



Galatians 2:20

Our Vital Union of Faith in Christ

"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 gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly (Galatians 2:20-21).

The apostle Paul is describing the normal Christian life. What Paul says here is true of all believers who have been justified by faith in Christ. John Calvin wrote of this vital experience with Christ, "Engrafted into the death of Christ, we derive a secret energy from it, as the shoot does from the root." It is our vital union with Christ whereby we draw our strength and life to live the Christian life. As we have already seen in this series, it is the indwelling Christ through His Spirit who lives His life in us as we yield to Him. The indwelling Christ makes the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ a living reality.

"All believers in Christ have 'died in relation to sin' (Romans 6:2, 11), but the point stressed here is that, at the same time, they have 'died in relation to the law' . . . It is fundamental to Paul's understanding of the law that he can define one and the same experience as death to law (cf. Rom. 7:4-6) and death to sin (Rom. 6:2). To be under the law is to be exposed to the power of sin, for 'the power of sin is the law' (1 Corinthians 15:56)." The law provides sin the vantage point to invade the soul (Romans 7:7-11). "But to those who have entered into new life in Christ the assurance is given: '*sin* will have no more dominion over you, since you are not *under law* but under grace' (Romans 6:14)" (F. F. Bruce). Phillips translates, "As far as the Law is concerned I may consider that I died on the cross with Christ . . . "

F. F. Bruce, the esteemed Greek expositor well said, "Having died with Christ in his death, the believer now lives with Christ in his life —i.e. his resurrection life. In fact, this new life in Christ is nothing less than the risen Christ living his life in the believer. The risen Christ is the operative power in the new order, as sin was in the old (cf. Romans 7:17, 20) . . . It is by the Spirit that the risen life of Christ is communicated to his people and maintained within them . . . The believer's present life . . . is lived in faith union with Christ, the Son of God."

M. R. Vincent put the emphasis on faith in this new life in Christ. He translates, "in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God." The object of our faith is in the God of very God —the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's focus our faith on Him because He cannot and will not fail. Our Christian life is a walk of faith in the faithfulness of Christ.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A WALK OF FAITH

Just as we have been justified by faith in Christ alone we are to walk by grace through faith in Christ. The apostle Paul says, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." We live this new life by His resurrection power. Christ wants us to make ourselves available to Him so He can live His life in and through us. We have been "raised to walk in newness of life."

Our daily life in this mortal body

Paul is referring to our daily life as we live it out in this human body in the midst of the sin, suffering and the groan of death in a fallen creation. Here the term *flesh* is not our sin nature, but our human body with flesh and bones.

Even though we live this Christian life "in the flesh" it is nonetheless lived "by faith" in Christ. "Not only are we justified by faith, but we also live by faith. This means this saving faith cannot be reduced to a one time decision or event in the past; it is a living, dynamic, reality permeating every aspect of the believer's life" (George). It was John Calvin who said, "It is faith alone that justifies, but the faith that justifies is not alone." Jesus Christ is the object of this faith. He is the one who "loved me and gave Himself for me."

The Presbyterian minister, A. B. Simpson, writes of this indwelling life of Christ. "I shall never forget the morning that I spent in my church reading an old book I discovered in my library. As I poured over that little volume, I saw a new light. The Lord Jesus revealed Himself as a living, all-sufficient Presence, and I learned for the first time that Christ had not saved us from future peril and left us to fight the battle of life as best we could; but He who had justified us was waiting to sanctify us, to enter into our spirit, and substitute His strength, His holiness, His joy, His love, His faith, His power for all our worthlessness, helplessness and nothingness, and make it an actual living fact. I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me (Galatians 2:20). I was indeed a new revelation. Throwing myself at the feet of the glorious master, I claimed the mighty promise —I will dwell in them, and walk in them (2 Corinthians 6:16)."

Christ doesn't save me to pursue my selfish pursuits. He saves me so He can live out His life in me as I surrender to Him moment by moment. He is my life. Since He has ascended to heaven in His bodily form, I am now His hands, His feet, His voice to reach a lost and dying world. My life becomes an intimate union with Him so that what ever He wants is available. We abide in Him and He in us. We rest in Him and in His gracious purpose and provision for our lives. We yield to Him, rest in Him and receive from Him the constant supply of His grace. We must focus our faith on Him. He is always dependable and we can count on Him.

This new life in Christ lived in this mortal body is the life of the age to come in Christ which has already begun while this mortal life has not yet come to an end. You are already living the eternal life. It began when you were born

an end. You are already living the eternal life. It began when you were born again. How great is the saving life of God in Christ!

It is daily abiding faith in Jesus Christ.

The whole context of Galatians chapter two is the simple truth that we are saved by faith in Christ who died for us and we live by faith in Christ who lives in us. It is a good summary of Romans chapter six.

"Being crucified with Christ implies a radical transformation within the believer," observes Timothy George. "The 'I' who has died to the law no longer lives; Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, dwells within, sanctifying our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and enabling us to approach the throne of God in prayer . . ." "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father'" (Galatians 4:6).

Faith is the bond of union with the risen Christ. To live by faith is tantamount to "living by the Spirit" (Bruce). By faith, we draw moment by moment on the promises and provisions of the resurrection life of the indwelling Son of God. "One clear evidence that we possess a living faith is that we are constantly yielding to Christ as our indwelling Lord," observed Olford. Therefore, since Christ is living in our hearts by faith the desire of our heart is to yield to Him moment by moment. The motivation of this new life is God's love for the believer.

THE MOTIVATION IS GOD'S LOVE FOR THE BELIEVER

God was serious about saving lost mankind. It is the unmerited, immeasurable, infinite love of God that sent Jesus to the cross to die for sinners. He did it for me the guilty sinner. He was the sinless one dying for the sinner. "Christ has no business dying!" How easy it is for us to forget that.

Timothy George says, "the very benefits of Christ's atoning death, including first of all justification, are without effect unless we are identified with Christ in his death and resurrection." John Calvin said, "As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."

James Denny well said, "The whole of Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men."

Substitutionary atonement

Christ "gave Himself up for me" in a substitutionary suffering and vicarious death. Only a sinless substitute can be the savior. There is no better commentary than 2 Corinthians 5:21. "He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." God laid all of our sins on Jesus Christ and He died in our place. The sinner gets a right standing with God by believing on Christ.

The Good News is God saves sinners, not good people. God justifies the ungodly. Before you can become a Christian, you had to admit you are a sinner. You have to admit that you are a sinner in the eyes of God and that you cannot merit a right relationship with God, no matter what you do. Sinners are the only kind of people Jesus can save.

The context of our passage in Galatians chapter two has emphasized justification by faith in Christ alone for

The context of our passage in Galatians chapter two has emphasized justification by faith in Christ alone for salvation. Verse 16 has made that truth plain. Paul says, ". . . nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner right in His sight through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is not a process; that is sanctification of the believer. God declares the guilty person acquitted. We have been once-and-for-all justified by grace through faith in Christ. It is an instant transaction between God and the believing sinner. It is a declaration of the believing sinner being acquitted in the eyes of God. Salvation by works would be a gradual process and you would never know if you had done enough to please a holy God. You would never know if you were satisfying Him. That is not grace. That is selfish manipulation. God does not make the believing guilty sinner righteous so He can justify him. He declared the believing guilty sinner righteous the moment he trusted in Christ's death. When Christ declares the believing sinner not guilty he can never be charged again. Before the guilty sinner believed on Christ he was guilty in the eyes of God, but in the moment he believed on Christ, God declared him acquitted. That is salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Our salvation is complete in Christ. God remembers our sins no more! His forgetter works better than ours! He separates us from our sins as far as the east is from the west —infinity. Let these beautiful words sink in to the deep inner recesses of your mind. God has forgiven our transgressions, our sins are covered, and the Lord does not impute iniquity because He has imputed the righteousness of Christ to our account! (Psalm 32:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Legalism kills grace.

The apostle Paul told Peter that he could smell pork on your breath! In the context, Paul's rebuke of Peter is strong. "Peter, you are a Jew and you have been living like a Gentile believer. Now you want the Gentile Christians to live like Jews. Peter, why are you being inconsistent? Who are you trying to please and why are you acting foolish?"

Paul says we have both been saved by grace. "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Galatians 2:21). The word for "nullify" or frustrate the grace of God is strong. It means to do away with something laid down, or established, to act toward something as though it is annulled. It is to make it null and void. This is what adding of law does to grace. It makes it invalid.

The Bible says, "The just shall live by faith." That is a basic truth found in the Old and the New Testament. You cannot have both law and grace. They mix like oil and water. The Judaizers wanted to mix law and grace; they wanted to make you a Jew before you could become a believer in Christ. Paul says this is impossible because to go back to the law means you "set aside" the grace of God. You cancel it out by going back to the law. By withdrawing from Christian fellowship with the Gentile believers, Peter was openly denying the grace of God. Returning to the law nullifies the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. Christ cried out, "It is finished!" Our salvation is done, completed, finished! You cannot add one thing to it. Jesus completed it. All anyone can do is receive it by faith and thank God. The law does not redeem; it reveals sin. It simply proves we are all guilty before God. Moreover, the sinner who depends in the least upon good works as a means of being accepted with God has no salvation. It is done in vain. Either Christ died in vain, or our works done to earn righteousness is in vain.

Let's suppose for a moment that you died today and stood before the throne of God and He said to you, why should I let you into my heaven, how would you reply to Him? I hear people all the time saying, "I come to you having tried to live the very best life I could." Really? "Yes, I have been a good parent and a good

you having tried to live the very best life I could." Really? "Yes, I have been a good parent and a good grandparent. I have tried to live a good life." Really? "Yes, I was baptized and I joined the church. Isn't that enough?" Really? What you are saying is: Salvation is Christ plus good works. It is Christ plus a good moral religious life. It is Christ plus my religious merits and activities. All of these good things will send you to hell eternally separated from the Lord God. The only thing that will save you is Christ plus *nothing*! Christ alone saves. But preacher, surely I have my faith. Your faith does not save you. Your religious experience does not save you. Your emotional catharsis does not save you. Christ does! And it is Christ alone! We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Christ saves the moment we trust Him to save us. Why in the world do you want to set aside the grace of God and cancel it by adding the slightest touch of works to it? Why not do it God's way? God says our salvation is complete. Christ paid for it. "For by grace you are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).

People pay a terrible price to legalism.

In the context the apostle Peter had played into the hands of the Judaizers, the legalist of his day, who demanded that you had to become a Jew before you could become a Christian. They were saying you had to fulfill the law when Christ had already fulfilled the law. When Peter separated himself from the non-Jewish believers he was saying, "We Jews are different in God's eyes from you Gentiles." He was denying the truth of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Bible declares that both Gentiles and Jews are sinners who are totally depraved and cannot obtain a right relationship with God through their good works or virtue. The law certainly cannot save anyone, because it can only provoke us to sin and then condemn us. It says you had better not sin, and we are just as determined to test it and defy it. It declares us all guilty before God. We can only be saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The only obedience that saves is the obedience of Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law, became our representative for sin, and died on our behalf to fulfill its consequences against sin. Both Jewish people and non-Jewish people are saved in the same manner: by grace through faith in Christ. No one has special privileges before God.

If you go back to the law, you are saying that Christ is insufficient to save you. We have salvation because we believed on Christ. If you go back to the law and works for salvation then you are saying, Christ alone did not save you. You are so desperate in your unbelief that you think you need Christ plus something else.

Paul tells Peter by going back and preaching legalism, or law keeping, you are building up what you tore down. You have sinned by tearing down the gospel truth of salvation by grace alone. Paul is arguing from Peter's own experience of grace. To go back to Moses and law keeping is to deny everything that God alone has done for you through Jesus Christ. We are dead to the law. The law said you are a guilty sinner and the soul that sins will die. "The wages of sin is death." Jesus Christ went to the cross and paid that debt to the law. Consider yourself a dead person. Our identification with Christ is so complete that "we died with Him." To go back to the law is to go back to the spiritual graveyard. Remember, Paul said we have been "raised to walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). We live the Christian life, which is the resurrection life by faith in Christ. We live this life in the flesh by the resurrection life and power of Christ. The law can't help us because we are dead to it. It is powerless. Furthermore, if we go back to that system we are saying Christ is insufficient to save.

If the works of the law justifies a person then Jesus died in vain. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ who died for us. Nevertheless, Paul goes on to emphasize that we live the Christian life by grace through faith in Christ who lives in us.

There is another aspect of this heresy of legalism. It says that God's people are not alike. However, no Christian is more justified, or more saved than any other believer. Legalism builds walls and barriers between believers who have all been saved by grace. It says I am better than you are because _____. However, God says you are all sinners. You are all on the same playing field. You are all guilty, I alone make you right

God says you are all sinners. You are all on the same playing field. You are all guilty, I alone make you right with Me, and it is only by the blood of My Son who died for you and rose from the dead. Legalism is ugly. Legalism destroys fellowship. Legalism destroys ministry. Legalism destroys grace. John Walvoord said it best, "If righteousness comes by keeping the law, the Cross was . . . the biggest mistake in the universe."

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

For the believer

Am I trying to mix law and grace? Am I trying to please God by *doing* something? On the other hand, do you know your freedom in Christ and appropriate it by faith? Galatians 5:1 reminds us that we have been set free to live the Christian life. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Are you enjoying your relationship with Christ? Are you obeying God out of love in response to His grace, or are you tied to a legalistic clipboard striving to please by doing?

Am I trying to please men or God? Galatians 1:10 helps us appreciate our freedom because it is usually in our desire to please men and women, or valued persons, that we are tricked into legalism. "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." Lewis Johnson, Jr., hit it on the head when he said: "One of the most serious problems facing the orthodox Christian church today is the problem of legalism. One of the most serious problems facing the church in Paul's day was the problem of legalism. In every day it is the same. Legalism wrenches the joy of the Lord from the Christian believer, and with the joy of the Lord goes his power for vital worship and vibrant service. Nothing is left but cramped, somber, dull and listless profession. The truth is betrayed, and the glorious name of the Lord becomes a synonym for a gloomy killjoy. The Christian under law is a miserable parody of the real thing. "

Legalism in salvation says, "I must do something, I must add to the work of Christ so that God will look at me and be pleased with my good, and bring me into His family. It is not Christ plus nothing, it is Christ plus something from the law, good works, the church, etc. that I do. It exalts self and it is full of pride.

A legalistic sanctification says, "Now that I am in Christ I will be closer to God if I stop doing something so that people will think better of me. Or if I do such and such because people expect that of me I will be a better Christian in their eyes. "

God does tell us to stop doing certain things, but when we stop doing them we are not being legalistic, we are being *obedient* to our first love. Faith says I rest everything on the blood of Jesus Christ to make me right with God. Sanctification is also by grace through faith in Christ. I grow in His likeness as I yield to Him. We obey Him because we love Him.

Do you have the peace of God that comes from being right with God? The righteousness of Christ has been put to your account and now you can have perfect peace with God in your inner man. Ever since we believed on Christ God treats or deals with us based on that righteousness of Christ imputed to us! "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (Romans 5:1). Are you appropriating that peace by faith? Our sins have already been judged at the cross and Christ died for them. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1).

The apostle Paul asked the question, "How then shall I live?" "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1). Paul's response is give me a break! Paul uses the strongest negative words in his vocabulary. "God forbid!"

Am I a responsible Christian? How seriously do I take my responsibility to live Christ before a lost and watching world? There is an ethical imperative in the Christian life that flows out of justification by faith. Because of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit energizing the believer, we now live on a new principle, which is the indwelling Holy Spirit manifesting forth the resurrection life in Christ. "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." This new life flows from our identification with the passion and death and resurrection of Christ.

Stephen F. Olford writes in *Not I, but Christ* of this walk of faith in Christ. It involves yielding to the sovereign Lord moment by moment. When He wants my hands, I yield my hands. When He wants my feet, I yield my feet. When He wants my eyes, I yield my eyes. When He wants my lips, I yield my lips. When He wants my heart, I say, "There it is, Lord. Pump Your love through it in terms of my behavior patterns. When He wants the outshining of glory, I say, 'L'ord, here's a poor, broken body, but flesh out Your glory through it. "

The believer experiences freedom from himself as he surrenders his old "I", and lets himself be crucified with Christ. He now lives with Christ, yet no longer "I", but Christ is the new "I" in him.

There is a better way to live than being tied up in legalism. The apostle Paul demonstrates that it is a life of grace. "Though He [Christ] was [exceedingly] rich, yet for your sake He became [extremely] poor, so that by His poverty you might become [exceedingly] rich (2 Corinthians 8:9b, c). "Believers have become rich in the possession of that glory which Christ laid aside, or concealed" (Hodge). It was by His poverty that we have been made rich.

Allan Redpath reminds us, "Yesterday's grace is totally inadequate for the burden of today, and if I do not learn to lay hold of heavenly resources every day of my life for the little things as well as the big things, as a Christian I soon become stale, barren, and fruitless in the service of the Lord . . . This is the moment in which God's grace is available to me, in any emergency and in any situation. Thank heaven that whatever the surprises, disappointments, and problems that may come to me at any moment of any day, I do not have to look back and say, 'What did the preacher say last Sunday that I should do at this moment?'" (Alan Redpath, *Blessings out of Buffetings*, p. 112-113).

Christ gives the believer a daily supply of grace that never runs out. Charles Inwood said, "It is a constant appropriation of a constant supply from Jesus Christ Himself. As I believe, I receive; and as I go on believing, I go on receiving." Draw daily, moment-by-moment from your riches in Christ. If you don't you will become barren, stale, worn out emotionally and spiritually.

Because you are rich in the grace of Christ, you have grace sufficient at every moment to meet every need. Moment by moment lay hold of the heavenly supply of your riches in Christ. As you give yourself away, you are renewed day by day in the inner person. When you have come to the end of your day of giving yourself away each night you go to bed so poor that you have not one drop of grace left. All the grace of God for that day has gone and you are exhausted and without any reserve for tomorrow. When you get up the next morning to be filled again with God's daily grace and you are once again can give and give and give again. As Redpath wrote, "in the process of being poor, he is making many rich: and though he possesses apparently nothing, yet he has access to the treasure in heaven, and nothing can ever touch that or ever take it away." This is the principle upon which God dispenses His grace. Jesus set the example. He gives to you and you become rich so that you can become poor by giving it away so others can become rich.

For the unbeliever

Have I been saved by the grace of God? There is no other name under heaven that you can call upon to be saved. "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Any other religion will put you under the curse of God (Galatians 1:6-9). In whom or what am I trusting for my eternal salvation? Christ plus _____ = eternal life? The true Christian has trusted in Christ *alone* for salvation. The apostle Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The just live by faith, not by works.

Timothy George said it appropriately. "If we try to climb up to heaven 'by some other way,' if we add works of the law to the sacrifice of the cross, then indeed we make a mockery of Jesus' death just as the soldiers who spat upon him, the thieves who hurled insults at him, and the rabble who shouted, 'Come down from the cross!'" Those who seek their justification before God anywhere but in Christ remain unjustified; they are still in their sins.

The resurrected Christ through His Spirit took up residence in Paul's life and Paul could say, "Christ lives in me." It is not automatic, but it begins by a simple transaction of receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. When you believe on Christ He comes to live in your inner person through His Spirit and then you live the Christian life the way you began it, by faith. It is not by obedience to laws, rules and regulations, but simple faith in Christ. As you trust Christ He releases His divine power of the resurrection life to the believer. Your obedient submission to the Holy Spirit releases this new life within you so you can be all God wants you to be. John Walvoord once said, "If He loved me enough to give Himself for me, then He loves me enough to live out His life in me."

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

Here are some more studies on justification by faith in Christ: [Romans Series](#) and our [Union with Christ](#).

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