

July 26, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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THE LIFE I NOW LIVE
Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20). This is one of the better known verses in the Bible. It is a favorite for many people, easily and often memorized. It is the life's verse for some Christians because it succinctly explains the new walk in Christ's power.

However, this verse made up of two short sentences is profound in its theological significance, especially as it instructs the follower of Christ in the matter of everyday living. We so easily attempt to live according to our own power, our own inner strength, our own discipline, and our own interpretation of what constitutes righteousness. Before us is one of the major foundation blocks for successful Christian living.

Backdrop to a Very Important Principle (2:11-21).

The background for this most important statement about Christian living unfolds a problem at the Church in Antioch. Most Bible students are familiar with the statement that the followers of Christ were first called "Christians" at Antioch.

We know from Church history in Acts that the first obvious impact of the gospel to the Gentiles began with God sending Peter to Cornelius at Caesarea (Acts 11:1-18). The next thing we read in the history of the beginning of the Church is how the gospel went to Syrian Antioch, a Gentile city 300 miles north of Jerusalem. *But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to*

Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:20-26).

Those who believed the gospel and followed Christ acted so much like Christ they were named for Him. From that assembly, God sent out Paul and Barnabas to spread the gospel and plant churches all over modern-day Turkey and even into Greece. *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3).*

But people are people. And Christian people are still people inside. Therefore, we are not too surprised to read that the people who were called Christians in Antioch did not always act like Christ. In the context of our statement in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, he related an incident about legalism that happened in the church in Antioch. *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Galatians 2:11-14).*

This event might be the one described on the Church History timeline in Acts 15:1. *But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question (Acts 15:1-2).*

We can tell from the context in Galatians two that the situation involved a meal at a gathering of believers. This could have been just an ordinary meal. The scrupulous Jews would have been taught that to eat a meal with a Gentile would render them ceremonially unclean. Devout Jews had learned to be discriminatory to the extreme.

But worse than that kind of discrimination is the fact that this was probably a love feast. The early Church practiced a special meal in connection with the Lord’s supper that emphasized the unity in God’s grace through Christ. It is a bit ironic that this meal seemed to bring the lack of unity among God’s people to the surface. Such was the case in Antioch. Such was the case in Corinth. Paul chided the Christians, *“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not” (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).*

Causing division based on perception and practice of preferred laws has been a perennial problem as it was in the first-century Church. There were those who had been schooled in Mosaic ceremonial law. In their lifetime, they had offered multiplied sacrifices that were supposed to point to Christ’s final sacrifice for sin. It is likely that the professing Jewish converts abandoned those sacrifices trusting the work of Christ “mostly” to save them.

But even though they no longer offered sacrifices for sin, and though they claimed Christ to be their Savior, still they insisted that some works of the law were necessary in order to be born again. In particular circumcision became such an identifier that the law keepers could not get past it. Luke recorded how *some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).* Paul pointed out how this attitude and insistence became a false gospel. *As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:9).*

It was an obvious problem and the Church leaders addressed it. They didn’t kick the can down the road but called for a meeting to deal with the issue. At that meeting *some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).* Also at that meeting it seems pretty clear that Peter had gained understanding from Paul’s rebuke at Antioch. *And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:7-11).*

The counsel of Church leaders arrived at a God-revealed conclusion and wrote the same in a letter to the Gentile Churches. *“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell” (Acts 15:28-29).*

Notice that there are three areas in particular which the Church leaders requested abstinence. They asked the Gentile believers to *abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols.* That was certainly a

questionable practice that also generated much debate because it involved interaction with spiritual issues like demons. Paul called it out when he told the Corinthians, “*No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons*” (1 Corinthians 10:20). At the same time, some Gentile Christians would have no conscience against it (1 Corinthians 10:23-30).

Second, the Church leaders requested the Gentile believers to *abstain from blood, and from what has been strangled*. Now that might have been considered a questionable practice. However, that issued was addressed directly in the Law God gave to Moses for His people. *Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh* (Deuteronomy 12:23). It was also the rule God gave to Noah even before the law (Genesis 9:4), which makes it a bit universal and timeless.

Third, the Gentile Christians were to *abstain from sexual immorality*. That one is quite clearly prohibited, being a much repeated statement from God’s moral law. The Old Testament, the New Testament, and Christ’s teaching all address that issue multiple times. It was not debatable or questionable in the least.

So we find three statements in the Church leaders’ rules. One a debatable practice of life. The second one would be debatable to Gentiles but not to Jews. The third one should not be debatable to anyone. So how do we Christians decide which rules to follow? How do we discern between debatable, somewhat debatable, and non-debatable? How do we decide what to do in life?

The Principle (2:20)

Step one is to admit, *I have been crucified with Christ*. I need to come to grips with the reason why I need to be crucified. I need to recognize myself as being crucified with Christ because God’s law kills. How so? God’s law, both the ceremonial aspect and the moral aspect, reveals the character of God to us. It reveals that God is altogether holy and free from sin. It reveals, therefore, that we miss God’s standard of righteousness by miles. It reveals that we are all guilty of being and doing what offends God.

That is the purpose of God’s Law through Moses. The law is the school master to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The law is intended to help us see that we are cursed by it for not keeping it. *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them”* (Galatians 3:10).

We who have been born again have experienced that very process. We know what it is like to be knocked down by conviction because we break God’s law. We, like Paul, can all acknowledge that, *“I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died”* (Romans 7:9). We understand the perfection of the law. We understand our own sinfulness exposed by the law. We sense the guilt of sin exposed.

But we also understand and fully believe Christ’s work to remove us from the curse of the law. Christ died to fulfill the law. A few verses later in this letter, Paul taught that *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13). Christ did not die as a martyr to a lost cause. Christ was not crucified to set an example for us to live sacrificially. Rather, in eternity before God ever created anything, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determined that God the Son would shed His blood to provide the price that fulfills all the requirements of the law. The impossible requirements of the perfect law have been fulfilled in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

What Christ accomplished in relation to the law is why I need to understand my identification with Christ’s work. When the law of God brought me up short, I understood my unpayable debt to the law. I understand that Christ paid it for me. Therefore, I am completely identified with Christ’s death for payment of my debt. Again in chapter three of this letter Paul wrote, *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe* (Galatians 3:22).

The person who has that faith in Christ’s finished work is the one Jesus described as His follower. There should be little doubt about the character of Christ’s followers, because He Himself defined it for us. *And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23).

To take up the cross is to completely identify with the shame of Christ's crucifixion. It is complete, thorough identification with Christ's crucifixion for my redemption. That is what "I am crucified with Christ" means.

That is also why I no longer live. *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.* The statement "I" no longer live is significant in that it alerts us to the fact that there are seven personal pronouns (*I, me*) found in this one verse (Galatians 2:20). Not one of them exalts the individual. All of them point to the death, the sacrifice, the inconsequential nature of the person for whom Christ died.

The lesson is clear. For the person who Christ has redeemed through His crucifixion, life is no longer about me. In my pre-conversion life, I was all that mattered. The natural-born sinner will follow Eve's choice to live for their own benefit and glory. *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate (Genesis 3:6).*

Being crucified with Christ makes us sensitive to the fact that we have died to our natural desires. The difficult part is living like we have died to the flesh. We need continual admonishing to keep the desires of the flesh in the grave. We need to be taught Paul's statement to the Roman Christians frequently. *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:11-14).*

I consider myself to be crucified with Christ, but at the same time I realize that Christ is living in and through me. Through this unification, Christ provides the strength, the wisdom to stay dead to fleshly desires and alive to Him. He is living in me. That is exactly what Jesus taught us when He commanded, *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4).*

Because He is abiding in us, we must understand that we are abiding in Him. We forget that reality so easily. But Christ in us is

our hope. *To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).* Christ in us is our strength. Therefore, Christians do not dig deeper, try harder to stay dead to law, sin, and self. Rather, we learn how to live by faith.

Paul described what crucified with Christ-life looks like. *And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* According to this truth, on one hand, we do live in the flesh. We live real lives – in the flesh. At times we wish we could be transported to a fully spiritual level where the flesh no longer plagues us. The flesh is weak, given to wrong desires, prone to respond to the powers of this world. We live with constant challenge. We must continually identify fleshly motives and desires and then die to those desires. That is to learn how to just say, "No." On the other hand, we live for Christ's glory, identified with Him and His work for us.

How do we do that? We live by faith. Maybe you remember the old gospel song titled *Living by Faith*. It appears that the chorus of that song describes what it means to live by faith. It goes like this:

Living by faith

In Jesus above

Trusting, confiding

In His great love

Safe from all harm

In His sheltering arm

I'm living by faith

And feel no alarm – Squire Parsons

As is always true for the Christian, Christ and His finished work is the object of my faith. But more important is that "faith" in this statement is identified by the definite article (**the** faith). This is a particular kind of faith. This is justifying or saving faith. This is the faith that God graciously grants to those who experience the miracle of regeneration. This is the gift of faith Paul described to Christians in Ephesus. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).* This means that Christ's sacrifice has given me all the resources I need to die to self and live for Him.

Paul acknowledged that he lived by the faith that Christ's sacrifice won for him. We live by **the faith of** *the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*. Faith to trust Him is the gift God the Son won for me at the cross. He gave Himself for me. He gave Himself because He loved me. And we will spend eternity plumbing the depths of this incredible love.

Christ gave the ultimate sacrifice when He was crucified. He laid down His love because He loves His people. By laying down His life, He won deliverance from sin for us. Being delivered from sin, I should identify wholly, completely with Christ's sacrifice and the person of the sacrifice. Remembering my point of identification motivates me to access the faith He gave to me as a gift to live for His glory.