

Main Idea: We need to gaze at the cross daily and Galatians 2:20 shows us how. As we walk through the phrases of Galatians 2:20, we discover four affirmations that Paul made, that we need to make on a daily basis.

An Identity Crisis: Who am I really?

1. We're prone to find our identity in our connections.
2. We're prone to find our identity in our accomplishments.
3. We're prone to find our identity in our possessions.

I. Affirmation #1: I have been crucified with Christ.

- A. I did not become a Christian by adding Christ to my life.
- B. I did not become a Christian by giving my life to Christ.
- C. I became a Christian on the basis of what Christ did for me.
 1. On the cross, Christ died in my place.
 2. On the cross, I died with Christ.

II. Affirmation #2: I no longer live.

- A. That means I'm not depending on my accomplishments.
- B. That also means I'm not pursuing my agenda.

III. Affirmation #3: Christ lives in me.

- A. My Savior is personal.
- B. My Savior provides the power.

IV. Affirmation #4: I live by faith in the Son of God.

- A. To be saved I needed to put my trust in Christ.
- B. To live each day I need to do the same.
 1. I can face the day with confidence because my Savior loved me (and you too).
 2. I can face the day with confidence because my Savior gave Himself for me.

Challenge: Be intentional about gazing at the cross every day in 2020.

We've begun the new year with some messages intended to help maximize God's glory and our joy in 2020. First, make sure you're in the Book every day. Second, make sure the Book is in you every day by meditating on the Scriptures (Psalm 1). Third, embrace a 20:20 ministry. That was last week's message from Acts 20:20. Today we come to another charge. In Galatians 2:20 we see the necessity of gazing at the cross daily.

Scripture Reading: Galatians 2:17-21

I need a fresh look at the cross every day. I'm not talking merely about the wood, but the Person and what happened that day He hung on the tree. I need to see that, to *gaze* on that on a daily basis. If I stop gazing at the cross, all kinds of bad things start happening.

I start seeing the Christian life in terms of just doing good things and avoiding bad things. I start seeing myself as better than others because of how I'm doing and they're *not* doing. I have trouble forgiving people, if I lose sight of the cross, convinced that the sins they've committed against me are far worse than anything I've done. I become irritable and impatient and self-righteous. *I'm a good person. I deserve better than this. You shouldn't do that.*

But a clear sighting of the cross changes that. The cross is not just the place to go to get saved, but once saved, to sit and ponder and wonder.

I've been helped to see this recently while listening to Milton Vincent's series, "Evangelizing Those Who Wrong You."² There's one of the surest ways to tell whether you're gazing at the cross as you ought, how you respond when someone wrongs you.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the series "It's All About Christ" at WBC, 10/4/09.

² <https://www.graceky.org/sermons/evangelizing-those-who-wrong-you-pt-1/>

Vincent, who is a pastor, recounts the painful story of a man who came to see him and confessed that he had been unfaithful to his wife in a multitude of unthinkable ways. By God's grace, the man was repenting and wanted to save his marriage. So, he asked his wife to come and meet with him and their pastor. Vincent said that when she heard only one-tenth of what her husband had done, she got out of her chair and went into the hallway and let out a blood-curdling scream, such was the intensity of her anguish when she learned of his betrayal. Then she returned to her seat almost in shock, as he husband repented and asked for her forgiveness. In that delicate moment Pastor Vincent, knowing she was numb and unable to process the thought of how to move forward with her husband, said, "Forgiveness is a journey. I want to go with you on that journey that will result in forgiveness."

The journey he had in mind was taking her to the cross, where she would begin gazing regularly upon the One who suffered there unjustly for the sins of every person who would ever receive Him, including her own sins. She would also see on that cross One who knew all about betrayal, who Himself let out His blood-curdling, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Eventually she began to affirm something very hopeful. "Christ has suffered as I am suffering right now, and infinitely more so, which means I am never alone in any pain."³

In the course of much time spent gazing at the cross, this woman was so captivated by Christ that she began to express the kind of bold love she saw Him express. She reported to her pastor one week, "I did something last week that you may not approve of. I found the address of one of the women and went to her home. After I knocked on the door and she opened, I handed her a care package and said, "We've never met me before, but I want you to have this and know that Jesus loves you."

That's what (to borrow Vincent's expression) "doing a 360 around the cross" can do for a person. Only the cross has that kind of power. If we want to be like Jesus, we must gaze at His cross regularly and then live in the light of that gaze.

One of the reasons we don't forgive as we ought, says Vincent, is because we feel alone in our pain, and by not forgiving we're trying to bring the offender inside the circle of our pain. But when we gaze at the cross we discover that we are not alone in our circle, for Jesus is "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...surely our griefs He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried (Isa 53:3-4)."

My friend, the cross not only insists that we forgive, but liberates us to do so. In fact, says R.C. Ryle, "A spiteful quarrelsome Christian is a scandal...It is doubtful that such a one has sat at the foot of the cross . . ."⁴

One of the reasons I need regular sightings of the cross is that I have an identity crisis.

An Identity Crisis: Who am I really?

We're so prone to find our identity in places other than the cross. Such as...

1. *We're prone to find our identity in our connections.* Like, our heritage (I'm important because I come from good stock), our friends (I'm important because I belong to the "in" crowd), our clubs or our neighborhood connections (I live in the parade of homes district). It's true. We tend to see ourselves in light of our connections.

2. *We're prone to find our identity in our accomplishments.* Our jobs, for instance (I've got fifty people working under me, so I'm important). Or the trophies on our

³ Milton Vincent, "Evangelizing Those Who Wrong You," session #1.

⁴ <https://www.unlockingthebible.org/marks-of-a-truly-forgiven-person/>

mantle. Or our GPA. Or our kid's trophies or GPA. Quite frankly, we may say "I'm a Christian," but we're so prone to see ourselves through the lens of our accomplishments.

3. *We're prone to find our identity in our possessions.* The house we own, the car we drive, the diplomas that hang on our wall, the title in front of our name, and on it goes. Granted, there's nothing inherently wrong with houses or cars or diplomas, but God does not intend for them to be the basis of nor the driving force behind our identity.

In today's text we're going to see an example of just how prone we are to have an identity crisis, even if we've known Christ for many years. The example is Peter.

Peter was a Christian, no doubt about it, an apostle in fact. And he had announced it publicly and was even willing to go to prison for it, as we see the book of Acts. But then one day he went to church in Antioch and did something that proved he wasn't thinking like a Christian, not that day for sure, and the apostle Paul told him so, too.

Galatians 2:11 indicates that Paul actually opposed Peter to his face publicly. Why? In short, because what Peter said didn't match how Peter was living. Peter was spending some time in Antioch, fellowshiping with the believers there, Jew and Gentile alike. But according to verse 12, when some religious Jews from Jerusalem paid a visit, Peter's fear of man prompted him to segregate from his Gentile brothers. He just picked up his food tray and moved to the other table, and some of the other Jewish believers followed his lead, including Barnabas.

By his actions, Peter split the church into two camps. Ponder that. Peter was a believer in Christ, and yet on this day in Antioch his actions weren't very Christlike. What happened? It was so subtle, for Peter, as for us.

Peter believed that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, the Savior tore down two barriers, first the barrier between the sinner and God, and also the barrier between the sinner and other sinners. And Peter also preached that message (remember his defense of going to the house of Cornelius following the conversion of the Gentiles? See Acts 11:17).

But in Antioch he acted like he didn't believe it. What happened? He lost sight of the cross. When he disassociated himself from the Gentile brethren, he was acting as if the cross never occurred and the dividing wall still in place. As John Stott observes, "The same Peter who had denied his Lord for fear of a maidservant now denied Him again for fear of the circumcision party. He still believed the gospel, but he failed to practice it."⁵

And that's exactly what Paul told him. Notice verse 14, "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

Paul saw this identity crisis and attacked it head on. He saw his brother who was thinking more about his Jewish connections than Christ, his kosher accomplishments than the cross, and his old covenant possessions rather than the new covenant implications. And what Paul saw promoted him to take immediate action.

What's ironic is that there was a time in his life when Paul was the man who avoided Gentiles, and worse. Until he began to see himself in light of the cross.

This is the new identity that Christ gave Paul. It's our identity, too, if we have come to treasure Christ. Galatians 2:20 is sort of Paul's apologetic for defending his actions with Peter. But Galatians 2:20 is also a powerful motivator for gazing at the cross daily, and shows us how to do it. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but

⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 52.

Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” As we walk through the phrases of Galatians 2:20, we discover four affirmations that Paul made, that we need to make on a regular basis.

I. Affirmation #1: I have been crucified with Christ.

Paul is very transparent here. In this one verse he uses the pronoun “I” four times and “me” three times. He begins by affirming something that happened to him in the past that has tremendous present tense implications (he uses a perfect tense verb). “I have been crucified with Christ.”

That’s strange. Crucified victims usually didn’t live to talk about their experience. When you’re crucified, you’re killed. What does Paul mean when he says that he was crucified with Christ? Was he one of the two thieves nailed to a tree next to Jesus? Is he saying that he literally died on a cross? No.

As the context indicates, Paul is talking about being crucified with Christ *to the law*. Remember, he just shared about his confrontation with Peter in Antioch (that’s verses 11-14). When an apostle publicly rebukes another apostle, he’d better have some solid ground for his actions. Paul gives that solid theological ground in verses 15-19, as he discussed the believer’s relationship to the old covenant law.

The question is this. Is the believer free from the law or not? Can he eat unkosher foods with Gentile sinners or not? Certain men from James said *no, he is not and cannot*. But Paul said *yes*, and he rebuked Peter and the rest, insisting that to say *no* was to undermine the very essence of the gospel.

This is an important question for us as well. We don’t keep the ceremonial requirements of the law. Why not? God gave them, didn’t He? Yes. So why aren’t we still bound by them? The answer, says Paul, is that something has happened to the believer’s relationship with the law. Look at verse 19, “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” Paul said I’m not bound by the old covenant law any longer because *I died to the law*.

He died? When did that happen? When did Paul die, and specifically, when did he die to the law which previously bound him? He tells us in verse 20, “I have been crucified with Christ (literally, “With Christ I have been crucified”).”

That’s how Paul saw himself. *I’m a dead man*. That was his identity. What happened to Christ happened to me. *I’ve had nails driven through my hands, and I’ve hung on a cross until my heart stopped beating*. He doesn’t mean literally, and he doesn’t mean mystically, but he does mean in reality. *I have been crucified with Christ*.

Is that the way you view yourself? I must confess that far too often I don’t think in those terms. I don’t go through my day affirming, “I have been crucified with Christ.”

So answer this. Is it possible to be a Christian and not be crucified with Christ?

Galatians 5:24 says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus *have crucified* the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” If you’ve become a Christian, a crucifixion has occurred involving your sinful nature, your flesh. Those who belong to Christ have nailed to the cross their sinful nature.

In Galatians 6:14 Paul says, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world *has been crucified* to me, and I to the world.” I have been crucified to the world, says Paul. I have died, and I boast in the instrument that caused my death. When and how did that happen?

Our next verse is critical, Romans 6:6, “For we know that *our old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be

slaves to sin.” When was my old self crucified? It was crucified *with him*, that is, with Christ.

So, can a person be a Christian and not be crucified with Christ? No. And isn’t that what Jesus said in Mark 8:34? “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself *and take up his cross* and follow me.” He didn’t say, *put a cross necklace around your neck*. He said, *take up your cross*. And every first century hearer knew what that meant. To take up your cross meant you had to die.

Jesus offers us life, my friend, eternal life. In fact, the life He offers is His life as we’ll see momentarily. But Jesus says that to experience His life we must be crucified, that is, we must *die*.

Do you think that the average self-professed Christian in America would agree that when he or she became a Christian, he or she died? I read one survey that said that 73 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian—that’s over 200 million people.⁶

Think about the implications of Paul’s first affirmation. If a Christian is a person who has been crucified with Christ, then the following is not true.

A. I did not become a Christian by adding Christ to my life. Jesus didn’t come to patch up MY life. But isn’t that the expectation that many of the 200 million Americans had when they became a “Christian”?

Think of Sally, for instance, who was overwhelmed with life’s problems. She wanted more peace and fulfillment in her life. “Ask Jesus to come into your heart,” a friend told her. “He’ll give you a new start.” And so Sally asked Jesus to come in and basically added Him to her cluttered life. Is she now a Christian? We can’t answer that question, not definitively, for we can’t see the condition of Sally’s heart. But here’s a question we can answer. Is that how Paul became a Christian, by merely adding Jesus to his life?

Remember the wheel illustration? Does Jesus intend to be a spoke in the wheel of our lives or the hub around which our lives revolve? Here’s another implication.

B. I did not become a Christian by giving my life to Christ. And isn’t that the way gospel invitations are often presented? “Raise your hand, pray this prayer, give your life to Jesus, and you’ll be a Christian heading for heaven.” But wait. Is that what Paul said, let alone Jesus? Do I become a Christian by giving something to Jesus? Please don’t misunderstand. Yes, Jesus deserves our all, and we ought to give our all to Him. But that’s not how we become a Christian. How then? Listen to Paul. He says...

C. I became a Christian on the basis of what Christ did for me. “I have been crucified with Christ.” According to Paul two things happened on the cross.

1. *On the cross, Christ died in my place.* He “loved me and gave himself for me,” Paul says at the end of the verse. A substitution took place on the cross. The wages of my sin is death. And a death occurred. On the cross Christ died in my place.

Paul loves to talk about the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary death, as we see in nearly all of his letters. **Romans 4:25** “He was delivered over to death for our sins.” **Romans 5:8** “While we were still sinners, Christ died *for us*.” **1 Corinthians 15:3** “Christ died for our sins.” **2 Corinthians 5:21** “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.”

It’s true, says Paul. A substitution took place. On the cross, Christ died in my place. But something else happened there, too.

2. *On the cross, I died with Christ.* Not only did Christ die on the cross, but so did I. “I have been *crucified with Christ*.” In a very real sense, I was there with Christ

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_United_States; this is a 2016 figure

on the cross, says Paul. It's called the doctrine of our union with Christ, and it's explained more fully by Paul in Romans 6.

Romans 6:5-8 "If we have been *united with him like this in his death*, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that *our old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if *we died with Christ*, we believe that we will also live with him."

My friend, if you are a Christian today and heading for heaven, this is why. It's not because you've given your life to Christ, nor merely added Him to your life. It's because you died with Him on the cross. That means, by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, you now are putting your trust in Christ and specifically in what He did for you. On the basis of that trust, that faith, God has united you with Christ and given you the merit of His Son's death and resurrection. And so now you can say along with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ."

So the cross isn't just my ticket to heaven. It's my identity, which is why I need to gaze upon that cross every day.

John Bunyan, the 16th century pastor and author of the classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, demonstrates this in the scene that happens right after the pilgrim looked at the cross and his burden rolled away. "Then [Christian] he stood awhile to look and wonder, for he was very surprised that the sight of the cross should ease him of his burden in such a way. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even until the spring in his head sent their waters flowing down his cheeks."⁷

Notice those words. He looked...and looked again. This is the Christian's life, to keep looking at the cross.

Isn't this kind of bizarre, to keep looking at an instrument of torture, and upon which our Leader took His last breath? Not at all. It's actually the most hope-giving activity we'll do in a day's time.

John Stott put it this way, "I myself could never believe in God were it not for the cross.... In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile plays round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time, after a while I have had to look away. And in imagination I have turned instead to the lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged into God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside His immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of His. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross which symbolizes divine suffering."⁸

II. Affirmation #2: I no longer live.

The second affirmation flows out of the first. *I have been crucified with Christ*. If that's true, if I have *been crucified*, if I have *died*, then obviously *I no longer live*.

⁷ John Bunyan. *Pilgrim's Progress*.

⁸ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 335.

But Paul wasn't dead, was he? He was still breathing and moving and writing letters like this one to the Galatians. What does it mean to say, "I no longer live"? He's *not* talking about no longer living physically (sorry for the double negative).

The truth is, Paul saw himself as a man who died on the road to Damascus. When Jesus broke into his life and brought him to his knees, a death occurred. The old Paul died. The Jesus he met that day didn't patch up his self-esteem, but gave him a brand new identity. That's how Paul saw it, how he saw *himself*.

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live. What are the implications of saying that *I no longer live*? I'll mention two.

A. That means I'm not depending on my accomplishments. Did you read the Bible and pray this morning? That's good, but it's not why you're going to heaven. Did you give a generous offering to your Savior today? Again, that's a good thing to do, but it doesn't add one bit of merit to your standing before a holy God. Remember, a Christian is a person who has put his trust in the merit of Christ's accomplishments, and Christ's *alone*, for his right standing with God.

Who do you like to talk about? I'm concerned when I'm with a person who calls himself a Christian who talks about his job, his family, his church work, etc, but seldom says much about Christ. How can this be? If I no longer live, it means I'm not enamored with my accomplishments, but His.

B. That also means I'm not pursuing my agenda. A dead man doesn't have an agenda. He's not working his five year plan. He's dead. To say that *I no longer live* is to affirm that my agenda went to the grave. I have a new agenda now, given to me by the One who gave His life for me.

If we lived in light of this second affirmation, just think of the effect it would have on our marriages. Why do husbands and wives squabble? So often it boils down to conflicting agendas. "I want to use the tax refund to buy a new boat," says the man of the house. "No, I want new furniture," says his bride. *I want. No, I want.* That's a recipe for a fight, for sure (see James 4:1-3).

Now answer this. What is it that people who are *no longer living* want? They don't have an agenda, do they? Beloved, this changes everything, when husbands and wives die to their own agendas and together pursue Christ's agenda.

And that brings us to our third affirmation. *I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live.* Three...

III. Affirmation #3: Christ lives in me.

While I no longer live, there is life within me, His life. *Christ lives in me.* Ponder what that statement reveals to us about our Savior.

A. My Savior is personal. *Christ lives in me.* The person of Jesus Christ, my Creator and Redeemer, lives in me, His redeemed creature. He lives in *me*, a tiny, insignificant, former rebel who is one of seven billion people who inhabit this planet. He lives in *me*.

This was a breathtaking thought to Paul. He, of course, used to be Christ's enemy (as did all of us, says the Bible), but Christ entered his life, *his* life. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," Paul wrote to Timothy, "Of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that *in me*, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life (1 Tim. 1:15-16)."

To say that Christ lives in me is to affirm that my Savior is *personal*. And this...

B. My Savior provides the power. If I've been crucified and no longer live, then who energizes my life? Who makes it possible for me to live the kind of life that pleases God? My Savior does. He provides the power. Christ *lives* in me.

You say, "I thought Christ returned to heaven." He did. "But I thought He was sitting on His Father's heavenly throne." He is. Yet right now the omnipresent Savior is living in you if you've been crucified with Him.

How can that be? Paul gives a fuller explanation in Romans 8:9-11, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, *if the Spirit of God lives in you*. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. *But if Christ is in you*, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And *if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you*, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, *who lives in you*."

Who lives in you? The Spirit does—verse 9. Who is in you? Christ is—verse 10. The Holy Spirit has come to represent Christ in His people. And if the Spirit of Christ is living in you, what follows? He gives life to our mortal bodies—verse 11. Yes, through His Spirit my Savior provides the power.

That's my identity, beloved, and yours too if you have trusted in Christ. And what's true, I must affirm. And what I affirm, I must appropriate in my daily life.

And that brings us to the fourth affirmation. One, *I have been crucified with Christ*. Two, *I no longer live*. Three, *Christ lives in me*.

IV. Affirmation #4: I live by faith in the Son of God.

Notice how Paul finishes the verse, "The life I live in the body (the Greek is *en sarki*; ESV & KJV 'in the flesh'), I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

That's interesting. In his second affirmation Paul said, *I no longer live*. But now he says he does live, "The life I live." Is that a contradiction? No. Here are two truths that work in balance. To say that *I no longer live* could lead to passivity if taken out of context, as the "Let go and let God" approach tends to do. Paul did not live a passive life. He strategized. He made plans. He worked hard in carrying out those plans, as three missionary journeys in the book of Acts verify. He died, yes, but he also *lived*.

The question is, how did he live? Was it by his own strength and for his own agenda? No, if that was the case he might have separated from the Gentiles along with Peter. No, Paul died to that, he was *crucified* to that. How then did he live? Hear his answer: *The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God*. Because of what happened on the cross, Paul died to a merit-based life, and began living a faith-based life.

And who was the object of his faith? Did Paul face the challenges of his day by looking deep within his soul and believing in himself? "You can do it, Paul! You can solve that problem. You can fix that relationship. You can conquer that habit. You can accomplish that project. You just need to believe in yourself!" While that's the kind of counsel you might hear in your company pep-talks, and you'll certainly read it in the self-help books, it was not Paul's approach to life. The object of his faith was not himself.

Who was it then? He tells us. *I live by faith in the Son of God*. He says he put his faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He's not talking now about faith for past tense salvation, but about faith for present tense living.

Think carefully now. Yes, it's true that...

A. To be saved I needed to put my trust in Christ. “For by grace are you saved *through faith*,” says Ephesians 2:8. My Christian life began the day I put my faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That’s faith past tense. But it doesn’t stay in the past.

B. To live each day I need to do the same. I need to affirm with Paul, *I live by faith in the Son of God*. That’s present tense faith. And that’s what I need when I face that challenge at work, or go to work on that nasty habit that displeases my God. The solution isn’t to believe in myself, but *in Him*.

“Isn’t that kind of risky?” you ask. And you ask that because you’ve been burnt by trusting others in the past. It’s a valid question. Why should I stop trusting in myself and put my total faith in a person I can’t even see?

Let’s let Paul answer the question. Why, Paul, why do you do it? What motivates you every day to put your wholehearted trust in Christ? His answer? “I live by faith in the Son of God *who loved me and gave himself for me*.”

There are the reasons, two of them. Paul says he entrusted his life to Christ every day because of what he knew about Christ. The first reason—He loved me. And the second—He gave Himself for me.

There’s the key to confident living. It’s not looking within yourself. It’s looking to Christ, and meditating on what He has done for you. Let’s follow Paul’s example here.

1. *I can face the day with confidence because my Savior loved me (and you too)*. I say, “you too,” because that’s where Peter got off track. He forgot that Jesus loved the Gentiles too, which is why separating from them warranted Paul’s rebuke. How can you refuse to eat with people who are loved by the very same Savior? But there’s more...

2. *I can face the day with confidence because my Savior (our Savior) gave Himself for me (for us)*. Once again Paul is gazing at the cross, and on that cross He sees the Savior who died in my place, for my benefit, *for me*.

Let’s be honest. This world is fractured. We see it in the impeachment trials, as well educated people can’t even speak civilly to each other. We see it in the breakdown of the family. We see it increasing racial tensions. What’s the answer to all this? What has the power to change the human heart so that people who hate each other can begin to love?

John Perkins discovered the answer⁹. Perkins was a civil rights activist whose brother was killed by the town marshal in small town Mississippi, who himself was beaten and filled with rage toward white men. He shares what happened to him in that hospital:

“The Spirit of God worked on me as I lay in that bed. An image formed in my mind. The image of the cross – Christ on the cross. It blotted out everything else in my mind. This Jesus knew what I had suffered. He understood. And He cared. Because He had experienced it all Himself. This Jesus, this One who had brought good news directly from God in heaven, had lived what He preached. Yet He was arrested and falsely accused. Like me, He went through an unjust trial. He also faced a lynch mob and got beaten. But even more than that, He was nailed to rough wooden planks and killed. Killed like a common criminal. At the crucial moment, it seemed to Jesus that even God Himself had deserted Him. The suffering was so great, He cried out in agony. He was dying.

“But when He looked at that mob who had lynched Him, He didn’t hate them. He loved them. He forgave them. And He prayed God to forgive them, ‘Father, forgive these people, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ His enemies hated. But Jesus forgave. I couldn’t get away from that . . . It’s a profound, mysterious truth –

⁹ I heard his story this week as told by Milton Vincent.

Jesus' concept of love overpowering hate. I may not see its victory in my lifetime. But I know it's true. I know it's true, because it happened to me. On that bed, full of bruises and stitches – God made it true to me. He washed my hatred away and replaced it with a love for the white man in rural Mississippi. I felt strong again. Stronger than ever. What doesn't destroy me will make me stronger. I know it's true. Because it happened to me."¹⁰

Those words are stunning, aren't they? *He washed my hatred away and replaced it with a love for the white man in rural Mississippi.* What caused that change to occur? Perkins says it happened when he gazed at the cross.¹¹

When I look at the cross, I'm reminded that I too am a sinner. As Rebecca Manley Pippert says, "Dust, rusty nails and blood notwithstanding, the ground at the foot of the cross is the only vantage point from which to view life clearly. To see things there is to see them truly."¹²

This is what I see when I gaze at the cross. Two things.¹³ One, a man dying. Two, me killing Him! That's what Isaiah 53 says, "He was pierced for our transgressions." Peter preached, "You nailed Him to the cross." Therefore, I am a murderer of the Son of God. At the cross I see the core of sin, the murder of God.

So when I find myself thinking, "Lord, I'm really mad at that person. I can't forget what they did," the cross humbles me. The cross says to me that my sin against God is far worse than that person's sin against me. When I minimize my sin, I am minimizing Christ and what He endured on the cross.¹⁴

I see myself most clearly when I'm gazing at the cross.

Challenge: Be intentional about gazing at the cross every day in 2020.

Here are some suggestions.

1. Memorize verses about the cross. Start with Galatians 2:20. Meditate on it each day. Make the four affirmations.
2. Sing a hymn about the cross every morning before you leave the house. As you do it will help you think about your sins that He took upon Himself on the cross.
3. Read good books about the cross. Like CJ Mahaney's *The Cross Centered Life*. Or Milton Vincent's *The Gospel Primer*. I have a dozen, and if you'll read it, pick one up on the way out.

¹⁰ From John Perkins, quoted in *Colossians & Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, R. Kent Hughes.

¹¹ To get to paragraph two, Perkins had to experience paragraph one. In the words of the hymnwriter, Charles Gabriel, "He took my sins and my sorrows. He made them His very own."

¹² Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reasons*, 172.

¹³ As observed by Milton Vincent.

¹⁴ <https://www.graceky.org/sermons/evangelizing-those-who-wrong-you-pt-2/>