

THE LIFE I 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.

What a wonderful verse this is, and what a favorite among God's children! It contains the words of a great Christian. It is the utterance of a man who was well-nigh overwhelmed by the amazing wonder of his experience with Christ. As he thought of the great change that had been wrought in his life by Christ, he simply lacked words to express the glow that was in his heart.

It is certain that no Christian ever lived a more heroic and victorious life that Paul did. His life was a model of excellence. It was honorable, noble, exemplary and victorious. Paul was great in many ways. He was a great thinker, a great preacher and a great missionary, but he was greatest of all as a Christian. What a wonderful Christian life he lived! What toils he endured, what difficulties he encountered and what obstacles he overcame! Surely it ought to be of great interest to learn the secret of such a life. Concerning this we are not left to speculation. Paul revealed that secret in the words of our text. What Christ did for Paul He can do for us. This verse certainly throws important and instructive light on the life I live. It emphasizes certain great truths about the Christian life.

What is the Christian life? From the beginning to the end the Christian life is a divine miracle. It begins in the divine 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 shall see Christ and become like Him (I John 3:2). Consequently, the Christian life is something far beyond our poor strivings and efforts.

With the greatest simplicity possible I want to explain some of the glorious truths enshrined in this inspired statement from God's Word. It described what we might well call the full-orbed Christian life.

"I am crucified with Christ." What does that mean? Paul was saying that even as Christ was crucified to the law, sin, Satan and death, so that they had no further power over Him, the Apostle was crucified with Christ in spirit so that the law, sin and Satan had no further power over him. His statement referred to the utter death of the whole life that was centered in self. His assertion meant, "I, with all my emotions, aims and hopes that are centered simply on myself, am absolutely crucified." Being crucified with Christ involves a three-fold change of relation, in that one becomes dead to the law, dead unto sin and dead to the world. Paul certainly had a genuine fellowship with Christ in His death.

On three occasions 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." There, you see, is the old man's decease. He died. In Colossians 3:9 Paul said, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." Paul thus taught us to put off the old deeds and habits. In Ephesians 4:22 he said, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." That phrase "the former conversation" meant the manner of life, or the whole trend of living. It did not refer to isolated deeds, but to the whole manner of life as a

person. One who is crucified with Christ is absolutely abandoned to the will of God, accepts Christ's attitude towards his fellowmen and chooses Christ's way of reaching ultimate victory. The Christian is a crucified man. He has crucified the flesh with its affections and desires.

Note the paradox in the text. The Christian is crucified, and yet he lives. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." Crucified, and yet living! The glorious fact is that while the old man is crucified, the new man is living. Oh, what a transformation!

Paul was not living as he had lived formerly. A great change had been wrought in him. A wonderful transformation had taken place. The life he was living when he wrote this verse was far different from his life in former years. His had become a Christ-centered life. Said he, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." The world observed Paul and saw Christ in him. Every grace that Paul possessed was but a faint reflection of the beauty of Christ. Every virtue which he manifested was only a demonstration in lesser degree of the holiness of his sinless Lord. Christ within meant refreshment, enjoyment and abiding strength for the daily life.

Paul was fully conscious that Christ was living in him. Knowing that he was spiritually alive, he spoke the language of happy assurance. When Christ takes possession of and lives in a man he does not destroy his personality, but He uses it and multiplies its worth and usefulness. Christ wanted Paul's learning, energy and flaming enthusiasm in His service. When He laid hold upon him He did not repress or exterminate these qualities, but He converted them to higher uses and nobler ends. It was as if Christ's personality had invaded Paul's and had taken complete possession of it. Christians should allow Christ's will to replace their wills, and allow His presence to fill their souls so that they shall have power to obey His will. Nobody in all history ever allowed Christ to take such complete possession of him as did Paul.

This text presents very vividly a view of Christianity which we are in danger of overlooking. What is the usual way of thinking of Christianity? Do you think of Christianity as believing in Christ and doing as He did? This verse tells us that Christianity is Christ living in us. It is not imitating something on the outside, but it is Christ living in the soul. It is not a vision, but an incarnation. Christianity is not the imitation of a splendid model, but it is the indwelling of a living presence.

When Christ enters the life the transformation is surprising. By His presence Christ brightens up the dull, monotonous days and makes life worth living. When Christ lives in us life takes on a new meaning. In the Christ-centered life dormant powers are aroused and greatly improved.

The Christian life is an entirely new life. How very important it is to understand this, for so many people have the idea that the Christian life is the old, unregenerate life improved, or patched up, or reformed. But that is not the case. Paul spoke of his old life and of the new life which he received at his conversion. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." He has become the recipient of a new life.

Where is it that you and I are to live the Christian life? It is right here in this mortal body that God has given us. "The life that I now live in the flesh" refers to the sphere in which the believer lives the Christian life. Paul made no claim to the extraordinary, the miraculous, or the spectacular. His life was subject to human weakness, trial and sorrow.

He encountered temptations from without, evil tendencies from within, the wounds of friends, the persecution of enemies and the disappointments of aim. Nobody can live the Christian life without an ample portion of disappointments, burdens, griefs and cares. The wonderful thing about the Christian life is that it has been made possible in the very body in which before we were defeated, and in the very circumstances where before we suffered loss. You can know that life and blessing in the flesh. The children sing about it:

"Two little eyes to look to God,
Two little ears to hear His Word,
Two little feet to walk in His ways,
Two little lips to sing His praise,
Two little hands to do His will,
And one little heart to love Him still."

Life-giving faith includes two things -- faith in His vicarious death 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.

Note the individuality of that. 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 that led Him to go to that shameful death. From that very moment the heart of Paul 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 a life of service, of his love for the One who had thus loved him. Notice how he speaks 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, can do more, none ought to attempt less, than to live his life according to the outline here so glowingly proposed. 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.