

8714U

VICTORIA STUDY WEEKEND - 2004

THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE - THAT I MIGHT KNOW HIM

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Study #3: Confronting the Cross

Brother Gordon has asked that I share with you the answer to the question that he was asking about Genesis 1, and then we'll move into this study. As you can see, hopefully begin to see, what I really enjoy about scripture is when I can create a picture inside my head; it's the one thing that you know, in terms of the beautiful things that can be created, and we can see with our eyes, but it seems like so much more when we can actually create that picture inside our heads.

Here's the picture given to us in Genesis 1 that I just find remarkable! When you read the second verse of Genesis you're presented with a picture. You've got a **rock** seeped in ice hurtling through space, I don't know how long it has been there and hurtling through space, no clue whatsoever. All I know is there's just this rock (that's how I think of a comet just travelling through the vast void of space); and if I were an observer standing to the side, I would think, 'who would care about that rock, that crumbly piece of rock'? It has no form, no beauty that I would desire it, there's nothing there, and yet that's the marvel of Genesis 1. God took that ugly rock hurtling through the void of space, and when you get to the end of chapter 1, you see an absolutely staggering beautiful world filled with all manner of living things; and beautiful in all its proportions. You know, from outer space you've seen those pictures of the blueness of the earth because of the ocean, it's a beautiful place but it didn't start that way, it started as an ugly rock that no one would give two cents for! Do you know why that picture appeals to me so much? that's me, that's you! and God is going to take that ugly piece of rock, and you may think if you look at yourself, 'I'm not worth anything' and God is going to take that rock and He's going to transform it to His creative activity and to a very beautiful place. So that's why Genesis 1, just one little piece of Genesis 1, why it's so inspiring. But you'll notice, I kind of love this, you'll see that, with this, I love the images, those pictures that God creates in our minds because they carry with them so much information, and it's exactly what we're going to do right now, when we move into this 3<sup>rd</sup> class and we look at the cross of Christ. We're going to see the apostle Paul paint a staggering picture and you know how they say that, 'a picture is worth a thousand words'? well, this picture that Paul paints in its absolute simplicity and its staggering profoundness, is Paul's explanation of the atonement. We're going to get it right now and we're going to look at it and I hope you're able to walk away from these considerations, with a picture that explains the whole of the sacrifice of Christ.

That's an amazing task, eh? So this is how I want to do it! we're going to look at one verse in which Paul presents a picture to us. We're going to take a break and sing a hymn, to capture some thoughts and to reflect a bit on what we've learned and then we're going to take the second half of this talk and we're going to examine some issues that flow from these thoughts. Alright? Here's the passage that I need to have you turn over to, Galatians 6 verse 14. Now in fairness, I didn't ask you something that I could have, which was, could you explain why Christ died? and you might have said to me, He died for my sins or you may have come up with some other words, but could you explain why Christ died, really explain it? Well, let's see how Paul explains it. Galatians 6 verse 14, 'God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world'. That's it! that's Paul's explanation of the atonement right there! Everything that you need to know about the sacrifice of Christ was explained.

Now let's get into Paul's thinking. He's standing in his mind and he's looking at the Lord Jesus Christ in his mind. So picture there, you're out on Gethsemane, you're at the place of the crucifixion and your thoughts come to this place now, and you're looking up and there is Jesus hanging on that cross or pole or whatever it is, and you're looking at that man, and Paul says, 'I see the world crucified to me!' Now wait a second, we need to think about this for a moment; **the world**, I know the world and you all know what the world is about! Let's just take three passages to refresh our minds so that we hear the words of scripture and learn them, James 4 verse 4, turn over would you from your Galatians' passage to James 4 verse 4 we read that 'Adulterers and adulteresses, says James, 'do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? whoever therefore who wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God'. So there's obvious some tension here, and we know why! I'm not sharing with you anything new or different!

If you go over to 1 John 2 just a few pages over and we look at those familiar verses, we have them in lectures as well where we try to stress these issues, verses 15 through 17, he exhorts us, '**do not love the world or the things in the world**; if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him'. Why? 'Because all that is in the world, the lusts (and that's not a magical word, it just means the strong desires that you have) the strong desires of your flesh, the strong desires of your eyes and the pride that goes along with being independent, self-functioning human beings (that's what the pride of life is, it has to do with the pride that goes with the fact that we're living entities, reasoning and thinking entities and we think that somehow because we are thinking, reasoning entities, we have a right to this life that we have and to do with it as we please). The pride of life! All of those things, he says, 'are not of the Father, these are the things of the world. The world is passing away and all the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever', because that way of life is eternal. Alright! we get that! that wasn't new, was it? I didn't think so!

Galatians 5, one more passage just to talk about this and get it fresh in our minds, Galatians 5 looking at verse 18, this is a description in verse 18, that 'if you are led by

the Spirit, you are not under the Law', but then he goes on and verse 19 is what I want to get to, 'Now the works of the flesh are evident' (now here's a description of the world, of what it means to 'do your own thing', and I had one brother, this actually brought it home to me in a way, one brother actually took and said, think of these things as you're reading in the sense of marriage, alright, and the things that can bring dried up marriages and break them to pieces. Alright! Adultery, we know how destructive that is, if we just think of it in an abstract way, adultery, maybe it doesn't mean so much, but if you think of it in terms of a marriage bond you know what adultery does, how destructive it is! Fornication, same thing, uncleanness, licentiousness (these are all sexual terms) idolatry, sorcery, (idolatry by the way, is making something else more important like when a marriage contract is kind of putting the wife or the husband to one side instead of giving the true attention that should be there), hatred, contention, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, self ambitions, dissensions, heresies, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God'. This is the fruit of the world, this is what our flesh produces, alright! This is how we behave naturally there's nothing strange about this stuff!

But here's the part that is so utterly, wholly, completely strange. It's here when Paul is looking at the cross of Christ, and he says, 'I see **the world**', does that bother you? He's looking at the Lord Jesus Christ and he says, 'I see the world up there crucified'. Hebrews 2, why does he see this? Well, there is actually a two-fold answer and you need to understand both parts to appreciate what Paul is seeing. The first one is a well known passage in Hebrews 2, you could probably guess it that it's going to be verse 14, here is one of many statements in the book of Hebrews to impress us with who the Lord Jesus Christ is: he says, 'Inasmuch as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He (and the KJV actually picks up a word that is there) 'He also Himself likewise shared in the same (that same flesh and blood that creates the world in which we live and have just read about, He partook of that same flesh), 'that through death He might destroy that which has the power of death, that is the devil'. So Jesus's flesh is our flesh, it's not different, it's not some peculiar genetically created variation that is different, it is our flesh. It's the same stuff!

Now turn over to Matthew 26, this might be a direction a little different than what you might have expected me to go, but turn over to Matthew 26 and again, let your eyes roam over the context and you will see that we're dealing with a chapter that's dealing with the coming up of Jesus's crucifixion. This is the chapter especially when we see Jesus in the garden and He's about to be betrayed by Judas and the whole judicial thing goes on, that brings Him to the crucifixion on the cross. Look at verse 38, He said to them, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: stay here and watch with Me! And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed saying, O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will (and that really means, not what I want but what you want) 'not as I will but as you will. Then He came to His disciples and found them asleep and He said to Peter, what, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, Peter, lest you enter into temptation; the spirit

indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak! He went away again the second time and prayed saying, 'O My Father if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, your will be done!' You see, what was in the world that we read about, all those awful descriptions of things that could be produced by our flesh, which were all the desires of the flesh, the eyes and all of that stuff; that stuff that was in the world was inside of Jesus. Because it was inside of Jesus, this man knew the pervasive pull of those desires, of His desires; you see, He said, it's not what I want, because He did have His own wants. There are things He could have justly said, 'I want these things', and He could have taken them, if He wanted them. Well, He did want, but He wanted more that His Father's will be done!

So He felt in His body these very same pulls and then He has the audacity to say to Peter, 'the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak'. Whose flesh do you think He was talking about? Do you think it was just Peter's flesh that He said was weak? B&S and young people and friends, He was talking about His flesh that was weak! His spirit was willing, 'Father, I will do this if you want Me to do it, but I don't want to do it! So His spirit, the spirit of the Son of God was willing but the flesh of the Son of God was weak; and so when the Lord Jesus was put on that cross and He was nailed and He died on that cross, can you see now what Paul was looking at? when he says he saw the world crucified? because in the crucifixion of Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ was making a personal confession and public declaration to every human being upon the face of this earth, that has ever been and shall ever be, and this is the declaration that what is in My flesh must be put to death if the will of God is going to be done!. So Paul standing where he does, he looks at that and he says, 'I see, I see the world and all that is within it put to death that the Father's will might be done.

Wow! that's only half the picture. Turn over to 1 Peter 3 and verse 18. He says, 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in or by the Spirit'. The phrase there, '**the just for the unjust**', I want you to think about that; let me ask you the question, how did Jesus get up on that cross? who put Him there? Answer it inside your heads, who put Him there? Wasn't it the world that put Him there? wasn't it the world that crucified Jesus Christ? It was the conglomeration of men, the Sanhedrin in conjunction with the Romans and there's this whole picture that you can paint of all the collaborators that came together to put Jesus up there on the cross. Now think about this phrase in that light? **the just for the unjust** ! That man of all men, was the sinless Son of God, He had never sinned or done anything wrong in His life. There was not one speck of sin or wrong doing that you could lay at His feet and say, 'you deserve it!' not one, this is the incredible thing about the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is another question! but for now just focus on this issue. So who then has been indicted as the 'unjust one'? the one being crucified that all said was a sinner and should be crucified or those that put him to death. Don't you see, b&s, that the act of crucifixion, that one single moment of time in human history, at that moment, God exposed once and for all, what is truly inside of us, because that man of all men, did not deserve to be on that cross, He is innocent of any charges that could be brought against Him. In that context, it's the unjust that are now exposed and from that moment of history on, there is nothing a single human being that

could say, 'oh, the ways of my ways are okay!' Oh, they are? well, it is the ways of the flesh that put the Son of God up there and killed Him and that's okay? Some of you may have seen the Passion of Christ, I know Duncan did not, he wrote an article to tell the facts, and I have my own issues with the film, but at least you get that sense that there were a lot of people that collaborated together to make the Just One suffer and die on the cross.

Is there any wonder that those who would be friends of the world are at enmity with God? Does that surprise you? It's the world that destroyed His Son, that brought all that pain and suffering to the Father as well as to the Son. So the dead body of the Son was something that exposed the world for all that it is. John 15, if you'll turn over real quickly and let's just read some verses from there, to just try and pick up this piece, then it gets uncomfortable! John 15 verse 18, 'If the world hates you, He said now talking to His disciples in the Upper Room, 'if the world hates you, you know it hated Me before it hated you; if you were of the world the world would love its own, yet because you're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, that a servant is not greater than his master, if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My words, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me, hates My Father also; if I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin, but now have they **seen** and also have hated both Me and My Father'. Then He quotes that wonderful passage, 'they hated Me without a cause'. The death of Christ was perpetrated by men who didn't have a cause to kill Him. In that moment as I said, that moment of history, all that was inside of us as human beings, is exposed.

You say to me, 'brother Ted, you know if I was there, you know I'm not going to say that I'm a perfect human being, but I don't think that I would have done that! and after all, that was 2,000 years ago that they did it; how do I have any personal connection with that cross of Christ?' Now you have to struggle with this one a bit, now let me ask you, now you've got to think about this in your own life - has there been any time in your life where in your heated desire to get something or go somewhere, and God has stopped it, that you've been a little upset over that because you wanted to go out and you wanted to go your own way and get something? Or has there been a time in your life where God was directing you here but you really wanted to go there and you chaffed at that because you knew what God was saying, 'go there' and I really don't want to do that! Has your pride been exposed perhaps even your arrogance maybe, or rebelliousness been exposed because of God's rebuke? maybe a mistreatment of another person? Let's be honest, b&s, we try to do the right thing, sometimes we do the wrong thing and then we cover it so no one knows we've done the wrong thing! Those men in John 15, do you know on what basis they were going to go about killing the disciples of Jesus? Do you know what it is? He quotes from Isaiah 66 which you ought to read sometime, they thought they were doing God's service by killing them, they thought they were glorifying God in doing His will, by destroying these men, so they justified their behaviour **on religious grounds**. This is astonishing! that's how good we

are as human beings. But in time, when you've been set upon a path and God's word has cut you off, and you've said to God in your heart, 'no, I'm not going that way! oh, I see what you say you want me to do, I'm not going to do that! Oh, I know that you say that this is how I should conduct my life, I know you've said to me, 'I should seek one in the Lord to marry, but I really love this person and I want to marry them'. Whenever you've done this, b&s, anytime in your life that you've said, no, to the will of God, you have crucified the Son of God. I have crucified the Son of God, every time I say to God, 'I won't do it, I don't want to go that way, I don't believe that, I don't trust you!' Every time we do that we are adding our nail to the man that hangs up there, so when Paul stands back and he looks up there and he says, 'I see the **world** being crucified', he recognizes that I put Him there; **I put Him there**, not you, I put Him there! because of what's in me and when I act upon what's in me. **I put the Son of God on that cross where He didn't belong!** There would be no sacrifice of Christ if all of us indeed, were doing the will of God. There is a sacrifice of Christ because we don't do the will of God and the very first thing that we have to acknowledge is, I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT MAN BEING UP THERE ON THAT CROSS, going through all the things that He had to suffer, I am responsible for it. That's where it begins, b&s, that's where the Atonement begins.

So if you can begin to appreciate that, then it's incredible because there's one moment in time that God has displayed in this act, an event that is able 2,000 years later, to take my heart and make me look at myself and say, 'there's something wrong!' and now the question is, **what are you going to do about it?** Now I'd like to share with you, from John 3, another picture, another word picture, looking at verse 14. Here's a picture, an image, he says, 'As Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up'. Even so must the Son of man be lifted up, so whatever he's referring to, he's referring to some event in the wilderness where a serpent was lifted up in the wilderness and he said, that that lifting up of the serpent is the lifting up and therefore the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know what the story is, right? back in Numbers 21. So let's turn back there, Numbers 21 and this is a neat story and I hope you appreciate it as we go through it.

The children of Israel were journeying and you know, they had complained about not having food before and that's when they got the manna originally. You'll notice at the very beginning how compassionate and kind God is towards all of their complaining; because He's the same towards us really when we complain. We've just got to the point, in verse 4, 'they journeyed from the mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way'. Very discouraged, 'and the people spoke against God and against Moses, why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness where there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless or light bread. So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses and said, we have sinned for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, Make a

fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and it shall be, that everyone who is bitten when he looks at it shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, he put it on a pole and there it was uplifted, 'so it was, when a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent he lived'. Alright! so the lifted up serpent referred to the crucifixion of Christ and in the New Testament this is picked up, the lifting up of Christ in crucifixion and we're being told to look at this story, because you can see yourself in here and how you might respond to the cross of Christ.

Now you'd agree that this is a vivid passage because all of you know Genesis 3 and the incident with the serpent in the garden and you know how the serpent was going to bite the seed of the woman on the heel, and here you've got literally that they're being bit and they're dying and if ever there was a symbol, or a picture that said, 'the wages of your rebelliousness and sin is death', then this is it! alright? So that's the context - your rebelliousness has brought your death', and that fiery serpent (do you know why they call it 'fiery'? you need to know this and you'll see why in a moment). Do you know why they called it 'fiery'? Do you know that there are some serpents that when they bite, they affect a nerve in your body and because they're destroying and damaging the nerves, it's like fire! As the venom moves up your legs or wherever you're bit, you basically feel like it's fire going up (I don't say that personally because I don't know) but this is from the medical journals that there are snakes that produce that effect. That's what they were feeling, just imagine, you know, you get bit and then you feel this burning in your leg and its travelling up your leg and pretty soon people are dying.

Did you notice that they didn't die necessarily immediately because if they all dropped dead the moment they were bitten (and there are some venomous snakes, but fortunately after being in Guyana for 4 years, I never actually saw a snake in Guyana that was alive, I did see a dead one, but never a live one). But there are venomous snakes that in 4 seconds you're dead, this apparently was not like that, this one took time before they died because some were able to get where the serpent was to get healing. Did you also notice that the people came to Moses and said, 'pray to the LORD for us that He take away the serpent from us. So here's my question to you, did God answer that prayer? because Moses did pray for that, and do you know what? God **didn't take away the serpents**; did you ever think about that? God never took away the serpents, they pleaded, take away these serpents. And God didn't because people continued to get bit and had to go to the uplifted serpent to get healed. You know that's the piece of 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 that we don't quote, that God in terms of our temptations and trials, that He'll make a way of escape and we think, 'ah, we're going to get out of it!' That's not what Paul said, Paul said He would make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it, God isn't taking away your trial, God is giving you a way to bear the trial. That's what God has promised! and that's what they found out, God was going to give them a way to deal with this trial with the uplifted serpent. I don't know how long through the rest of their journey they were subject to be occasionally bitten by these snakes, but the remedy was always there whenever it occurred.

Why a serpent? Gee, do I really need to ask that question? You know about why the

serpent, right? because it is representation in Genesis 3 and all that it represents is about the rebelliousness of human flesh that wants to go its own way! and says to God, 'I want to do what I want to do, and I'm not going to die, after all I have a different view of this whole picture than you do!' So I think we understand the sense of the serpent. Why a bronze one though? Well, again, those of you, you have heard enough talks from the platform about how bronze is used to represent our human flesh; in the tabernacle it was meant to represent flesh, so you get that sense of a bronze serpent. How do you think they made that serpent? (By the way, do you ever respond in study days? I'm a teacher, I sometimes look for a response, I don't know if that's fair game sometimes!) Good, you know the answer, how was the bronze serpent made? I think he made one because he was told to go make it, so he had to make it, I don't think he found one! He used the jewellery and melted it down, he made a mould because that's how you **cast**, isn't that right? with a mould. I can remember my son doing some moulding in college and he apparently had to have something to mould. So either he did some cutting with some wood, or maybe he took one of those dead serpents and cast it! and then poured in the bronze and there was the serpent. So there was a real connection between what they saw lifted and what was biting them. I think we get that sense of it!

So what do you think God was trying to teach them? as they're bit like that and they're feeling the struggle? what do you think God was teaching them? that they're part of the serpent. So they needed to see that in what was going on, that this was not just an accident that what was happening to them was a representation and this is the thing I love about scripture, time and again, God takes a mirror and says 'take a look at yourself. In the garden He did that with Adam and Eve, you remember the earth produced thorns and thistles and weeds and all those other problems, and God was saying to Adam, 'Take a look at this, this world that you're looking at is you! because that's what I see inside you, when I look at you, because all of those things strangle what I'm really looking for'. Remember Jesus used thorns to choke the wheat so it can't produce, in fact, time and again (I can give you the whole thing on the 'garden' at another time), how it is a picture-mirror and you can look at yourself and see, 'oh that's me!' Well, I believe that all of this was to help them see, 'this is me'; you're dying because of what you have done, those words that you said, that hatred that you've expressed, and the venom that you've expressed towards God is killing you!

So, the cross of Christ! you're confronted with a choice, you can be bitten by a serpent and feel the heat coming up your leg, right? you're beginning to feel that, aren't you? You have a choice, don't you? you could go out to where the pole was put with the bronze serpent on it, you could look upon it and go away healed or you could stubbornly refuse to do anything and say, 'I'm not going to do that'; well that's good but you see these people felt that, you don't! When you refuse to do the will of God or I refuse it, I don't feel it! I don't feel the pain, the heat, you know, the venom travelling and going up to my heart to kill me, I don't feel it! that's the problem. They did! they experienced it, so in that experience they realized that if I don't do something, I'm dead. I can see my friends and neighbours dying - am I going to die? So their response to the

uplifted serpent was to go to him. Now what do you think they did when they went over to the uplifted serpent? Do you think they said, 'good', 'great', do you think that's what happened? I think this is what might have happened, (my vivid imagination, I will apologize for it), I think they went over to the uplifted serpent, and remember I said that this is what was going on in them; so this is real and the venom is spreading and they'd just feel this fire going up into their bodies, right, going further and further. I think when they went over to stand and then look at that, the words that are chosen in the Hebrew, is not to just take a glance and walk away, it's **'to behold'** (7200) and I think they sat and they watched and as they looked at that serpent, I think they felt the venom being pushed back down, the heat descending down slowly out of their bodies; and you can see the stupidity of a person only looking for a time and then forgetting what this was all about and walking away, and suddenly feeling it come back again and saying, 'oh, no, God really means this!' and they go back and they look and they look until finally, it's gone from their bodies and they're healed. What a powerful lesson, it wasn't just 'oh, yeah, I see Jesus crucified, that's alright, fine! It was, 'I'm looking at this, says Paul, and I see the world crucified; I see all that's wrong with me, I see it put to death, and I realize that's what I need to do, that's what needs to happen. I'm responsible for that up there, that cross and that man dying and for all the pain I put the Father and the Son through, I'm responsible for that, and I'm looking at it and thinking about it', and in that moment, you see, in that moment, there's a chance to change!

You see, there's only two positions with respect to the cross. You can be the crucifier or you can be the crucified; there's only two choices, you have to decide and I have to decide where to stand. Will I be with Him? or will I be against Him? and that I think is the struggle that we have to go through when we eternalize the death of Christ and it's no longer academic, it's no longer theology, with someone telling me in Sunday School this, yeah, yeah, yeah! and I see all those passages. When you now understand that it's about **you** and you realize you don't have a choice, you can crucify Him or you can be crucified with Him. You can confess to God, 'I need to put to death what's in me', or you can say to God, 'I'm alright, let me live my life if I want to'. Well, if you go the route that the apostle Paul went, turn with me back to Galatians (we're going to break at this point) Galatians 5 and here is the apostle Paul just prior to this little verse in chapter 6 verse 14, but in chapter 5, he's now going to express, if you like, the image of what it means to respond to the cross in a positive way, verse 24 he says, 'Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit'. Alright? So this is the life of those you choose; Paul says, 'I see the world crucified', and then he turns around and says, 'and I am crucified to the world'. Do you see the two pieces? I see the world crucified' on the one hand and then he turns it around and says 'and I have chosen to be with the man', and so the world sees me being crucified!

That, b&s, is the Atonement in its absolute simplicity, in that one single image is all that you ever need to know about the cross of Christ and why Christ died. If I ask again, 'why did Christ die?' all you need to do is do that, why Christ died. What then do I need to do about it? join Him!

Let's sing a hymn! Open up your hymn books to 200 -

Lord, let me learn thy sorrow and mark thy pain  
That no more heedless through the world I roam

I want to conclude this class with some considerations about what it means to fellowship the sufferings of our Lord. The concept of a journey is there, a need for us to learn, but remember what Paul said, that I might know Him and know the fellowship of His suffering. So let's put this in an important context! If you would turn with me to John 3, just for a second here, it's one word and I know that brother Dennis Gillett was such a master at picking that one word and just driving home the power of how just one word changes a whole view of things. Well, here's one word in John 3 verse 14, 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up'. Do you know which word it is? 'lifted up', perhaps, but here's the word that I find to be so significant, 'even so **must** the Son of man be lifted up'. That word 'must' conveys to me a powerful, powerful concept that's hard for me to grasp; but think of it in this sense, was there no other way to redeem people like you and me? except that this man must suffer as He did and die? Was there no other way? to the Father's mind then, the Son had to be lifted up! it must happen! And why must it happen? because as the famous verse 16 says in John 4; 'and this is love not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the covering for our sins**, or propitiations'. Think about who we are as human beings, think about it as the fact that we killed His Son and God says, He had to be put up there, He had to go through all of that; He and His Son had to endure all of the pain and the despite and all of the other things, that they experienced through that journey for us, that we might change who we are and respond and act differently. He must be put up there because **God loved us and loves us!** That to me is an incredibly powerful context in which to understand the cross of Christ.

That's what it really means that 'God loved us', that He was prepared to endure all of those things and His Son as a companion with Him! Remember Genesis 22, do you remember how those words go? 'Take you son, Abraham, your only son, the son whom you love', that's like putting the knife in, but that's what God felt! Sharing God's life, well, you can reflect on that scene but that's how Abraham shared God's life. I'd like you to look at about 5 passages and then one final one, and I want to have you reflect on this theme. What does it mean now if I'm going to share in the sufferings of Christ, if I'm somehow going to be in reality, a part of this cross, what does that really mean for me? and that's what I would like to put together now. So 1 Peter 4 is the first passage that I want you to think about, and I want you to look at verses 1 and 2, he says, 'Therefore since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men but for the will of God'. This is fellowship in Christ's sufferings when we take our own desires that would propel us in this direction and we say, 'God help me, but no, I can't go in that direction, I need to go in your direction'. So we put to death those things, we deny ourselves certain things that we

might go in this direction and no longer live the rest of our lives subject to our own desires and the desires of others around us and what the world tells us to do, but to the will of God.

Matthew 16, this is a well known image, so just take a look at the words and think about them, verses 24 to 26. 'Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake, will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul. Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?' Alright, so there's the image of the cross; whoever desires to come after Me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me! That's simple - why on earth? Well on one hand you could say, okay I understand why we need to deny ourselves, Peter just told us! because we can no longer live the rest of our lives following the will of the flesh, but is that really all that he's saying here? to deny yourself? and by the way, it means 'utterly deny yourself' (533), the Greek word is a very strong word, you know, totally and completely denying yourself. It's like I'll have nothing to do with this man, alright, but why? is he telling us that what we really need to do if we're going to be a really good disciple of Christ, is that we need to go out and we need to show everybody how we sacrifice everything 'oh, I'm not going to buy that type of car, I'm going to buy this cheap little old car over here because that's what disciples of Christ do! I'm not going to buy that house but I'll buy this kind of house because this house looks more like what it should be! I'm going to give as much of my money to the ecclesia as I can, I'm going to try and deprive myself of everything that I can!' Is that what He means?

2 Corinthians 5, let's see what it meant to Paul, verses 14 and 15, he says, 'For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus, that if one died for all, then all died: and He died for all, that they who lived would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and for them rose again.' But the love of Christ constrains me, we just read about the love of the Father and the Son, and Paul says, 'do you know what it means to me, why I deny myself? I deny myself for your sakes, brethren,' I'm not going around giving my body to be burned and all my riches to the poor, that's not what it's all about, that's not what love is all about. Love is when I deny myself for you, my brethren, that's what love is all about! It's not just abstract self denial. What does that really look like?

Well, I'm going to give you another image, 1 John 3, and this one is incredible! It's incredible because we have a history as a community of misunderstanding this statement. Alright? 1 John 3 verses 16,17, and 18, 'By this we know love, (this is how we understand what love really is) because He laid down His life for us. Then he goes on to say, 'then also we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (so we see there's some repetition of a pattern here, Christ has done something then we should do something!). Then he goes on to say, 'Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word and tongue, but in deed and truth.' We know these words, we know what he's saying, or do we?

Question time! Jesus said, 'I laid down my life for the brethren', what's the image that pops into your head? crucifixion, Christ on the cross! right Well, turn over to John 10 because that's not what these words mean! So John 10, are you ready for this one? verse 14, Jesus says, 'I am the good Shepherd and I know my sheep, and am known by my own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father (oh, there's rich language here which is what our weekend is about) and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep that I have that are not of this fold, them I also bring and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock and one Shepherd'. Then He goes on and says, 'Therefore my Father loves Me because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself; I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from the Father'. Now let me ask you, this should make plain sense to you, as a shepherd is it my job to go and get myself killed? Is that what I do as a shepherd? Well, if I'm killed who takes care of the sheep? So you think Jesus is saying I lay down my life, means I'm going to go and get Myself killed for the sheep? well, that may be ultimately a piece of this, but let's understand what He's really saying first! He is saying that a shepherd lays down or puts aside what would be his normal rights of a human being, to take care of the sheep. You see, it's 24/7 taking care of sheep, it's not a past-time or part time job, **it's a full time job to take care of sheep**. As a shepherd that means that you don't have a job that allows you to get this nice house and all the other accoutrements. As a shepherd it isn't quite so easy to go out and have a wife and those other things that go along with our rights as human beings. Jesus laid down His life, in the sense of setting aside those things that He would naturally have wanted for Himself. There's nothing wrong with marriage, there's nothing wrong with having a house, a family, but Jesus put all of those things aside, for the sake of His sheep. For the sake of you and me, b&s! What are you prepared, and I have to ask myself, what am I prepared to lay aside for you? The next time there is a problem in the ecclesia and someone is in need, there are brethren in my ecclesia who do things that I don't do, and I feel bad about that but they have this ability to do these things and there's denial going on; they are not doing something else that they could rightfully do, for the sake of this need within the ecclesia, or their neighbourhood. That, b&s, is what love is all about! it's not about your great self denial or my great self denial of whatever it is, oh, I won't do this and I won't do that, and I won't buy this or that, I'll give all of this or I'll give all of that; what will you do to help that stumbling and falling brother or sister in your ecclesia who you don't like? who's uncomfortable because they have bad problems. Their life is a mess, will you lay down your life and disrupt the flow of your day to day existence to take care of them? to help them?

Colossians 1 and Paul says and he puts this is such a beautiful way that you can begin to see this bigger picture, alright? Colossians 1 verses 24 and 25, listen to how he pictures the joy of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. He says verse 24, 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the ecclesia, of which I've become a minister according to the stewardship of God'. Isn't that an incredible picture and image put

before us? It's as if that Jesus' sacrifice, (His laying down of his life eventually bringing Him to the cross itself) which was, was it not? the ultimate denial of a man's right that is, to live, and He even gave that up for us. Paul says then that it wasn't done, you see, the body of Christ is still in need, and the body of Christ is still suffering affliction and Paul says, 'you know, I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the affliction of Christ, for the sake of His body'. Ah, b&s, if that was the mind that could be in all of us, do you know what a wonderful place every ecclesia would be? what our community would be, what the world would say when they looked at us? MY! how this people love one another because of the care, the compassion that would be seen and spread about!

I have something that brother Alan Eyre once printed in the Carribbean Pioneer and it's a beautiful statement, it's the actual description of a first century ecclesia in action up in Antioch, alright? I think it was 90 AD or something like that, it's an actual description by a Roman who was writing this piece about these Christians, and it described exactly those goings on: he says, 'when there is someone in need (and it didn't have to be a Christadelphian), when there was somebody in need in their world and sphere where they worked, such as the orphans and widows, they did things for them; it was as if the life of Christ flowed out of them, the love they had now experienced, they were now prepared to share; and hence, this last passage, I'd like you to go over to John 15 and this is where we'll close.

John 15, do you remember these words? verse 12, 'This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command'. So actually just turn back a page to chapter 13, the same thought, verses 34 and 35, 'A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another'.