

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

EASTER DEVOTIONAL

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PKBedwell@hotmail.com

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THE WONDROUS CROSS OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading – 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

Introduction

Once again on at this Easter time we gather around the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ to focus on the truth that "Christ died for all." It describes the extravagant love of God and boundless grace of God bestowed upon us. And under the leadership of the Holy Spirit I want to emphasize this indispensable pillar of truth. The cross must ever and always be central in our thinking, our witness and ministry. There is a disturbing trend today to slowly minimize the visibility of the cross in some of the western church. The symbol of the cross is being removed from church walls and windows. It is no longer being stamped on church bulletins and it is not wanted on the roofs of sanctuaries any longer. The reason is that there is unbelievable mindset that the sign of the cross is offensive to world. One church had no symbols of the cross in their church, and when its pastor was asked why, he replied "we find it difficult to market the cross in this community so we don't say much about it." I would suggest that this being so they have nothing of a message of salvation which brings hope to the lost soul.

There is no doubt that there is a gross misunderstanding in that pastor's mind as what the Cross was all about.

The message of the Cross should not be adjusted to the culture; the culture has to adjust itself to the message of the Cross. The Cross is not to be marketed it is to be proclaimed. While we do not worship symbols, we need to be continually reminded of the truth they represent. The symbol of the Cross serves to keep before the church the extent to which God went and the incalculable sacrifice that Jesus made, in order to save us from sin and its penalty. Its message is redemptive. It proclaims the love of God without limit, mercy without restriction and grace beyond measure. It says to the world there is a way out of sin and a release from the guilt it brings. Despite the passing of the years of history, it still remains the power of God unto salvation to all who believe in the man of the Cross, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why would any one be offended at such a sacrifice made for the world? It is incredible and the height of ingratitude that there some in the Christian church want to remove it, because it might offend someone. Are we so obsessed with the worldly success of great numbers that we camouflage the dynamic truth of a crucified Savior who loved us so much that He gave up His life for each of us. It is true that the cross in reality is an ugly thing. As Tozer would say "It has been beautified by the poet and the artist.....but the way of the cross is still the pain-wracked path to spiritual power and fruitfulness...and so do not seek to hide from it. Do not accept the easy way. Do not allow yourself to be patted to sleep in a comfortable church, void of power and barren of fruit. Do not paint the cross nor deck it with flowers. Take it for what it is, and you will find it the rugged way to death and life." Do this even if it is offensive, because you cannot make it what it is not and expect that its message will transform lives. The Apostle Paul faced this problem in his day. He talked about the offence of the cross. It was probably more of an offence in his day than it is today. In his day it was the equivalent of the hangman's rope, the electric chair or the lethal injection. It was an offence in Paul's day, but there is no sign that he hid it or camouflaged it. He knew that the Bible said that "cursed is everyone who hangs

on a tree." It is so in part because it was our sin that put Jesus there. The cross brings us face to face with our sin. Is that why it is so offensive? But it is also true, that the heartbeat of the Gospel is the Cross. Is it reasonable that the supreme expression and ultimate evidence of God's unconditional love for us, is something to be camouflaged in the church for which He gave up His life. It is difficult for me to understand this kind of twisted thinking. But I do understand Paul's thinking when he wrote. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He testified that he gloried in the Cross because He understood what the Cross was all about, and what it meant for God to send His one and only Son to become sin for us and die on it for sinful mankind. He understood in part, the deepest agony of the pure and spotless Son of God taking our sin upon Himself for you and me. Why would anyone want to remove the symbol of that kind of self-less sacrifice and indefinable self-giving love? The question is that when you are ashamed of the Cross what do you put in its place as the means to salvation. What happens to the message of redeeming love? Where does the message of saving grace fit in? The Gospel in essence will disintegrate when the cross is removed.

Paul in the passage of scripture we read together is totally committed to the Cross and its redeeming and liberating message. It is clear that what is being proclaimed here is the,

1. THE PLACE OF THE CROSS IN PAUL'S LIFE AND WITNESS. 2

Corinthians 5:15,19. In these verses Paul is underlining the importance centrality of the Cross in his life. The Cross is central to Paul because it is,

a. Sad Exposure of the Human Problem of Sin. 2 Corinthians 5:15.

Paul writes that Jesus "died for all." And verse 19 he continues that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." On another occasion Paul made clear that, "Christ gave Himself for our sins." Galatians 1:4. What was the compelling reason for the death of Jesus on the cross? Why did He have to give His life as a ransom for many? It is simply, the fact of sin. You cannot talk about the cross and avoid the fact of sin. If you were

to look at Rembrandt's painting of the "Three Crosses", your attention would be drawn first to the center cross on which Jesus died. Then as you would look at the crowd gathered around the foot of the cross, you would be impressed by the various facial expressions and actions of the people involved in the awful crime of crucifying the Son of God. Finally your eyes would drift to edge of the painting and catch sight of another figure, almost hidden in the shadows. Art critics say that this is a representation of Rembrandt himself, for he recognized that by his sins he had helped nail Jesus to the cross. Is that why the Cross is so offensive to many? The Cross exposes the reality, the deadliness and ugliness of sin. It is our sin that put Him there. On that hill called Calvary the real ugliness of sin was revealed in its naked awfulness. Jesus became sin for us on that cross. He exposed sin for what it is. "He died for all." The cross is central to Paul for it exposes the inherent problem in man which is sin. Furthermore the Cross is central because it is,

b. The Supreme Expression of God's Priority in the Gospel. 2 Corinthians 5:15.

It is simply stated that "He died for all." Never has more been said in so few words. Never has hope been better expressed in this brief statement. Never has grace been so graphically pictured in this declaration of faith.. "He died for all." These words describe the cross; it is indicative of what matters in the gospel. It is God's priority because it is designed to meet the soul's deepest need. It is God's plan to rescue mankind from the destructive ravages of sin. A traveler in Europe once spied a carving of a lamb near the top of a church tower. He had seen carvings like that before but never in such a place. Asking for an explanation, he was told that in the days when the church was being built, one of the workmen lost his footing and fell from scaffolding just when that particular stone was being laid. His fellow workmen hurried to the ground and were shocked to see the man standing there brushing the dust from his clothes. He had fallen into the midst of a flock of sheep, and pointing to a lamb at his feet, he said, "The lamb was crushed, but I live." One lamb saved his life. The workman carved a lamb on that stone so that all might remember the miraculous escape of

the workman. But more than that, it also points everyone to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The word lamb in itself speaks of sacrifice. The prophet Isaiah tells us the Jesus was "pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities." Isaiah 53:5. Paul said simply "He died for us all." He was crushed by our sin on that cross that we might be delivered from the crushing damning power of sin. This is the message of the Cross. It is the supreme expression of God's priority in the gospel. Jesus "died for us all." In this way Paul proclaims the place of the cross in his life and ministry. "Christ died for us all." Note

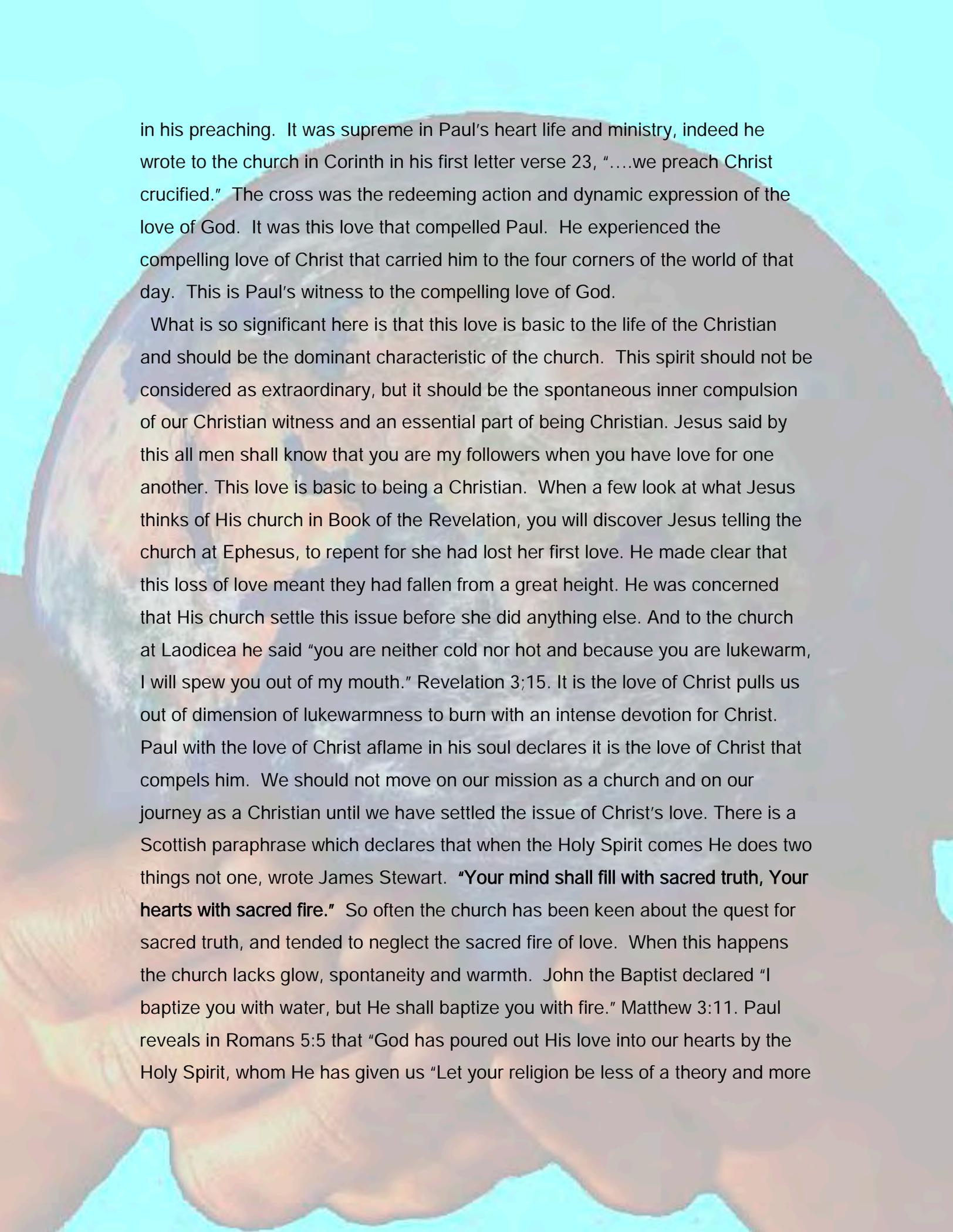
2. THE POWER OF THE CROSS IN PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY. 2

Corinthians 5:14-15, 21.

It is the power of Divine love. Christ's love defeated the evil malignant forces of darkness. That love triumphed on the cross. This indefinable incomparable love had invaded the heart and mind of the great apostle. It gripped him. It held him in its grasp. He could not get away from it, and in verse 14 he writes "for Christ's love compels us." It describes the power and force of Divine love. This is Paul's personal testimony not simply a personal observation. His spirit pulsated with the dynamic of divine life. It is powerful in its meaning. Christ's love had possessed his heart and life and had become the motivating force in his witness. He is highlighting,

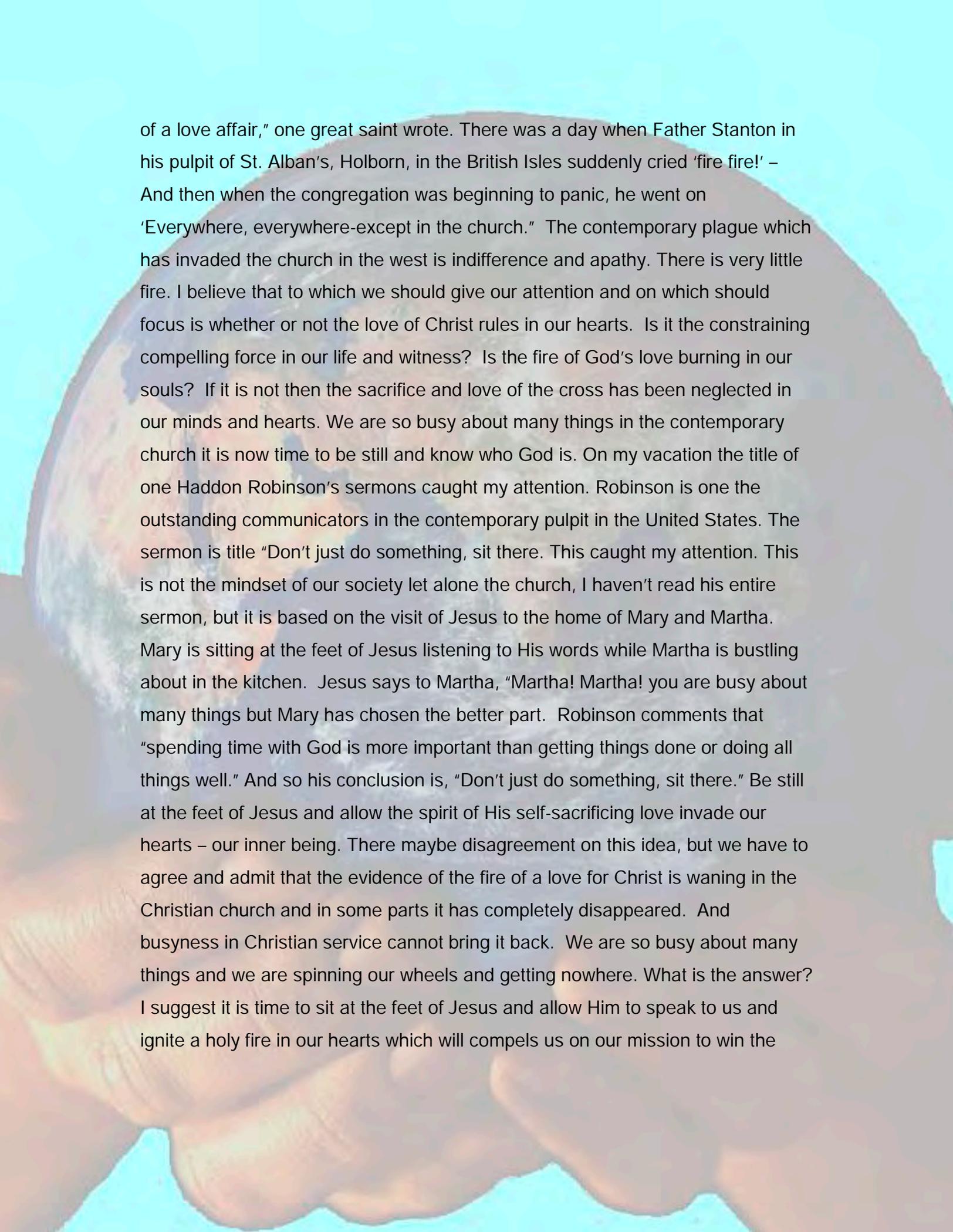
a. The Compulsion of Christ's Love. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

Paul was once compelled by hate to destroy the Christian church. He was driven by vindictiveness to annihilate the people of God. But the love of God revealed at the cross had radically transformed him. The power of the love of Christ had expelled every trace of hatred and every thought of murder. This love had established a new set of values in him and it now compelled him in a different direction. His new message was redemption not destruction. His testimony makes this clear "The love of Christ compels me." This compulsion was not that of organization, method or duty. It was the compulsion of love. He is no doubt speaking of the love of Christ revealed on Calvary's cross. The cross was pivotal



in his preaching. It was supreme in Paul's heart life and ministry, indeed he wrote to the church in Corinth in his first letter verse 23, "...we preach Christ crucified." The cross was the redeeming action and dynamic expression of the love of God. It was this love that compelled Paul. He experienced the compelling love of Christ that carried him to the four corners of the world of that day. This is Paul's witness to the compelling love of God.

What is so significant here is that this love is basic to the life of the Christian and should be the dominant characteristic of the church. This spirit should not be considered as extraordinary, but it should be the spontaneous inner compulsion of our Christian witness and an essential part of being Christian. Jesus said by this all men shall know that you are my followers when you have love for one another. This love is basic to being a Christian. When a few look at what Jesus thinks of His church in Book of the Revelation, you will discover Jesus telling the church at Ephesus, to repent for she had lost her first love. He made clear that this loss of love meant they had fallen from a great height. He was concerned that His church settle this issue before she did anything else. And to the church at Laodicea he said "you are neither cold nor hot and because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth." Revelation 3:15. It is the love of Christ pulls us out of dimension of lukewarmness to burn with an intense devotion for Christ. Paul with the love of Christ aflame in his soul declares it is the love of Christ that compels him. We should not move on our mission as a church and on our journey as a Christian until we have settled the issue of Christ's love. There is a Scottish paraphrase which declares that when the Holy Spirit comes He does two things not one, wrote James Stewart. **"Your mind shall fill with sacred truth, Your hearts with sacred fire."** So often the church has been keen about the quest for sacred truth, and tended to neglect the sacred fire of love. When this happens the church lacks glow, spontaneity and warmth. John the Baptist declared "I baptize you with water, but He shall baptize you with fire." Matthew 3:11. Paul reveals in Romans 5:5 that "God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us" "Let your religion be less of a theory and more



of a love affair," one great saint wrote. There was a day when Father Stanton in his pulpit of St. Alban's, Holborn, in the British Isles suddenly cried 'fire fire!' – And then when the congregation was beginning to panic, he went on 'Everywhere, everywhere-except in the church.'" The contemporary plague which has invaded the church in the west is indifference and apathy. There is very little fire. I believe that to which we should give our attention and on which should focus is whether or not the love of Christ rules in our hearts. Is it the constraining compelling force in our life and witness? Is the fire of God's love burning in our souls? If it is not then the sacrifice and love of the cross has been neglected in our minds and hearts. We are so busy about many things in the contemporary church it is now time to be still and know who God is. On my vacation the title of one Haddon Robinson's sermons caught my attention. Robinson is one the outstanding communicators in the contemporary pulpit in the United States. The sermon is title "Don't just do something, sit there. This caught my attention. This is not the mindset of our society let alone the church, I haven't read his entire sermon, but it is based on the visit of Jesus to the home of Mary and Martha. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His words while Martha is bustling about in the kitchen. Jesus says to Martha, "Martha! Martha! you are busy about many things but Mary has chosen the better part. Robinson comments that "spending time with God is more important than getting things done or doing all things well." And so his conclusion is, "Don't just do something, sit there." Be still at the feet of Jesus and allow the spirit of His self-sacrificing love invade our hearts – our inner being. There maybe disagreement on this idea, but we have to agree and admit that the evidence of the fire of a love for Christ is waning in the Christian church and in some parts it has completely disappeared. And busyness in Christian service cannot bring it back. We are so busy about many things and we are spinning our wheels and getting nowhere. What is the answer? I suggest it is time to sit at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to speak to us and ignite a holy fire in our hearts which will compels us on our mission to win the

lost. Paul said it is the love of Christ that compelled him. But the Cross also reveals

b. The Concern of Christ's Love. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

The concern of Christ's love lies in its focus. Christ's love is concerned with a sinful humanity. Paul states it simply and concisely, "Christ died for all." The cross offers a universal hope. The love of God extends to all. Grace is all inclusive. The concern of God's unconditional love is broad and expanding and without restriction. His love is not selective –it is not prejudiced and it is not shackled by the will of an autocratic God. Jesus died for all. It is simple is it not? The rich and the poor – The educated and the uneducated - The civilized and the uncivilized – The socially acceptable and the socially unacceptable. Jesus died for all. It is one of the core principles of the gospel. It makes the gospel relevant in all cultures and at all times. The Bible is urgent on this truth. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." You see "He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9. Concern of Christ's love as manifested on the Cross reaches out to all. There is no exclusionary clause in gospel message. The death of Jesus gathers all in its loving embrace. He died for all. Do not allow its familiarity to dull the wonder and tarnish the glory of this message in our hearts. We must refuse to allow its simplicity to nullify in our minds, its power to save souls from the bondage of sin and an eternity of hell. Its simplicity is its genius and its power. "He died for all." The simplest mind can understand this, and the smallest child can accept it. "He died for all." The cross reveals the concern of Christ's love. But the Cross is also the evidence of,

c. The Conquest of Christ's Love. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. In verse 15 we read "He died for all.....and was raised again."

This is a description of an incredible event. It is normal to die. We can readily accept His death. But what about this talk of His resurrection. Is it possible that a man can be raised from the dead? The Bible tells us that death had no grip on Jesus. It failed to keep Him confined in a grave. Paul tells us that death has now

been swallowed up in victory. Neither sin nor death could stop Him from rising out of the domain and darkness of the tomb. To many, the cross may have appeared to be the end, however we all know that it was but the beginning. His resurrection is vital to our salvation. It is not the dead Jesus who saves us from sin and death, it is the living Christ who has conquered sin and who redeems us. "He died for all.....and was raised again." We are saved by his life. The cross and resurrection is the clear evidence of the power of the love of Christ. Then there is the

3. THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S LOVE IN PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY. 2

Corinthians 5:17-19. The cross was both central and supreme in the mind, heart and life of the Apostle Paul because he believed that the crucified Christ is both the power and the wisdom of God. The power of the cross does not lie in two pieces of wood put together by a carpenter. That which gives power and authority to the message of the cross is the man of the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the passage of scripture 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Paul describes the purpose of Christ's death on the cross. It is in the power of the Cross that the purpose of God for the salvation of the souls of men and women is fulfilled. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is perfect. TO THE Apostle Paul new day had dawned in history, for now through His sacrifice we are offered salvation. The provision of Christ's sacrifice and His triumph over the grave has completely changed the way we look at things. Nothing is the same anymore. What Jesus did at Calvary so long ago has brought a new perspective on the world about us.

What is abundantly clear is that the Christian should not function by the old worldly standards and the old ways of perceiving people. Paul says in verse 16, "so from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer." And why not? Paul's answer is concisely clear. It is, he writes, because, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come." The key word which dominates the theme in these verses is the word "NEW." It speaks of transformation. There is a transformation which takes place when we are made

new in Christ and the old has gone. Paul moves on to tell us that this transformation will be,

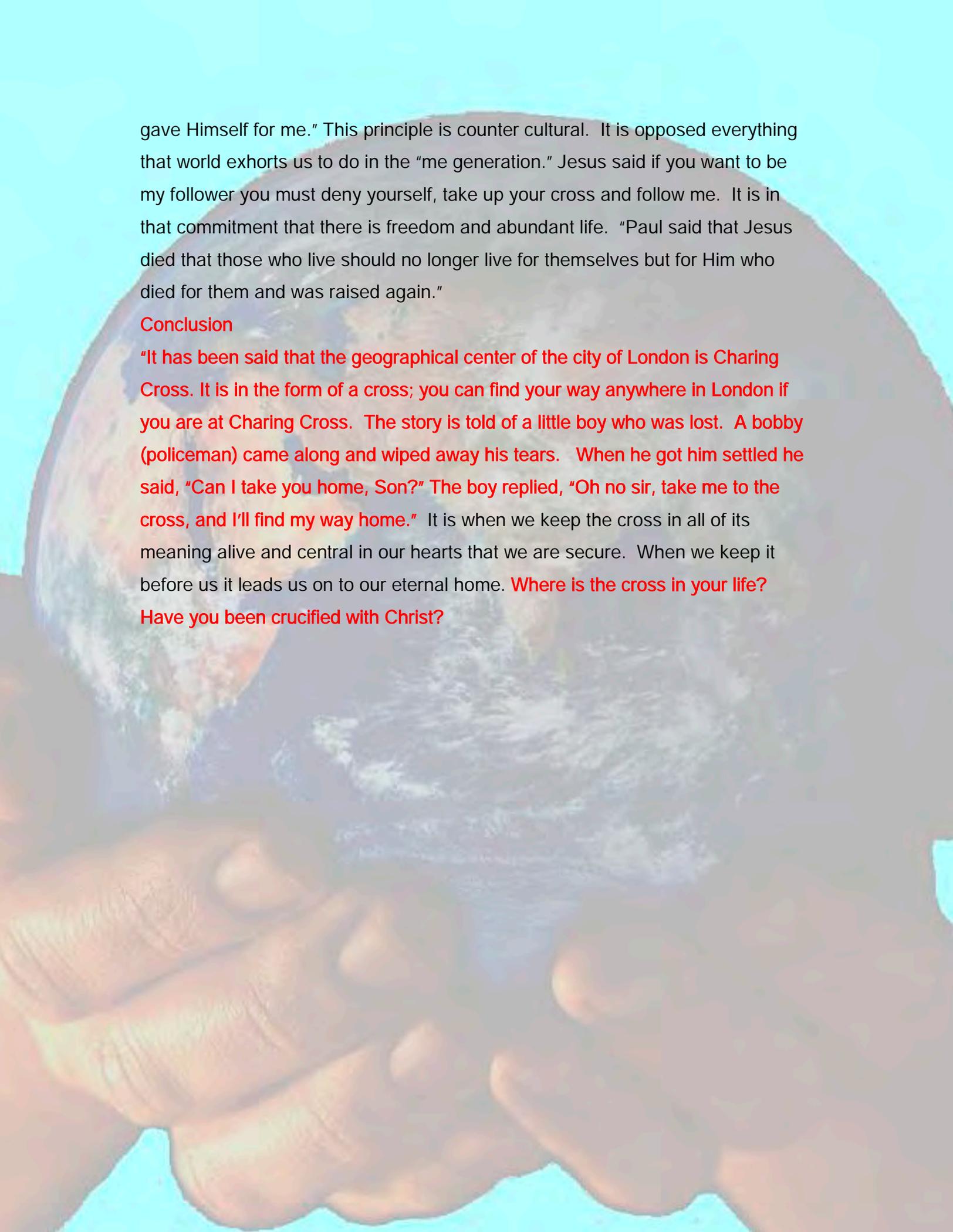
a. Demonstrated by a New Pattern of life. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

In Christ, Paul says that the Christian is a "new creation.....the new has come." Rueben Welch points out that this verse could be a text that opens up the entire passage." The new creation is not ourselves made better by being religious or doing good things and behaving acceptably. This kind of newness is not based on human effort or good works. It is not by good works that we are made new. It is not by reformation that we are made new. What about the life that was lived in sin before that moment you decided to reform. What is to be done about that? Reformation cannot obliterate the old sins. Can we just forget about it and put the past life out of our minds? Is it possible to lay aside the past and move into the future with the determination of a new resolution and become a new creature? I think not!! This is human reformation. It is based on human effort and fleshly ingenuity. Reformation will not do it. The difference between reformation and regeneration is that reformation is humanly based that is why New Year's resolution don't succeed, but regeneration or being born again is God empowered. If we are to be made new the old life must first be forgiven. It must be blotted out. Paul makes clear that the old cannot and must not remain if genuine transformation is to take place. It has to be dealt with. In verse 17 he says the "old has gone." Not simply neglected or forgotten but gone. Being made new means the old has gone. Only God can do that. The scripture tells that God separates our sins as far as the East is from the West to be remembered against us no more. This means that they disappear into infinity never to return. The old has gone. God is definite about that. It is not by good works that we are made new. It is by the grace of God that we are made new. It is new life. It means a complete change. It is new condition of the mind and heart. Paul crowns this truth with the words that this newness is from God. We are born again by the power of the Spirit of God. The Jesus way of looking is not the world's way with a simply a better spirit or a kinder more generous attitude. It is not a better point

of view it is a radically new point of view. It is one that says to all other persons, "Jesus died for you. As Welch would say "you are a loved redeemed person created in God's image. I will not look at you as one to be exploited, mistreated or despised." The Cross of Christ creates us to be new creatures with a new perspective on life. This newness of life is demonstrated by a new pattern in life. Furthermore this transformation is,

b. Dominated by a New Principle in Life. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

The words of the Apostle Paul challenge us at this point. He clearly lays down this new principle. "For the love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again." Welch points out, that it was not only what the death of Jesus had done for them that is involved here, but it was also a death in which Paul was called to participate, a death to the old self-life that brought him alive to live for the Christ who loved him. Jesus died for all says Paul that "those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again." The heartbeat of the Cross is selflessness and self sacrifice. Jesus lived to die for others. The purpose of His death and resurrection is that the Christian should not live for himself but for Him who died for Him. Jesus had made plain that "if anyone would come after Him, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow him." Matthew 16:24 This is one of the difficult sayings of the Gospel not because it is hard to understand, but because it is hard to obey. The scriptures tell us what Jesus can do for us. It describes the many blessings we receive from this gospel and that is easily digestible. We accept those blessing with joy. But the principle purpose of the death of Jesus on the cross is that we do not live for ourselves but for God and His will. And we in our society want to live for ourselves, but the way of the Cross is not to live for ourselves but for Him who died for us. It is the way to life and victory. Paul expounded on this truth in his letter to the church in Galatia chapter 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and



gave Himself for me." This principle is counter cultural. It is opposed everything that world exhorts us to do in the "me generation." Jesus said if you want to be my follower you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. It is in that commitment that there is freedom and abundant life. "Paul said that Jesus died that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again."

Conclusion

"It has been said that the geographical center of the city of London is Charing Cross. It is in the form of a cross; you can find your way anywhere in London if you are at Charing Cross. The story is told of a little boy who was lost. A bobby (policeman) came along and wiped away his tears. When he got him settled he said, "Can I take you home, Son?" The boy replied, "Oh no sir, take me to the cross, and I'll find my way home." It is when we keep the cross in all of its meaning alive and central in our hearts that we are secure. When we keep it before us it leads us on to our eternal home. **Where is the cross in your life? Have you been crucified with Christ?**