cycles of poverty and disease.

### **HOW CHE WORKS**

CHE is initiated in a community by a two- or three-person CHE

training team—dedicated Christians who speak the language of the community and live close enough to visit frequently. CHE trainers are generally supervised by a local organization—whether a church, an association, a denomination, a mission agency, or an NGO.

As they start out in the community, they raise awareness of need and opportunity, and facilitate a process by which the community itself identifies solutions and begins to work together in an organized way. The community gains hope and vision, and a development process is catalyzed.

The trainers assure that community leaders understand CHE

*(continued on page 19)*



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## Book Review

### **WORD VS DEED: RESETTING THE SCALES TO A BIBLICAL BALANCE**

By Duane Litfin

Crossway Books & Bibles, 2012

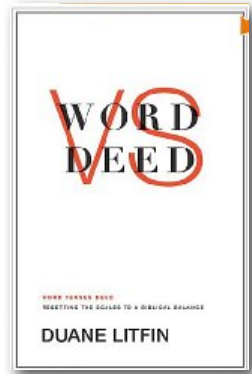
Available as Paperback; Kindle

ISBN-10: 1433531127

ISBN-13: 978-1433531125

Duane Litfin is president emeritus of Wheaton College where he served for seventeen years. In his new book, Dr. Litfin aims to strike the fine balance between words and deeds in the evangelical church. *“Word versus Deed”* (Crossway, 2012) is a timely book, written for a time of great controversy in today’s church because of over-emphasis of deeds ministries

in certain streams of evangelicalism, at the expense of proclaiming the gospel with words.



This is a most important book of great significance, for Litfin strives to address the misunderstandings of this linchpin theological controversy of our age. He does so by examining first the communication theory behind the issues of not using words to seemingly convey the gospel, and then carefully analyzing some key biblical passages used in defense of deeds ministries.

## *Let us hear from you*

This is our eighth edition of *Compassion Link Journal*—we’re now into our third year of production. We welcome your feedback, suggestions, comments, and anything else you’d like to share with us. Here’s how to reach us:



Online at our Website: [www.compassionlink.org](http://www.compassionlink.org)



Email: [info@compassionlink.org](mailto:info@compassionlink.org)



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## Is ‘Priority’ the Right Question? God’s Concern for the Poor

by Jerry Ireland

### INTRODUCTION

It has become a given that whenever committed Christians gather and begin to discuss the notion of compassionate ministry or involvement in social justice issues, the conversation ultimately comes around to the question of priority regarding evangelism and compassion. Often the issue is stated something like this: “There is nothing wrong with our being involved in compassionate ministry as long as it remains a secondary thing—and only if evangelism/proclamation remains our top priority.”

In this essay, I wish to argue that the very notion of “priority” is fundamentally the wrong question, and that evangelism apart from compassion falls short of the model given to us in Scripture.

God’s plan of redemption centers on the renewal and restoration of His creation, encompassing us and the entire cosmos. Therefore, our present efforts to engage in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58) must incorporate both physical and spiritual realities, both present and future needs.

I am not saying that compassionate ministries are the same as evangelism, nor am I saying that there is not a difference between the two. Neither am I saying that

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**The notion of ‘priority’ is the wrong question—evangelism apart from compassion falls short of the model given to us in Scripture.**

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compassionate ministry can legitimately exist in Christian form apart from connection to the local church. When it does, it is not “holistic”

—to use a word often associated with compassionate ministry. Compassion divorced from the local church ultimately becomes yet another social program void of any eternal significance.

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What I intend to argue here is simply that the Great Commission (“go and make disciples of all nations,” Matthew 28:18–20) and the Great Commandment (“love God and love your neighbor,” Mark 12:28–34) are not exactly the same thing, and therefore must both find expression in our Christian lives and ministry if we are to be truly biblical. The point is that there are some

things that can only rightly be seen as two parts of a whole and to divide them is to diminish one or the other. For

example, we might think of prayer and Bible study when it comes to our devotional lives. None of us, I don’t think, would deny that both are important and that one without the other leads to an imbalanced life in Christ. Genuine, Christian prayer cannot happen apart from the study of the Scriptures, because it is in Scripture that God has revealed himself, and it is there that we learn what to pray and how to pray. So too

with disciple-making and love (compassion). One without the other will lead to an imbalanced Christian life that fails to fully embody the Kingdom principles to which Christ directs us. Discipleship apart from compassion will result in quasi-disciples who do not understand God’s concern for the poor and needy, and thus fail to live out their faith in biblically meaningful ways.

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**Genuine, Christian prayer cannot happen apart from the study of the Scriptures; it is in Scripture that God has revealed himself.**

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I firmly believe that the often bitter tension each side feels toward the other in this de-

bate is ultimately fear driven. One side feels that if evangelism is not made the explicit priority, then we run the risk of becoming yet another social program void of any salvific potential. We might meet people’s immediate needs, but will fail to address their eternal ones. On the other hand, compassion advocates fear that a failure to understand the biblical prominence of compassion, concern for the poor, justice, and love for one’s

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neighbor will lead to a truncated Gospel that overly spiritualizes what it means to be human.

So, how do we overcome these dueling fears?

A brief word is in order about what exactly it means to be a disciple. Is disciple-making about bringing others to faith in Christ? Yes. But is it also more than that? Yes. To be a disciple of Christ is to care about that which Christ cares about, to love what He loves, and hate what He hates (Psalm 97:10; Zechariah 8:17; Colossians 3:10; 1 John 4:17).

I believe that we can arrive at a more balanced perspective if we take a few moments to consider three

aspects of Scripture that are often overlooked in our disciple-making efforts.

- First, we must consider the abundance of Scriptural references to the poor, and the clear teaching of Scripture that the poor occupy a place of special concern in God's redemptive plan. The im-

plication of this is simply that if this is a major concern of God's, then any true disciple-making efforts must also make these things a major concern.

- Second, we must also look at what God says about justice. We in the west often hear the word "justice" and with it political intonations with which we are less than comfortable. But justice is a biblical concept. There is throughout Scripture the notion that God hates injustice, and is Himself the champion of the downtrodden

and those that are disadvantaged. Again, God calls on His people to also adopt this same passion.

- Finally, we must understand precisely what it is that we as Christians look forward to. What does Scripture mean when it refers to heaven? Is heaven a spiritual place, a physical place, or both? Our answers to these questions will say much about the degree to which we engage in compassionate min-

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**To be a disciple of Christ is to care about that which Christ cares about, to love what He loves, and hate what He hates.**

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istry and whether we do so from a solid, biblical basis or not.

## **GOD'S CONCERN FOR THE POOR**

There can be little doubt that God, throughout the Bible, maintains a special and prominent concern for the poor. But who are the poor? How does Scripture define the word? Hebrew uses a number of words to denote poverty, and all of them have at their center the notion of oppression and injustice. The poor are those that are needy and unable to care for themselves. They are dependent and helpless, and often because they have suffered at the hands of others. This is seen for instance in Amos 2:7, which specifically relates poverty to oppression:

*They trample on the heads of the poor  
as upon the dust of the ground  
and deny justice to the oppressed.*

This is but one of many examples in which God, in response

to the injustice done to the poor, fights on their behalf. For example, twenty times in the first five books of the Old Testament alone, God gives the newly formed nation of Israel specific guidelines regarding His concern for the poor (see Exodus 23:3, 6, 11; 30:15; Leviticus 14:21; 19:10, 15; 23:22; 25:25, 35, 39, 47; 27:8; Numbers 13:20;

Deuteronomy 15:4, 7, 11; 24:12, 14–15).

This same theme is carried over into the historical books, as we hear the prophet

Samuel declare:

*He raises the poor from the dust,*

*He lifts the needy from the ash heap*

*To make them sit with nobles,*

*And inherit a seat of honor;*

*For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S,*

*And He set the world on them*  
(1 Samuel 2:8).

God's concern for the poor is a frequent theme among God's prophets. Isaiah, for instance, declares that God's judgment is

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coming upon the people of Judah and Jerusalem precisely because of their neglect and abuse of the poor:

*The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people,*

*“It is you who have devoured the vineyard;*

*The plunder of the poor is in your houses.*

*“What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the face of the poor?”*

*Declares the Lord GOD of hosts (Isaiah 3:14-15).*

There are a total of seventeen explicit references to the poor in the major and minor prophets (Isaiah 3:14–15; 10:2; 11:4; 58:7; Jeremiah 2:34; 5:4, 28; Ezekiel 16:49; 18:12, 17; 22:29; Daniel 4:27; Amos 4:1; 5:11–12; Zechariah 7:10). In addition, the Psalms are replete with similar admonitions regarding the poor as God instructs His people to have the same concern for the poor that He has. For example, in Psalm 72:13

we read, “He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy he will save.”

A total of fifty-nine times God makes reference to the poor in the books of Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Proverbs 14:31, for example, warns that disregard for the poor is tantamount to disregard for God: “He who oppresses the poor

taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.”

We see this same concern carried over to the New Testa-

ment as well. When a man came to Jesus boasting of his religiosity, Jesus admonished him saying, “Go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and come and follow me” (Mark 10:21). Though much could be said about what is going on in this passage, at the very least it shows Jesus never departed from the regard and concern for the poor seen in the Old Testament as a central component of the faith of Israel. Based on

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**Jesus never departed from the regard and concern for the poor seen in the Old Testament as a central component of the faith of Israel.**

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Jesus' statement, "The poor you will always have with you" (Mark 14:7), some have tried to argue that concern for the poor was not a primary feature of Jesus' ministry. But we must understand this verse (like all verses) in their historical context. Jesus was addressing hypocritical comments about a lavish act of worship. Jesus' main point, against their hypocrisy (which likely had nothing to do with the poor but rather with their own pride), was that His time on earth was short and the woman anointing him, as told in Mark 14, recognized it to be so.

We see Jesus' concern for the poor in numerous other occasions, but perhaps none as clear as when he says, "When you give to the needy..." (Matthew 6:2-4). We often note this language regarding Jesus' instructions on fasting (i.e., "when you fast" not "if you fast," Matthew 6:16). Surely the same principle applies here. The "when" implies that we will!

This commitment on behalf

of Jesus to give to the poor also comes out in John's Gospel. When Jesus tells Judas "what you are about to do, do quickly" (John 13:27), Scripture records that the other disciples assumed that Jesus might have been instructing Judas to give something to the poor (John 13:29). This simply doesn't make sense unless Jesus had a habit of giving to the poor. Why else would they have come to that explicit conclusion so readily? In fact, alms giving was a common feature of first century Judaism, and it would have been surprising if Jesus did not give to the poor on a regular basis.

Luke's Gospel also especially highlights the plight of the poor.

In the rest of the New Testament, one of the most obvious references to the poor is Romans 15:26, which references Paul's collection in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor in Jerusalem. This text raises one of the most common objections to giving to the poor, namely that our compas-

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sion should be primarily directed toward the poor in the church. We must remember that all of the letters of the New Testament are “occasional” letters and thereby address specific situations. From those specific situations, we are to draw out broad principles and apply them to our own situation and setting. Since all of the New Testament letters are written to churches, it should not be surprising that the poor in these letters refer to Christians.

When we consider that neither the Old Testament nor Jesus made a distinction between concern for the poor within Israel and concern for non-Israelite poor, we also should be hesitant about making such a distinction. Galatians 2:10 also underscores the reality that concern for the poor was a central feature of the early Church.

Other notable references to the poor in the New Testament include the well-known passages in James. James 1:27 states “religion

that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Similarly, James 2:2–5 reflects a direct and clear repetition of the Old Testament themes regarding God’s concern for the poor, and especially the notion that we as

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**In James 5, Scripture warns against ignoring the poor and needy; no indication is given whether these poor are in the church or not.**

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God’s people are to reflect that same concern. In James 5, Scripture warns the reader against ignoring the poor and needy

(and here, no indication is given of whether these poor are “in the church” or not).

Finally, in the book of Revelation, we find two specific references to “the poor.” One (Revelation 3:17) is a warning against those who trust in their riches, and are ignorant of their own poverty. There is a link here between this verse and Jesus’ comments in Luke’s Gospel, “blessed are you who are poor, yours is the Kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20). The



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link is simply that the poor are often more aware of their need of God than are the rich and wealthy, who trust in their own resources and genius. The second (Revelation 13:16) teaches that all are equal in God's eyes and that their economic status has no bearing on their standing before God.

## THE INTEGRATEDNESS OF WORSHIP AND COMPASSION

What might we conclude from all of this?

No one can claim to have read Scripture and deny that the poor occupy a place of special concern in the eyes of God. I have only quoted a few of the many texts that make direct reference to the poor in the Bible. There are many others that indirectly make similar claims.

I think a passage from Deuteronomy that doesn't specifically mention the poor very succinctly highlights what we are talking about:

Deuteronomy 26:12, 15

“When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied... “You shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have command-

ed me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.

Concern for the poor in this passage is root-

ed in God's instructions to Israel on their worship practices: their very acts of worship are to include concern for the widow, the orphan, the stranger! There can be no doubt that “stranger” refers to non-Israelites, and represents a real challenge to those who would advocate for “church only” service to the poor. The point here is

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**No one can claim to have read Scripture and deny that the poor occupy a place of special concern in the eyes of God.**

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that worship and acts of love and compassion are to be integrated if they are to be meaningful. In fact, this is the entire theme of Isaiah 57:6–7,

*Is this not the fast which I choose,  
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,  
To undo the bands of the yoke,  
And to let the oppressed go free  
And break every yoke?*

*Is it not to divide your bread with  
the hungry*

*And bring the homeless poor into  
the house;*

*When you see the naked, to cover  
him;*

*And not to hide yourself from  
your own flesh?*

## CONCLUSION

The point is simply this: if we are to embody all that God has called us to be, then we too must integrate love and compassion in our acts of worship and in all that we do in serving Christ. The notion of “priority” overlooks a great deal of biblical data that reflects the reality that we are to be a people who embody God’s love and compassion, especially for those who are most needy. Compassion, then, cannot be secondary, but must be inherent. It must flow from us constantly and consistently as a central part of who we are!

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## Meet Dr. Brian Fikkert at Compassion Forum

Dr. Brian Fikkert will be speaking at the AGWM Compassion Forum. He is a Professor of Economics and founder and Executive Director of the Chalmers Center for Economic Development at Covenant College. Dr. Fikkert earned a Ph.D. in economics from Yale University, specializing in international economics and economic development. He has been a consultant to the World Bank

and is author of numerous articles in both academic and popular journals. Prior to coming to Covenant College, he was a professor at the University of Maryland—College Park and a research fellow at the Center for Institutional Reform and the Informal Sector. He is co-author of the excellent book “*When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself.*”

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## **COMMUNITY HEALTH EVANGELISM** *(continued from page 8)*

as a way they can address their physical, social and spiritual needs themselves, not a program that offers them money. The key to CHE is the community's willingness to take responsibility for addressing its own problems.

Through a series of open meetings, the community decides whether or not to do CHE as a community.

If the training team has done its initial work well, most communities decide to do CHE.

The community then selects people to serve as their local leadership committee, which is prepared for its work by the training team. Then the CHE program is officially launched by the community.

The leadership committee selects other community members to be trained as volunteer CHEs (chays)—community health educators/evangelists. The work of these dedicated volunteers is crucial to achieving results.

Through frequent trainings, the CHEs are equipped to implement health-improving steps in their own homes, and they learn how to pass along what they are learning in home visits with other families. The CHEs become health educators and personal evangelists to their community.

The combined influence of the training team, the leadership committee, and the volunteer CHEs creates a dynamic process of learning and change in the community.

Physical and social health improves, projects are accomplished, and spiritual growth occurs as people come to faith in Christ. The community changes from the inside-out.

CHE works because it is the community's own program, with CHE trainers serving as catalysts for change.

*Reprinted from <http://www.chenetwork.org/whatische.php>*

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**CHE is a true best practices model for integrating evangelism and discipleship with community-based development.**

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## Transformational Mission

*By Jerry Ireland*

<http://wordandwind.com>

The framers of the Cape Town Commitment of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in 2010 helpfully articulated the integrated nature of Christian faith, when they stated (Part I.6.D.) that... nothing commends the gospel more eloquently than a transformed life, and nothing brings it into disrepute so much as personal inconsistency. We are charged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ and even to 'adorn' it, enhancing its beauty by holy lives (<http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html>).

Transformation, in other words, refers to both who we are and what we are called to do. Transformation involves both words and our deeds.

That said, there are a few fears I would like to dispel about the no-

tion of transformation.

First, when we talk about transformation we are not saying that our deeds are equal to words or that the two are the same thing. We cannot preach the Gospel with our deeds. The Gospel is verbal; Scripture comes to us in verbal form, and it demands a verbal communication.

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**We are charged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ and even to adorn it.**

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Second, preaching the Gospel is a non-negotiable and essential aspect of the Church's mandate in the

world (Mark 16:20). Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, not by the work of our hands.

However, there is nowhere in Scripture a dichotomy between our calling to preach the Gospel and our calling to embody the Gospel, our call to proclaim the love of God and our call to practice the love of God. Perhaps nowhere is this more explicit than in John 3. Though the focus of the

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famous verse 16 is on belief that leads to eternal life, that life is further described as a present-tense reality manifest in deeds of righteousness (3:21). The emphasis is not simply on knowing the truth, but rather on practicing the truth. Remember, Jesus Himself was a prophet mighty in word and deed. He wasn't only the Word, but the Word made flesh. He was and is the Living Word who taught and who touched. He preached against sin and cared for the sick. He offered the riches of heaven and He met the needs of the poor. He commended those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and He fed those who hungered and thirsted for bread and water.

To understand the biblical idea of transformation, we must look at three very closely related concepts in Scripture, namely, the Nature of Evil, the Kingdom of God, and the Purpose of the Church.

## **THE NATURE OF EVIL**

Evil has steadily gained in popularity and influence ever since Adam and Eve's first "unfruitful" act of disobedience. From the murder of Abel by his brother

Cain, to the murder of 52 million babies in the USA alone due to abortions, from Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery, to 12 million humans trafficked in the year 2010, evil has steadily gained in popularity and influence, and the Church has sometimes forgotten that we are our brother's keeper.

## **THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The Kingdom of God in Scripture refers to the rule and reign of Jesus over the whole cosmos, and at the heart of the biblical concept of the Kingdom is the overthrow of evil. Thus, Jesus said, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God then the Kingdom has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). The coming of the Kingdom and the destruction of evil in every form are intractable and inseparable aspects of who Jesus is and what He does. Thus, when He taught his disciples to pray, He said pray like this: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

## **THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH**

As Harvey Conn says, "The keys of the Kingdom are not locked in

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a drawer; they are given to the church.” Christ begets a people who are to be conformed to His very image. As Paul says, we are to be imitators of Christ (Ephesians 5:1). As such, the Church is a visible sign of the invisible Kingdom. That’s what Jesus is getting at when He says “let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify our Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

The church of Jesus Christ, then, ought to exist as a microcosm of the future to which God is leading us. The call of every Christian is to not only preach about our heavenly destination, but to also, in all truthfulness, be able to point to the church and say with confidence and conviction, “this is a taste of what it will be like! This is where the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control abound. This is where healing and whole-

ness, love and compassion, justice and righteousness live.” Or, as one writer put it, “The Gospel is Good News concerning the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is God’s rule over the totality of life. Every human need therefore can be used by the Spirit of God as a beachhead for the manifestation of his kingly power” (Graham Cray in *Mission as Transformation*, 28).

To preach the Good News without embodying the good news declares loudly and unequivocally that we have not understood the good news.

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**The church of Jesus Christ, then, ought to exist as a microcosm of the future to which God is leading us.**

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But when the church embodies in practice the qualities of the Kingdom because we have spent time in the presence of the King, then we together show the world that our God is not a distant God who sits aloof in a faraway heaven, but a living and active God who steps into human history and brings about the transformation of all things. We give evidence that our words and the words of Scripture are not hol-

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low products of our imagination but flow from an intimate connection with a God who both speaks and shows. And so we are admonished, as John says, “to not love with words or tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18).

When we practice the qualities of the Kingdom, then we set the whole world proleptically before the judgment seat of Christ. Evil stands condemned because the Kingdom has come and is coming and because the King dwells actively with His people.

To participate in the Kingdom is to live by the ethical demands of the King. The Prince of Peace does not beget a people unconcerned about the extension of Peace. Because justice and righteousness are the foundations of His throne, justice and righteousness must characterize the work of those who call themselves His subjects.

To be Kingdom-minded is to care about the things God cares about. It is to share our abundance with those who lack, to give alms

to the poor, to make peace with our enemies, and to produce the fruit of righteousness. It is to empty ourselves, to give up our comfort and to go sacrificially to those in need. It is to lay down our lives for our friends.

To close, I'd like to share a quote I recently came across in book by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert.

The book is *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Mission of the Church*. In the opening pages of their book, DeYoung and Gilbert point out, rather helpfully, that there is a lot that Evangelicals can agree on when it comes to this issue of social justice or transformation.

The gospel, is, at the very least, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection; proclamation is essential to the church's witness; heaven and hell are real; people are lost without Jesus; bodies matter as well as souls; and good deeds as the fruit of transformed lives are not optional (p. 16).

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**When we practice the qualities of the Kingdom, then we set the world proleptically before the judgment seat.**

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