



## Galatians 2:20

# Our Vital Union in Christ's Death

The Christian life is Christ living His life in and through the believer. It is the life of Christ reproduced in the child of God by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within the believer.

The doctrine of sinless perfection in this earthly life is not taught in the Scriptures. But neither is once saved always saved and now I can live my life any way I so please because I know all my sins are under the blood of Jesus. However, the emphasis in the New Testament is for the believer not to continue in the habitual practice of sinful behavior. Our strength to not continue in the habitual practice of sin is found in this vital union in Christ.

Handly Moule reminds us,

To the last it will be a sinner that walks with God. To the last 'will abide in the regenerate' that strange tendency, that 'mind of the flesh,' which eternal grace can wonderfully deal with, but which is tendency still."

To the last, the soul's acceptance before the Judge is wholly and only in the righteousness, the merits, of Christ.

To the last, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. . . We yet need to the last the blood of propitiation, to deal with sin. ”

God's solution to the problem of sin in the believer's life is based upon our identification with Christ. God has changed our identity by forming a new union with Jesus Christ.

Because the believer has died with Christ he is now freed from the obligation to obey sin when it issues orders to him.

A. T. Pierson states the reformed doctrine of justification and sanctification correctly when he writes, God "first reckons or counts us holy in Christ, and then proceeds to make us holy, until at last we are presented before the presence of His glory, without rebuke, or spot, or wrinkle, blame or blemish, unrebukable and perfect."

In this intimate relationship with Christ we find the sole basis not only for our justification, but also for our sanctification. "As Christ does away with the *penalty* for sin by His death, so by His life he puts an end to its *power* over the true believer." God "counts the sinner now dead *in sin* to be dead *to*

over the true believer." God "counts the sinner now dead *in sin* to be dead *to sin* and alive to God, counts him as righteous, and then proceeds to *make* him what he at first only *reckons* him to be (Romans 4:4-8, 17, 21-22)" (Pierson).

We died with Christ in order that the body of sin, or the sin nature, might be set aside as the master that controls us. Because we died to sin and were buried we are no longer obligated to serve our old master. This death and burial does not mean that sin or sin nature has been eradicated. Nor does it mean the believer will no longer commit sin.

"Our death with Christ delivers us from compulsory obedience and submission to the sin nature which once dominated and controlled us. . . By our resurrection with Christ, death has no right to lay hands upon us, for we have been made alive in Christ Jesus" (Dwight Pentecost).

We are not compelled to submit to temptation. We have been set free from the obligation to serve the sin nature in the same way that a wife whose husband dies is set free from the law of marriage so she can marry another. The apostle Paul tells us there is only thing that can break sins' control over us and that is death. Then he goes on to tell us that we have already died! When Jesus Christ died, you, as a believer in Jesus Christ, died with Him, and that death broke sins' control over you. Now you can walk in the newness of life through your resurrection with Christ.

### **Judicially every believer has died to sin.**

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:11, "Even so consider yourself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." In Galatians 2:20 he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."

Paul is not referring to an experience in these passages. He is referring to our *position* into which we have been brought through our union with Christ in His death. He is not even referring to some special "blessing" for a select few of believers. Both of these passages including Colossians 2:2; 3:3; Galatians 6:14; 5:24 speak of our union with Christ that is true of *all* believers. The "flesh with its affections and lusts" has *positionally* been crucified with Christ. It is a judicial fact in the past and not a spiritual experience.

We are never called upon to crucify ourselves, but to "mortify" or reckon to be dead. This is only possible by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:13, "for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Those who are being led by the Spirit are the sons of God.

The crucifixion was accomplished once and for all. In view of this fact the believer is to "reckon," "yield," "mortify," "count as dead," "cut off," "put away," "put on the whole armor of God," "set your affections on the things

away," "put on the whole armor of God," "set your affections on the things above," "put on the new man," "deny himself," "abide in Christ," "fight the good fight," "run the race," "walk in love," "walk in the Spirit," "walk in the light," "walk in the newness of life," etc. This is the believer's responsibility in our abiding in Christ.

God's goal is that we may "walk in the newness of life." We have the enabling power of the Holy Spirit because of our union with Christ. Because of our relationship with Christ our bondage to sin has been broken. We have been liberated and set free to live the Christian life through the indwelling power of God. Through this new vital relationship with Christ the Spirit of God can operate through the new divine nature to produce His righteousness in us. The important question is am I walking in the Spirit now?

"We are all of us conscious of no such actual identification with Christ in death and burial. We have never yet really died or been laid in the grave." This is "a judicial act, something counted or reckoned or imputed to our account by the sovereign mercy and grace of God" (Pierson). God reckons the believing sinner to be one with Christ so that His obedience is imputed to the sinner as his own. Moreover, Christ's sacrifice is reckoned as the sinner's own death for the claim of the penalty for sin.

In this great exchange "the believer is in Jesus, in the sight of God, and is so judged and acquitted as clothed with God's righteousness" (Pierson). His righteousness is imputed to the believing sinner's account in heaven.

Many professing Christians fail in their spiritual walk because they do not appropriate by faith what it means to be dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declared, "I have been crucified with Christ."

In Romans 8:3 we discover that Jesus Christ condemned sin in the flesh. "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh . . . "

The incarnate Son of God lived a perfect absolute sinless life and by that life condemned sin in the flesh. No one could point their finger and convict Him of sin. He was sinless, pure and holy in the eyes of the Lord God. His pure sinlessness condemned sin in the flesh. When we as sinful men stand in the presence of the Lord Jesus we are condemned. His holy presence brings conviction and condemnation to our sinful hearts (John 3:19-20).

Carnal Christians rebel at the idea that God condemns all our sinful fleshly efforts. To trust in sinful flesh reveals a shallow understanding of the sinfulness of our hearts. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," said Jeremiah (17:9).

Our only hope is to rest in our position of complete acceptance in the Lord Jesus. Self-effort produces the works of the flesh. Paul experienced the same struggle we do. He said, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want" (Romans 7:18-19).

It is "not I, but Christ." Paul cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin" (vv. 24-25).

God has to bring us to the end of ourselves and reliance upon our fleshly nature. It is not "wherever there is will there is a way." It is in Christ alone that we accomplish His will. We do not understand that lesson until

will there is a way." It is in Christ alone that we accomplish His will. We do not understand that lesson until we learn to die. Sadly, many sincere believers never seem to learn that truth. Our self-efforts produce corruption.

F. F. Bruce reminds us, "Paul is not thinking of the body of flesh and blood; the evil was more deeply rooted. 'The body of this death,' or 'this body of death' (RSV), is, like the 'body of sin' (6:6), that heritage of human nature subject to the law of sin and death which he shares with all sons of Adam, that *massa perditionis* in which the whole of the old creation is involved, and from which, for all his longing and struggling, he cannot extricate himself by his own endeavors" (*Romans*, p. 155).

Paul made a complete break with the law when he put his faith in Christ. It was the tutor that led him to Christ. Its demands upon him were all fulfilled when Christ died for him. Christ perfectly fulfilled the law in His life and His death.

"All believers were identified with Christ in His death, and resurrection and thus have passed out of the realm of divine law as its legalistic aspect is concerned," says Kenneth Wuest. He has died to the law in order that he might live to God. Paul stresses that you can not have both legalism and Christ. Paul no longer tries to draw near to God by means of his self-righteous attainments. "The new life is a Person within a person, living out His life in that person" (Wuest). Instead of living by rules and regulations he "now yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit and cooperates with Him in the production of a life pleasing to God, energized by the divine life resident in him through the regenerating work of the Spirit" (Wuest).

Instead of a totally depraved sinner trying to please a holy God by attempting to live by a set of laws "it is now the saint living his life on a new principle, that of the indwelling Holy Spirit manifesting forth the Lord Jesus" (Wuest).

No wonder Paul wrote with excitement, "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." This is the Christ life. It is an exchanged life. It is "not I, but Christ." It is "Christ in me, the hope of glory." He could write with security and conviction, "To me to live is Christ. And to die is gain."

### ***Our old self was crucified with Christ.***

We have become permanently united, "grown together," in an intimate union with Christ in His death. Romans 6:5, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death . . ."

What was crucified? Paul says, "our old self (lit. man) was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin" (v. 6). The "body of sin" is the body belonging to or ruled by the power of sin. The dead person sins no more. He is released, legally dead, no guilt, no power, but stands perfect, justified. He "who has died once for all is freed (justified) from sin" (v. 17).

Colossians 3:5-9 gives us an example of this death to the old man. Paul gives us a list of sinful behaviors to be ridded of like taking off old dirty clothes. "You laid aside the old self (lit. man) with its evil practices and have put on the new self (lit man) who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him" (vv. 9-10).

"We have been crucified" is in the perfect tense indicating it is a completed action in the past with permanent results.

Our judicial or positional crucifixion of our sinful flesh took place when Christ died on the cross. Our death dates from the death of Christ (Col. 3:3).

When Christ died He died to sin once and for all (Romans 6:10). Christ paid in full our penalty for sin. Moreover, He broke the power of sin over the believer.

When Jesus Christ died, I died, and I am now set free. That is my present spiritual status in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's death on my behalf as my substitute I am identified with Him by faith. God is not going to condemn me (Romans 8:1). He has just acquitted me! He has already condemned Christ who died in my place.

Faith reckons us to be one with Christ in God's sight. What is literally true of Christ becomes judicially and representatively true of us. We died when Christ died; we were buried when He was buried. God reckons us to have died and been buried when Christ died and was buried. This is true judicially because what happens to our representative is true of all whom He represents. All that Christ did was representative of every believer (Colossians 2:10-13; 3:1-4).

In Christ the believing sinner finds himself dead and buried and left in the grave. In Christ the believing sinner assumes a new life with his whole inner life quickened with resurrection power. In Christ the believer has an ascension at God's right hand, a life of spiritual privilege and eternal life.

I am dead to sin through Christ because in His death I died. I am justified by grace through faith in Christ.

Wuest translates verse twenty, "With Christ I have been crucified, and it is no longer I who live, but there lives in me Christ. And that life I now live in the sphere of the flesh, by faith I live it, which faith is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf."

"I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20a). The verb is in the perfect tense indicating a past-completed action having present finished results. Paul is saying the believer is identified with Christ at the cross. It is a fact to be relied upon and now we experience spiritual benefits through this identification.

This explains how Paul died to the law. He died with Christ when He died for the penalty of sin. Because the law demands for the death penalty were satisfied it no longer has any claim on the believing sinner who has put his faith and trust in Christ's death.

God's answer to the problem of sin in the believer's life is based on our identification with Christ. God calls us to reckon, to believe on an acceptance of an accomplished fact.

Paul is referring to our identification with Christ when he wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

Literally, "I have been crucified with Christ." Paul tells me I am to believe in this fact that I am identified with Christ in His crucifixion.

When Jesus Christ died, we died together with Him. But my identification with Christ not only means we died with Christ, but we were buried with Christ, resurrected with Christ, ascended and glorified with Christ. We have been so identified with Him that God reckons us as having experienced co-crucifixion, co-burial, co-resurrection, co-ascension and co-glorification.

You ask, how can it be that Christ lived 2000 years ago and I am crucified with Him? How is it possible that I have been resurrected with Christ? How can it be said that I have ascended and have been glorified with Christ when I am living here on the earth today?

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:13 the believer in Christ has been joined to the body of Jesus Christ who is the living Head so that all that is true of the Head is true of each member in His body. God has changed our identity by forming a new union with Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit baptized the believer into one body, they were baptized into Christ's death, burial, resurrection ascension and glorification.

All that a sinner needs has been fully provided for in the death of Jesus Christ. Christ died to pay the price for our sins. He has set us free from spiritual death and has made us alive. The obligation to obey sin has been cancelled. We have a new lover, a new relationship with a new master.

This is true because when Jesus died, I was so identified and united with Him that I died also. I was crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). When Christ died, we died with Him. Have you recognized and appropriated your identification with Christ? "We were identified with Christ in His death, so that when Christ died, we died." No, we were not consciously present when it took place, but it was nonetheless a real death.

"We were baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ Jesus." By that baptism we were identified with His death. Cf. Colossians 1:21-22; 3:5, 9; Romans 6:3.

In that vital union we were also identified with Christ in His burial. Burial is the consequence of death. We who have died with Christ have also been buried with Christ. No, we were not conscious of our burial. We had no sense of the tombstone being rolled against the opening to seal us in. Yet, our burial is nonetheless real. It is a fact to be believed and reckoned upon as true. Cf. Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12.

Our identification with Christ is so complete that we were identified with Christ in His resurrection. We, too, have been raised by God's power. We were identified with Christ in His resurrection. Every believer has been resurrected with Christ. Any child of God can experience the power that brought Jesus up from the grave. Now tell me why you can not deal with sin in your life? Cf. Romans 6:4-5; Ephesians 1:19; 2:1, 5; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 3:1. Because of this identification with Christ we are no longer under the control of our sin nature. We have been crucified with Christ in order that Christ may live His life through us. We experience power to overcome sin when we act upon this truth by faith. We are identified with Christ's resurrection that we may walk in a new life with Him.

I appreciate the way Dwight Pentecost expressed this great truth in *Designed to Be Like Him*. "God, in order to terminate sin's control over you, put you to death with Christ. In order to remove you from that old sphere in which you operated, God put you into a grave with Christ. And in order to bring you into a new kind of life, God brought you in resurrection power, out of the grave with Christ, and raised you to glory with Christ. We have this identification with Christ in order that we might walk in newness of life; in order that Christ who lives in you, might live His life out through you."

The apostle Paul admonished us to "reckon," count upon the fact that we are dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Believe on that fact. Act on that fact that you are liberated from the obligation to serve sin.

Moreover, this identification with Christ in His death also meant death to self. Is this not the whole crux to our sin problem? We are basically selfish. We see things my way. We must do things my way. We must have it my way. We look out for I, me and mine.

my way. We lookout for I, me and mine.

Saul looked at his old life up to the moment he put his faith in Christ and saw that it was buried, the dominating control of his old nature under the control of Adam was now broken. The self-righteous Pharisee died that day (Philippians 3:8-8). Now his life is dominated and centered in Christ. It is a Christ centered life. His new life is in a Person. The Lord Jesus Christ lived in Paul just like He lives in Wil Pounds.

In Romans 8:13 the verb is in the present tense. We die to sin daily. Luke 9:23, Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Am I willing to accept all that the death of Christ demands in my life today? Am I willing to be crucified today? Am I willing to die to sin, self-interests, selfish pleasures, self-rule, etc.?

Christ bids us come and die to our reputation, to our rights, to our riches, etc.

### ***How do I crucify myself?***

I can't. The cross is never self-inflicted. We die to self by submitting to the Holy Spirit who applies the power of the cross to our sinful self. We rely upon the Holy Spirit to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13). Cf. Romans 6:14; Philippians 3:3.

The apostle Paul is saying we are legally and judicially declared dead the moment we identify ourselves by saving faith with our Savior and Lord.

However, Martin Luther put it well when he lamented, "The old man dies hard. It is a daily battle to put the old man to death and rely on the indwelling Spirit to enable us to reckon on the all sufficiency of Christ."

Who or what circumstances reminds you of the nails of the cross? It is a constant reminder that I can do nothing in the flesh that pleases God.

We must reckon on our oneness with Christ in death to sin. "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" Romans 6:11 tells us to reckon on the fact that we have died to our sinful self. We must reckon on the fact of our identification with Christ (6:11-13).

When we reckon upon the fact of our oneness with Christ in His death to sinful flesh we can act upon the reality that we are dead to every temptation to sin. We have a choice and now the power to go ahead and choose to sin or refuse to yield to temptation and to yield to the power of the indwelling Spirit who resides within us. We can now repudiate every beckoning of sin to seduce us. "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:2). We now have a choice. We are no longer spiritually dead. Christ lives in us and he is our new master. He has given us spiritual life and power to face temptation and conquer sin. Since we are dead to it we no longer have to respond to it. We can now refuse to make any provision for the flesh and yield to its temptations (Romans 13:14).

### ***Abandon all practice and plans for sinning.***

The apostle Paul admonishes, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:14).

If you knew that at midnight tonight you would die you would stop making any provisions for your life. A

coffin and grave cloths are all you would need. God would have you count yourself dead to sin and make no more provisions for it. He tells us to reckon ourselves *dead*, no longer alive to it. Stop making any provisions for it. Instead, make plans for the power of God in your life.

"Your expectation has everything to do with your actual life," warned Pierson. "If you expect to sin you will sin. . . To count on sinning is itself a form of sinning; it is reckoning the flesh, the world, the devil, mightier than the Spirit of God and the Son of God, whose very office is to overcome the flesh, deliver us from this present evil age, and destroy the works of the devil."

Don't go through life *prepared* to sin. Paul said do not go on making provision for the flesh, to yield to its temptation.

Because of our vital union with Christ we can now rely on the power of our oneness with Christ overcome the sin of the flesh. We go on putting to death the sins of the flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit who now lives within us.

"Whenever we deliberately count on our union with Christ in His death, the Holy Spirit instantly applies the crucifying force of the cross to the ever-reviving flesh, that makes the life of victory a reality in our experience," writes Stephen Olford.

When the sinful flesh rises to tempt you nail it to the cross by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### *How do I take up my cross daily?*

"If our old self is condemned and crucified, then we can venture out on the sound assumption that the 'body of sin' is done away with, rendered powerless, inoperative, put out of business (Romans 6:6)" (Olford).

The apostle Paul, observed Leonard Ravehill in *Why Revival Tarries*, p. 172, was a man who "Had no ambitions –and so had nothing to be jealous about. He had no reputation and so had nothing to fight about. He had no possessions –and therefore nothing to worry about. He had no "rights" –so therefore, he could not suffer wrong. He was already broke –so no one could break him. He was "dead" –so none could kill him. He was less than the least –so who could humble him? He had suffered the loss of all things –so none could defraud him."

The only way we can mortify the "flesh" is by walking in the Holy Spirit. Only by abiding in Christ can we put to death daily the temptations of the "flesh." God has provided the power in the Spirit to die daily to sin.

Experience proves that if we live by the flesh everything will wither and die. However, if we live by the Spirit we will put to death the deeds of the flesh and we will live to the glory of God. Pentecost writes clearly:

The secret of the Christian life is not repeated crucifixion –putting to death again and again and again in order to be delivered from bondage to sin. Rather, God's secret is found in Romans 6:22, where you read that you are to reckon or count it to be a fact that you are dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. When you were joined to Jesus Christ in His death, it was once for all. The apostle did not write in Galatians 2:20, "I crucify myself, again and again and again and again, so that I might be free." But he says, "I have been crucified with Christ," and the effects of that crucifixion continue on and on and on. God is asking you to stand off and look at yourself as one who has died, and to deem yourself as one over whom sin's authority has been broken because when Christ died, you died; when Christ was resurrected, you



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authority has been broken because when Christ died, you died; when Christ was resurrected, you were resurrected; and now you have been set free to walk in newness of life —resurrection life under control of the Spirit of God.

This is a fact from the Word of God. And like every fact, it is to be accepted and believed. . .

. . . God says you are crucified, and in God's sight you are a crucified one. God is not asking you to add to the value of the death of Christ by crucifying yourself again and again. God is asking you to accept His judgment on the sin nature and to reckon the fact to be true that you were joined to Christ in His death because God says it is true; also that death with Christ has broken sin's power over you so you have been liberated to walk in the newness of life. Such acceptance will change a man's whole attitude to the sin nature within him.

We sin because we choose to. Christ set us free and now we can choose to follow Him. We choose to sin because we do not reckon ourselves to have been crucified with Christ and empowered by His Spirit to allow Him to live His life through us. The truth is I do not have to serve sin because I have been set free. God has set us free to walk in righteousness and true holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

God is not asking us to break the power of sin because Christ has already done that for us. Paul is telling us that Christ has set us free, and this freedom is ours in Christ. It is a walk of faith. Just as we have been justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone we are to reckon on this great truth of our sanctification. Sin's power over us has been broken and we can now walk in newness of life.

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