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Mercy is a very important antidote to Pharisaism. Being merciful to others means more than just forgiving those who harm us or do evil to us. It means doing good to others in need. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus explained what "mercy" meant (Lk.10:25-37 - see the use of the word "mercy" in v.37).

There we read of a Bible-scholar who questioned Jesus on how to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied that it was by loving God wholeheartedly and by loving one's neighbour as oneself. But the Bible-scholar (like many Bible-scholars today), "wanting to justify his lack of love for some kinds of people" (v.29 - Living), asked Jesus whom the word 'neighbour' referred to. His self-justification identified him straight-away as a Pharisee, and Jesus replied to his question with an illustration.

In the parable, we read first of all of a priest (an elder in God's house) ignoring the beaten man on the roadside. He saw human need there and was indifferent to it. Perhaps he felt the man was being chastened by God for some secret sin in his life. Or perhaps he found fault with the man for walking down that road without any company late at night. He was exactly like the three preachers who preached to Job. How quick we are, when we see people suffer to attribute that suffering to all types of wrongs that we imagine that they must have done, instead of helping them. How indifferent we are to human need! "I was hungry and you never gave Me anything to eat," the Lord says to us, "I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink. I was naked and you never clothed Me. I was sick and you never visited Me. You just sang songs to Me and preached sermons to Me, but never helped me in My need."

That priest was more interested in getting to the meeting in Jerusalem on time than in helping a suffering human-being. Remember that a lot of people who are on time for all the meetings finally go to Hell. After that, a Levite (a brother in God's house) also passed by, and he too was tested by God. And he failed the test too. He also wanted to get to the meeting on time and was indifferent to human need. These two religious men wanted to get to the meeting to hear God speak to them. Little did they realise that God had already spoken to them on their way to the meeting - and that they had turned a deaf ear to Him. They never heard God tell them that their songs and their prayers and their religion were all worthless, because they were indifferent to the sufferings of a needy man whom they had encountered on the way. God uses the sufferings of godly people to test the hearts of those who see them suffer.

None of us can throw a stone at these two religious men; for at some time or the other, we have all behaved like them. If we do see ourselves in the Levite and the priest in the parable, then let us repent and seek to be radically different in the coming days. We need to recognise that, like the priest and the Levite, we too have been placed on this earth by God, to represent Him. And we have to repent of the fact that we have not represented Him aright.

Finally, it was a despised Samaritan (a brother who belonged to another denomination that did not have such a pure doctrine as the priest and the Levite had) whom God used to help that beaten man. That Samaritan was not an elder or a preacher. He was just one of those quiet people who go about doing good to others, looking for opportunities to help those in need, without anyone ever knowing about it. He did not judge that beaten man. He realised that that calamity could have happened to him too. And so, he was merciful. He denied himself and spent his time and his money to help a brother in need.

There we see what the new and living way through the flesh really is: Christ manifest in the flesh is LOVE manifest in the flesh. It is MERCY manifest in the flesh. It is GOODNESS manifest in the flesh.