

## Compassion Rooted in the Gospel

The barrios, where I first saw the manifest needs of the world revealed in living color, have forever influenced my deep concern for the impact of poverty and violence on human beings. My growing understanding of the Gospel has rooted my response and my attempt to avoid the current possibility that social justice becomes merely a cause du jour.

To simply accept this current emphasis on social justice as merely a correction of past imbalances, without understanding its historical roots or biblical foundation is to be at best naïve and at worst a pawn of fads. See my article [Compassion Rooted in the Gospel](#) written in 2004. Available with posted articles for the Compassion Forum

*“In view of questionable sociological, psychological and political theories presently permeating our culture and making inroads in to Christ’s church, we wish to clarify certain key Christian doctrines and ethical principles prescribed in God’s Word. Clarity on these issues will fortify believers and churches to withstand an onslaught of dangerous and false teaching that threatens the gospel, misrepresent Scripture and lead people away from the grace of God in Jesus Christ.” (See Colossians 2:8)*

See [www.statementonsocialjustice.com](http://www.statementonsocialjustice.com) also see response by Christianity Today [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com) and their September 12 editorial “John MacArthur’s Statement on Social Justice is Aggravating Evangelicals”

The current focus on social justice-compassion must be understood in light of its historical roots.

### Key points:

- The early Pentecostal history was a particular version of late 19<sup>th</sup> century theological context
- The modernist-fundamentalist debate of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the larger context
- The particular context was the growth of Pentecostalism and their commitment to world evangelization as a clear theological critique of Christianization as civilization
- Eschatological urgency and the radical strategy were alternative building blocks offered by Pentecostals
- A simple comparison: evangelism vs. social gospel

Church planting vs. structure building

Jesus is coming soon vs. long-term strategic planning

Signs and wonders vs. human ingenuity and professionalism

These dual tensions in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have major exceptions- particularly in the lives and ministries of single women missionaries and the unnoticed work of the poor that led to some Catholic observers saying that Pentecostals didn’t *have* a social program, they *were* a social program.

Our growth globally has placed us in direct relation with the majority world- they live in circumstances vastly different than ours. They hear the gospel –express it in ways we don't, because they really need God to make a difference. Social justice is more than a cause to like on Facebook, it is simply survival.

We Americans must listen and learn from our majority world brothers and sisters.

### **Indian student in Bangalore India**

“In the power of the Holy Ghost man becomes confident of building for himself a just society, that is humane, peaceful and righteous. If we want to win India for Christ, we have to girdle ourselves and get ready for the struggle. Let us fight for the marginalized, the ostracized, the untouchable, the prostitute and her customer, the child whose childhood has been robbed. The need of the day is socially active Christians who will accept the challenge of the gauntlet thrown upon us by the forces of the world.”

### **Some Biblical Thoughts on Compassion**

Robert Linthicum

- The power of the world's evil is far greater than the sins of its individuals.
- We need a biblical theology that is equal to the challenge of social and individual sin.

**Social structures** are those systems humans create to facilitate meaningful life. Each system has a *defacto* center as well as a periphery of influence.

- **Education:** A system that asks the question: “What's important to pass on to the next generation?”
- **Family:** A system that gets to the core of how human relationships are formed
- **Government:** A system that gets at the question of how we organize and regulate ourselves for “the common good” of our citizens.
- **Economy:** A system that answers the question: “How can I trade what I have for what I need?”
- **Religion:** A system that provides rationale for a person's ultimate destiny

Every humanly devised structure that contributes to meaningful life must come under the rule and redeeming power of Christ's Kingdom.

## Old Testament Overview of What the World Should Look Like

### Deuteronomy as a Template

- Relationship is central
- Societal functions facilitated by institutions where all people have reasonable access to “basic life.”
- Equity that serves all the people—systems that affirm human effort, but protect against human greed
- A focused reference point in Deuteronomy 15

### The Shalom Community

- A comprehensive community concerned with wholeness
  - Bodily health—Ps. 38:3
  - Security and strength—Judges 6:23; Deut. 10:19
  - Long life ending in natural death—Gen. 15:15
  - Prosperity and abundance—Job 5:18-26; Ps. 37:11
- What keeps going wrong with the picture Deuteronomy paints?
  - Kings can’t handle power
  - Priests sell to the highest bidder
  - Greed thrives without repentance
- Jesus’ proclamation and description of the Kingdom in Luke 4 is a final and complete vision of the intention of Deuteronomy 15.
  - All those under the tyranny of...
    - Self-destructive personal decisions that separate us from God
    - Oppressive systems that have robbed us of human dignity
    - Lives lived under the law that could not yield abundant life.
    - The lost vision of Deuteronomy 15
  - ...now have access to the good news of the Kingdom.
- Paul’s development of the Kingdom
  - **Foundation**—A gracious and merciful God who is full of love toward all
  - **Framework**—The fulfillment of God’s promises as already begun but not yet completed.
  - **Focus**—Jesus accomplished eschatological salvation for humanity through his death and resurrection.
  - **Fruit**—The church, as an eschatological community, becomes God’s new covenant people
  - “If the church is going to be effective in our postmodern world, we need to stop paying mere lip service to the Spirit and to recapture Paul’s perspective: the Spirit as the *experienced, empowering* return of God’s own *personal presence* in and among us, who enables us to live as a radically *eschatological* people in the present world while we

await the consummation. All the rest, including fruit and gifts (that is, ethical life and charismatic utterances in worship), serve to that end.” (Gordon Fee in *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*)

- *“The social context Pentecostal believers find themselves in does not define the needs to be addressed; it is rather a point of insertion where the transforming power of the Gospel is given visibility by a Pentecostal community by Spirit-empowered witness and Spirit-empowered action that testifies to the eternal life-changing Gospel of our risen Lord.”* Doug Petersen, Not by Might or By Power, Regnum Publishers.

A summary of key talking points:

- We do not live in a historical vacuum: we must acknowledge what influences have shaped our context.
- The Bible is not merely a source of validating our passionate initiatives of compassion.
- The Bible is our final authority of God’s redemptive plan. Its arc bends toward eternity with a salvation that “abundantly pardons and saves to the uttermost.” Redemption’s story not only has eternal ramifications, it has contemporary impact as humanly devised structures show signs of human depravity.
- Compassion is demonstrating wholeness where evidence of our fallen nature exists and must be rooted, not merely in humanity’s best intentions at compassionate action, but in Christ’s redemptive mission. In the words of Beth Grant “human crusades need the Cross of Christ.” See *Courageous Compassion* published by My Healthy Church.
- Pentecostals involved with ministries of compassion must be intentional about asking whether or not the work and power of the Holy Spirit are evident. Is there interplay between word-deed and sign? The stories and testimonies of people touched by ministries of compassion are the lens through which to see the Spirit at work.
- Kingdom agents, serving Christ through ministries of compassion, must frame and articulate their foundational principles for service in Christ’s name. That process must have symmetry in word, deed and sign. The Church desperately needs workers in compassion ministries to be teachers and exemplars of what Spirit empowered compassionate ministries are.

To build your foundations consider the following resources:

*The Brussels Statement* framed by A/G missionaries and national leaders in 1998. (See posted materials which include a synthesis of key themes in compassion ministries outline by A/G missionary icon Melvin Hodges.)

This statement was an attempt to create a foundational statement about compassion ministries that was not culturally defined or statistically motivated as its central premise. This statement was foundationally rooted in the character of God as revealed in the Bible, seen most clearly in Jesus Christ and continuing in the power of the Holy Spirit through the Church.

See Jerry Ireland *Evangelism and Social Concern in the Theology of Carl F. H. Henry* Pickwick Books 2015. This timely volume offers a reemphasis of the critical contribution made by Henry in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as a reminder to evangelicals about a need for a social conscience. It was a mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century course correction that highlighted Henry's commitment to salvation as the center piece of a social conscience. Also see his latest book *For the Love of God: Principles and Practices of Compassion Ministries* published by Wipf and Stock 2017. Also see Jerry's lectures as 2018 J. Philip Hogan Chair of World Missions at AGTS.

See Ivan Satyavrata, *Pentecostals and the Poor*, published by APTS Press/Wipf and Stock 2017. This is an articulate majority world perspective on compassion ministries that needs serious consideration. Dr Satyavrata is among the most articulate majority world voices in the global Assemblies of God.

See the work of *Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization* [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org) See the Capetown Commitment and Occasional Papers #2, #3, #21, #23. Since 1974 this international initiative has provided a significant repository of foundational materials for the multiple dimensions of global mission.

Look for Al Tizon, *Gospel, Christ and Mission in a Fractured World*, Baker Academic October 2018.

Also see posted articles by Brian Stiller (Canadian Pentecostal) on Justice presented at World Pentecostal Conference.

See Pentecostal Theology of Compassion statement developed by World Assemblies of God Fellowship.

See article by Bryant Myers on Progressive Pentecostals and the impact of worldview on how we view justice.