

"THE LIFE WHICH I NOW LIVE"

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

This wonderful verse contains the utterance of a great Christian who was almost overwhelmed by the amazing wonder of his glorious experience with Christ. He simply lacked words to express adequately the joy that was in his heart after Christ had wrought that great and wonderful change in his life.

In our study, I want to emphasize some of the great truths about the Christian life, which are enshrined in this inspired statement from God's Word.

Paul's opening statement, "I have been crucified with Christ," carries us back to that scene where Christ was crucified between two robbers. There, on that cross, Christ endured our pains in order that Paul and we might enjoy His peace. He shared the shame of robbers in order that the Apostle and we might share His glory. The atoning sacrifice of Christ, accepted by personal faith, was the open secret of Paul's victorious and useful life.

To Paul, crucifixion with Christ meant the forgiveness of sins. Sin is rebellion against the will of the holy and gracious God. Men want to be independent of their Maker. Instead of trusting, obeying and serving God, they enthrone self in their lives, and all their sins are the fruits of this revolt. The experience of the forgiveness of his sins put an end to Paul's old life.

Crucifixion with Christ also implied death to self. What he had been and had done prior to that experience passed away, so far as he was concerned. The old life of sin was crucified and dead. The old life, of which the "I" principle was the center, had been nailed to the cross. The man he used to be, the unregenerate person that once was, no longer survived. There was something which had perished and something which had persisted. There was an "I" which died, and an "I" which lived. The "I" which died was a master; the "I" which lived was a servant. The "I" which died loved to be ministered unto; the "I" which continued to live delighted to minister to others. Paul's use of the verb, "crucified," in the perfect tense indicated that it was an action which had been completed in the past, but had present finished results.

Note the paradox in the words, "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I am living." While the old man was crucified, the new man was living. Crucified, and yet living! What a transformation! Death with Christ involved life with Him. Being alive after crucifixion was mysterious to the world.

Paul referred to the man he used to be as "the old man." In Romans 6:6 he said, "Our old man is crucified with him." He was talking about the death of the old life that was centered in self. He meant that the emotions, aims and hopes which were centered simply in himself had been crucified. His old manner of life was dead. There had not only been a certain mortification, but also a real vitalization. As surely as he had been crucified with Christ, he was then living far more fully than ever before. He had new powers of perception, desire and service.

The paradox of the Christian faith and surrendered life was expressed by Paul in the words, "I am living, yet not I." He was living in the comforts and the triumphs

of grace, but that grace was not his own. The Christian life is something beyond the poor strivings and the paltry efforts of any human being. After Paul was united with Christ by faith, the Lord so pervaded and possessed him that He manifested His glory through him. His new life was in Christ. Instead of trying to live in obedience to a set of rules in the form of the Mosaic law, Paul yielded to the indwelling Holy Spirit and sought to produce a life which was pleasing to God.

Paul was not living as he had lived formerly. His life, when he wrote this verse, was far different from what it had been in earlier years. A great change had been wrought and a wonderful transformation had taken place in him. A new principle of life had been implanted in him. His life had become Christ-centered. He knew that Christ was living in him. Paul said, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." Christ within meant refreshment, enjoyment and abiding strength for the tasks of daily life. It also meant victory in the battle against Satan.

When Christ took possession of Paul and dwelt within him, He did not destroy his personality. Christ wanted the learning, energy and enthusiasm of Paul for use in His service. When He came to live in Paul, He did not repress or exterminate these qualities, but He converted them to higher uses and nobler ends. While Paul remained essentially the same personality after his conversion that he was before, his whole life was under a new mastery. The Lord Jesus was living in and through Paul's yielded and dedicated personality. Christ living in him meant the death of the self-life. When Christ came to live in Paul, personal ambitions died, and with them all the purposes which formerly kindled and fired his soul.

Paul's claim, "Christ liveth in me," was not made in the spirit of vanity and pride, but rather in the deepest humility. Since his life was derived from Christ, Paul knew that it was by the grace of God that he was what he was. He had given all the keys of his life to the indwelling Christ. There were no secret chambers in his life to which the Lord was not welcome. Christ had taken full possession of him. Every grace which Paul possessed was but a faint reflection of the beauty of Christ, and every virtue which he exhibited was simply a manifestation in lesser degree of the holiness of his sinless Lord.

This text vividly presents a view of Christianity which we are in danger of overlooking. What is the usual way of looking at Christianity? Do you think of Christianity as believing in Christ and doing as He did? Christianity is not a vision, but an incarnation. It is not imitating something on the outside, but it is Christ living in the soul. It is not the imitation of a splendid model, but the indwelling of a living Person. If Christ is living in us, His will replaces our wills, and His presence so fills our souls that we are enabled to conform to His will. It is truly wonderful that while the Lord lives in us that He fills us with His victorious strength. He brightens the dull, monotonous days and makes life truly worth living.

With Christ living in us we have and enjoy so many new things -- new tastes, interests, ambitions, motives, purposes, enjoyments, judgments, outlooks, affections, conduct and hopes. Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). With Christ living in us we have healing for every wound, comfort for every sorrow, provision for every day and strength for every need. Paul wrote, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

To what sort of a life did Paul refer in the expression, "the life which I now live"? While he spoke of the old and the new natures, the old sinful nature was no longer the principle by which Paul lived, but he was governed by the Holy Spirit.

It is important for us to remember that the Christian life begins in the miracle of the new birth (John 3:3), is sustained by the miracle of the energizing Spirit (Galatians 5:16), and is lived by the miracle of the indwelling Christ (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21). It will consummate in the miracle of glorification, when we see Christ and are made like Him (I John 3:2).

Where is it that you and I are to live the Christian life? It is right here in these mortal bodies which God has given us. Paul was referring to the sphere in which we, as believers in Christ and children of God, are to live the Christian life in the expression, "The life which I now live in the flesh." Of course, the word "flesh" was used in two ways in the New Testament --as a physical body and as a principle of life. It is necessary for us to reside in the flesh or physical body, but we do not have to be governed by it. To live under the control of the flesh or according to the way in which our associates live is dishonoring to our Lord and damaging to our influence.

Paul lived according to the faith of the Son of God. He had been saved through faith. Later he wrote, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). He also wrote, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7). In the beginning of his Christian experience Paul recognized Christ on the cross as his personal Substitute and Saviour.

Life-giving faith includes two things -- faith in the vicarious death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and faith in His death as a propitiation for our own personal sins. The essential elements in that faith which gives life to the soul are a sincere belief that Christ is the Son of God, that He loves us, and that He gave Himself for us. He gave Himself in my place and for my benefit.

Paul, who had been a bitter persecutor of the people of God, who had been an enemy of the cross of Christ, one day had his eyes opened, and he suddenly realized that the One Who died on that cross went there for him, that He had taken his place, and that it was love which led Him to go to that shameful death. He trusted Christ as his personal Saviour and from the moment of his salvation his heart went out in adoring gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, and until the very end of his days he found his greatest joy in trying to give some evidence by his lips and by his life of his love for the One Who had thus loved him. Notice how he spoke of Him: "The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." There you have the very heart of the Gospel -- "Himself for me." That is substitution.

Thus has Paul written for us the perfect sketch of a true Christian life. Each one of us can reduce to reality the splendid ideal here set before us. Privilege means possibility, and possibility means duty. No Christian, however humble he may be, can do more; none ought to attempt less, than to live his life according to the outline here proposed so glowingly. Let us so live that we can truthfully say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).