

Christ's Love Compels Us

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[0 : 0 0] asked me to go and visit the three villages where new churches had been planted in a sense out of the gifts of the Australian church. Through CMS we'd supported an evangelist pastor to work in this area where nobody had worked and there was no Christian presence some years previously.

And so I was very excited about getting out to this area right on the border of India and visiting these villages. And as I came to each of these little congregations, they built for themselves, in some cases a mud brick church and in some cases a proper brick church with just a hardened floor.

I kept saying to myself, well, have these people really understood the gospel? And out of their Islamic background, do they really know what it's about?

So I tried to work out how could I find this out without looking as if I was somehow interrogating them. And I decided the best way is because on each occasion they got all their children together and they sat them on the floor and then the adults around them that I would question the children.

And if ever I visit your home and you see me questioning your children, you'll know why. Because I reckon that if the children understand it, then the parents do. And so I asked the children about Easter because Easter had only just occurred some weeks before.

[1 : 2 8] What happened on Good Friday? What happened on Easter Day? And so on. And they answered all the questions perfectly well. So I was encouraged. But on the other hand, Easter had only just occurred.

And so it was all probably fresh in their minds. So I was trying to work out how can I get a little deeper and really see if they really understand it. So I asked the question, how do you know that Jesus is alive today?

And one nine-year-old boy sitting right in the middle of this group was the first to put his hand up. So I asked him. He said, because the Bible tells me so and Jesus is alive in me.

And all of the adults sitting around all clapped their hands. They were so thrilled at the response. And what a joy that here we are in this Islamic context and yet they'd grasped the fact that not only was Jesus alive, but he was alive in him.

Because in Islamic teaching, Jesus, Easter, as he's known in the Koran, is indeed in heaven with God. He never actually went to the cross because he was such a great prophet that God wouldn't allow him to have died on the cross.

[2 : 4 0] And he's there watching everything that you do and is the Messiah and will come again to judge the world. And you see, that's not all that far removed from Christian teaching. After all, Islam has just simply taken bits and pieces out of Judaistic Christian teaching.

But of course, it's distorted it. And in particular, it's dropped the cross. There is no cross. Yes, somebody did die on the cross, but died in the place of Jesus.

Probably Joseph of Arimathea is one of their theories. And so the whole idea, of course, of salvation, of the grace of God, of forgiveness, all of that is missing. And so my concern was, had they really grasped that difference?

But another aspect that sometimes people seem not to quite absorb is the impact of the gospel in my life now. It isn't just that I'm looking for an insurance policy, which is what Islam is doing, sort of saying, you know, I want to be sure that, well, I'd like to be sure anyway, that when I get to the point of death that I will go to heaven.

And of course, the Islamic teaching is that God has watched everything I've done and he'll weigh up all the good and the bad. And I'm hoping I've done enough good things to outweigh the bad things and I'll be there.

[3 : 55] But the impact of God in my life now is unknown in all of the world religions. And so to actually have this boy say, yes, Jesus is alive in me, was an exciting fact.

He knew that Jesus was at work in him here and now. And when Jesus gave the instruction to go into all the world with the gospel, at that point of time, all of the major religions of the world existed.

Now granted, you say, well, Islam didn't. No, but Islam is really, as I've just said, a deteriorated form of bits and pieces of Jewish and Christian teaching. Sikhism also is a modern religion, but it's just taken out of Hinduism and Islam.

Islam, you might say, well, what about the New Age forms of spirituality? But basically that's come out of Hinduism. So you can still say, really, that the religions of the world were all there.

In fact, there are many more divinities that people were following after in the Greek-speaking world in which Jesus walked than exist today. You can see, of course, the remnants of that if you visit the monuments of Greece, either in Greece or the British Museum.

[5 : 08] They're all there. So Jesus was quite clear. Yes, all of these religions do exist, but they are the product of human imagination. God has come to this world.

And, of course, we know that unless God reveals himself to us, we will never know who he is or what he is like. But not only that, that he has come to impact our lives in the here and now.

So as Paul then took that message around the Mediterranean countries, he had to deal with that issue as well because of all the plethora of divinities that were there.

And I'm finding that as I move about this country, that I'm dealing with it. That people are constantly saying to me, yes, but God is a loving God. Surely it doesn't matter what religion a person has grown up in.

If they're devout, then surely they will be acceptable to God. But, of course, in one sense, I'm glad to say I'm not God and I'm not the judge of all the world and I cannot predict how God will function except what God has told me or what God has told you, what God has revealed in his word, in other words.

[6 : 21] And he's made it very clear that Jesus, in his own words, has said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me. And, of course, I can quote many other texts and I'm sure you know many others such as, for instance, Peter in front of the Sanhedrin making it very clear that there is no other name by which people can be saved.

And Paul, of course, is dealing with the same issue because the Corinthians to whom he was writing, as we are about to look at 2 Corinthians, were in this context of a plethora of religious attitudes.

They had up on the high hill next to them a temple to Zeus. They had down there below in the town of Corinth itself a temple to some of the other divinities.

They were used to a multi-religious society and we have a multicultural society and so it's politically correct in this society to give everybody their due and say, well, as we respect, as indeed we should respect, all cultures and people of all languages and races, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we have a multi-legal system.

We don't have all the laws of different countries applicable here and you can choose whichever set of laws you happen to like to live under, although there is some pressure for that. Nor do we have to therefore have a multi-religious position in terms of what God has revealed.

[7 : 51] That doesn't mean to say we're against people following their own religion. That's up to them. But it does not mean that we therefore say that all religions lead to heaven.

We don't know what other religions lead to. All we know is what is revealed and what God has said. There can't be half a dozen gods, otherwise the word God loses its meaning.

There can only be one eternal being, eternal supreme being, creator of all the world, and that person is either a person or an idea and we don't know what he or it is unless he or it somehow reveals himself.

And God has revealed himself and made it very clear that he is a person, that he's created us in his own image so that we can relate to him and that he's made it possible for us to relate to him by what Christ has done on the cross.

So Paul is carrying that, if you like, burden with him as he's trying to preach the gospel across the Mediterranean countries, trying to make it very clear why he is preaching that there is only one way to God in Christ.

[9 : 00] And bearing in mind he wasn't only preaching to people of Greek religious or Roman religious background but indeed to Jews who after all believed in the coming Messiah, who believed that God had revealed himself and from whom we have inherited the teaching of the Old Testament and the words of the prophets.

And yet he's making clear to them too that unless you as good Jews here in this synagogue also turn to Christ, that then you are missing out on the route that God has provided to be in a right living eternal relationship with him here and now and forever.

But Paul had an extra little burden to carry and that was that in those days the people were very used to the orator. The orator would come into town, preach in the marketplace, he had to be well dressed with nicely combed hair but in particular he had to be able to preach, to speak well.

Philosophical material which demonstrated that he could be a great teacher, that he had a great message to give and he would attract then out of the crowd some pupils who would then pay to become his disciples and he would then teach them in that place or maybe a nearby town for the next maybe six months sometimes some would go on for a couple of years.

That's how he earned his income. And so the Corinthians who were used to this able preachers standing up sort of said, well Paul, what sort of a guy are you? You're just an orator.

[10 : 32] You're just coming and you want disciples to follow you so that you can earn your income. And so Paul's having to tackle in a sense a religious problem and a social problem at the same time.

Well perhaps you'll open up your Bibles again to 2 Corinthians and chapter 5 and have that in front of you now. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 11. And you'll see how Paul is responding to both of these issues at the same time.

Verse 11. Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord. We try to persuade everyone. What is plain is plain to God and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.

We're not trying to commend ourselves to you again. See, they're dealing with the orator problem. but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us.

An interesting thing of saying, you know, you want to have pride in the orator because he's good looking and a good speaker. No, we don't want you to do that. I'm not here as an orator. But I would like you to have pride in yourselves.

[11 : 41] I think to contextualise that to this congregation, what Paul would say if he was standing here today is, I would like you to have pride in this, your church. which I'm sure you actually do have.

But may I encourage you in that. That you're thrilled with this congregation, with this church, with your pastoral team because together as God's people here you love to bring people in.

In other words, you have a sense of pride that you can talk to a neighbour or to someone that you're working with or someone you can take out and have a cup of coffee with that you have a sense of pride to say, please come to church with me because you know that this is an appropriate and a proper place to bring an outside person and you know that the word of God will be taught and that they will hear the word of God in a context that is warm and welcoming which is I think an important aspect of being God's people together.

So Paul's saying yes, I want you to have pride in yourself. I want you as a congregation here at Holy Trinity to be proud of your congregation and to want to bring people in. And then he goes on to say verse let me catch up with myself verse 13 if we are out of our mind it is for the sake of God coming back to himself he said I'm not here to commend myself in fact of anything you may think I'm mad I'm functioning as a madman for the sake of the gospel and I don't mind if you think that I'm mad as I preach the gospel but if I am in my right mind it is for you in other words if I am functioning in a way that is acceptable it is for your sake because verse 14 for Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died Christ's love compels or in some translations constrains us had a double meaning one it constrains me from trying to promote myself as a great orator

I'm not here trying to promote myself and disciples to follow me and pay for me etc that's not why I'm here the love of Christ constrains me from that but also the love of Christ constrains me with a direction I have a job to do and although that job may not be easy because you have the temple of Zeus up there on the top of that hill and the other temple down below and because in the Greek mind it is right and possible to talk about religion in a philosophical way and yet I'm talking about only one way that God has come to us and it is the love of God his grace and love the love expressed for us particularly on the cross that pushes me that constrains or compels me to make that message known I cannot just simply sit around and enjoy it for myself others must know about it as well but then as he moves on he explains that it has an impact on us verse 15 he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again now that's the basic sort of overarching point that once Christ has come into your life it changes you that you no longer live for yourself you're no longer constrained just to be living a comfortable life you are constrained by Christ's love to in fact live for him and just to make the point a little stronger in a couple of more verses he draws it out verse 17 for instance that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation you see the impact of Christ's life now of Christ living in me isn't just a question of my future status but is an immediate impact in my life verse 19

[15 : 33] God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting our sins against us and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation we have a job to do so you see in a variety of ways the gospel impacts my life now and that makes an enormous difference that we're not just concerned with something in the future let me give you an example come with me if you would to Northern Territory to Arnhem Land and CMS first sent missionaries from Victoria up there nearly 100 years ago and the very first place they went to was a place called Roper River now called Nkir and they went there because this was a safe place to bring Aborigines from all over the north eastern corner of Northern Territory whose life was a threat due to the white farmers who when they got into the pub at the end of the day would often joke about how many kangaroos and Aborigines they'd shot that day we have a terrible history of treating

Aborigines and so CMS was asked to go there and bring a place of rescue and safety as a result Aborigines came from various parts of Northern Territory all with their different languages and so we didn't have one language and therefore a new language developed known as Creole which today is now the most widely spoken language among Aborigines of the whole of North West Australia as well as Northern Territory and North Queensland so the people of this area are more westernised in some way than the other communities of Arnhem Land where we also have missionaries but where they all have their own language and so I wanted to tell you about Ray now Ray is his real name because they all have western names there as a result of this language change and Ray like many other young men has nothing to do during the day there is no economic base in Arnhem Land very removed from other towns so economically there's no work for them so what do you do with yourself and you've got nothing to do well unfortunately young men particularly tend to drink alcohol leads to violence and so we have enormous problems with violence on this occasion the policeman came to arrest

Ray because the previous day he'd been very violent towards some people and caused them some pain and they complained to the police so as the policeman turned up and announced Ray's about to arrest him Ray grabbed his hunting gun and shot him actually it took a few seconds for the policeman to realise that he wasn't yet dead in fact something had happened to the trigger mechanism and it actually didn't the bullet didn't come out of the gun it actually fired but nothing happened which is rather an amazing story but that's how it is and so when the policeman realised that he wasn't dead he then arrested Ray now of course not only for violence but for attempted murder and put him into the small cell that they have there waiting for the magistrate to come round for his monthly round and then in due course brought him before the magistrate now Ray had already suffered from mandatory sentencing of which I'm sure you're well aware and he'd been in jail twice now if you get caught on mandatory sentencing a third time that means you're in jail on that occasion for a year but actually if you attempt to shoot somebody or in fact kill somebody you don't come under mandatory sentencing believe it or not mandatory sentencing seem to be for stealing boroughs or some stupid little thing like that but if you actually do something really serious then it's up to the judge to do whatever he thinks is appropriate well this particular magistrate who actually is a member of the cathedral in Darwin and has some wisdom about him

I'm glad to say said to Ray well Ray this is a very serious charge and really I had to put you away for at least three years and probably longer for attempted murder but he said I want to give you a chance to think about it because I think you should come back to me with some sort of a case give me some argument why did you attempt to kill a policeman so I will put you on parole for this month and when I'm back here next month then I want you to give me a statement and then I'll decide what the sentence will be and so Ray was able to leave the court and his wife he's only married Miranda just a month before he went with her walking back to their home and he said to Miranda you know jail actually isn't too bad I've always enjoyed it because after all you get well fed we all play football together in the afternoon we have jobs to do in the morning it's an organised life it's much better than living out here in Nukur but now that I'm married to you I don't really want to leave you and certainly three months would be alright but three years is a bit too long so he was really quite sad for the first time he admits well as the evening started to come near

Miranda said well Ray look why don't we go up to night fellowship now some years ago we developed in all of our communities Monday to Friday night fellowship which occurs in the big grassed area right in the middle of the community and some of the young men who do not get involved I'm glad to say in alcohol or sniffing petrol are involved in leading it they have their guitars they sing songs and hymns and the pastor gives a message and quite often some of the lay people give a message in fact more people go to night fellowship than go to church on Sunday church being very uncultural you know all sitting like this in rows is not really fit the aboriginal lifestyle whereas sitting on the grass in various groupings where you don't see certain people you're not allowed to see for various reasons fits them much better so it's really quite an effective mechanism and so Ray said okay well we'll go to night fellowship if you haven't been there for a long time as they got close to the grassed area

[21 : 52] Ray said oh I don't want to think I don't want any of my friends seeing me sitting down there let's sit on the veranda of the shop there's just the one shop that the community has and it's right next to this grassed area and on the veranda during the day old people sit there and chat to each other through the day so Ray Miranda sat on the veranda of the shop and watched the event well then they went home and the next day Miranda said to Ray well you know that was really lovely last night I just loved hearing those hymns again can we go again tonight so Ray said oh well I suppose so so they went up again the next night and this time Miranda said I want to sit on the grass tonight and so they did in among the crowd and Goomboli the pastor a wonderful man who's ministered the word of God there now for many years and if you ever think of praying for Aborigines I'd ask you to pray for Goomboli because he has a tremendous ministry gave a very clear gospel presentation and he doesn't always ask for people to come forward on this night he did and down here on the side he said you know where it's a little bit darker would you come down and chat with me if you would like to and like that

Ray just stood up and went straight down across the crowd to that spot Miranda scrambled up as fast as she could and chased after him and joined him and Goomboli led them both to the Lord and he said now during the day we three times a week we have Bible study I'd like you to come and join that and of course as they don't have anything to do during the day that's a good thing to do and so he did and so right through that month he came to the Bible studies and he really grew in Christ so when it came to the court case Goomboli went with Ray and he presented to the magistrate the fact that this man's life has been changed he is a new creation and I'm pleased to say that the magistrate with his Christian background could recognize that that person who allows Christ in his life is a changed person so he said well look I'll put you on parole for these three years and you continue to grow in Christ and so Ray did not go to jail and he's continued to grow he's been into Nungalinya the theological college for some training and he told me last time I was with him that his mother was very ill hospital and he had to go into

Darwin to see her and some of his mates would yell out across the road say hooray you're back in Darwin come and drink with us and he said at that moment he really felt that temptation no one else was around nobody would know if he went and had a drink with them and yet if he did that would take him back down the wrong track again and he said he knew that it was God's strength in him that the Holy Spirit was enabling him to say no I'm sorry I can't come and he said that to me was a real test that I am a changed person now isn't it a thrill to see lives change and no doubt each of us here could tell a story out of our own life or maybe somebody else's life where we've seen that change and that is the impact of the gospel we're not just simply wanting people to get them right for death although deathbed evangelism is a very effective form of evangelism I might say and we do want people to know they're going to be with God forever in heaven but the big reason why we're presenting the gospel now is that we want to see changed lives now and that's what Paul was on about at the time he wanted to see the lives of those

Corinthians changing and he had some agony with them because he didn't see that there was enough change going on that they weren't really opening themselves up to the teaching of God's word they were not allowing the Holy Spirit to be fully at work in them and so he is arguing for that point but he's also arguing for another point and that is that they've got a job to do and so in verse back to say verse 16 and 17 so from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view though we once regarded Christ in this way we do so no longer and that's he's dealing with the old problem of the worldly way of looking at an orator etc but if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old is gone the new has come all this is from God see the point this is God's revelation to us it's not just the inheritance of sages of the past or ideas that people have dreamt up as to what the divinities might be like it is

God who has come to us and he has reconciled us to himself through Christ and ultimately we have the prophets we have the word of God but particularly we have Christ who has walked this earth so we can be absolutely certain that God is a person that he relates to us indeed that he has reconciled us to himself and here's where the crunch now comes and he has given us the ministry of reconciliation now in case you haven't quite grasped that point he goes on that God was reconciling the world himself in Christ not counting our sins against us and he's committed to us the message of reconciliation you got the point well if you haven't apparently Christians are a bit slow next verse we are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us and so we implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God so three times he's making the point that the consequences of having

[27 : 36] Christ in your life is that we are to be bearers of that message of reconciliation that we are to be ambassadors for Christ in this world so you see we are a new creation our lives are being changed and we are to represent that to the world others are to know about it and there's no point saying well you know I have this devout Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim or Sikh living next door to me in fact as one person has said to me recently here my neighbour is so devout he's far more devout than I am I really can quite certain he's going to heaven well I don't know whether he's going to heaven or not but I do know he hasn't got Christ in his life and I do know that it's very clear that God has called me and therefore you as the neighbour to share the message of reconciliation with that person and we're not in a position of making a judgement but we are in a position of sharing the good news and we have no choice to do anything but to do that and when people do grasp the gospel and see the change in their life it does have a big impact and as I meet with people in various countries so often they will come and tell me what an enormous change it's made I think particularly of one old man in Nepal I hope some of you can come back tonight and hear Mark and Jenica speak about

Nepal who said to me having been a Christian at this point about two years he said David you will never understand the burden of puja puja is the Hindi word for prayers or worship to the divinities you do this thing you get up early in the morning you have a little bell on your tray of food and flowers you're going to give to the divinity to wake the gods up in the hope they might hear you you have no idea if they hear you you have no idea if they'll ever respond it's a burdensome life but now that I've discovered God in Christ to know that he hears me in my language to know that he lives in me to know that he is changing and transforming my life it is such a wonderful change you see people do want to become Christians once they've discovered the gospel I've just returned from Egypt and I'm feeling the cold here straight away and in the church that I was preaching afterwards people said to me when you come back to

Australia will you ask people in Australia please pray for us we have a Muslim identity card because you're given an identity card from birth with your birth religion and if you're a Muslim you cannot change it and they've become Christians and to become a Christian in Egypt from a Muslim background is extremely difficult and your life is constantly under threat and you say well why bother why don't you stick with your Muslim root after all you believe in one God but you talk to those people they say there's no way I want to stay a Muslim there's no way I want to live the legal life and the life of never knowing whether there's a God who really cares about me to actually discover not only that there is a God but he's actually in my life that he's actually changing me that he's actually creating me to be like him is such a wonderful change please pray that we survive or try to survive in a very hostile environment please pray for Christians around the world many of them in hostile settings many of them being killed as you probably know in

Maluka Islands in Indonesia in southern Sudan in Nigeria are probably the three worst places at the moment where people are dying for Christ why they could so easily change but who wants to change than the great knowledge of a transformed life in Christ let us pray father we're overwhelmed by the fact that you want us to take this message of reconciliation out to the world each of us with our own weaknesses indeed with our own sin and yet we know that we stand before you forgiven reconciled growing to be Christ like because of the working of your Holy Spirit in us today and so we give you praise and thanks for that and so we pray to for the working of your Holy Spirit to give us the strength to be bearers of this message of reconciliation to be your ambassadors we're not orators Lord but we pray that as we have a chance to sip coffee with someone or to talk with a workmate that your spirit will just put the right words on our lips so that that person may know something of the great love that you have a love that compels us a love that can change their lives we pray this in your name amen you you you you you you you you you