

## A LIFE WITHIN A LIFE

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

This wonderful verse, which is the favorite of many of God's children, is the utterance of a great Christian who was almost overwhelmed by the amazing wonder of his glorious experience with Christ. As he thought of the profundity of the great change that had been wrought in the life by Christ, and sought to make such a change of heart a living reality for others, language almost failed him for words which were deep enough and big enough to express the glow that was in his heart. From this text one gets the idea that Paul was trying to explain that personal experience which, actually, was and is beyond the power of words to express. Words are a most precious vehicle of expression, but at times they are inadequate.

In this declaration we have the open secret of a great life. The underlying principle and the inspiring motive of an eminent and useful career are here brought to view. These words express the profoundest conviction and the loftiest experience of the Apostle Paul.

It is certain that no man ever lived a more heroic and victorious life than Paul. 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 pioneer, a great missionary, and a great preacher, 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 would be of the greatest interest to know the secret of his great life. Concerning this we are not left to speculation. Paul revealed that secret in the words of our text. Here is to be found what ought to be the normal experience of every Christian. What Christ did for Paul He can do for you.

Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ." To Paul crucifixion with Christ meant that the law, Satan, sin, and death did not any longer have power over him. His statement was an affirmation of the utter death of the life that was centered in self. His assertion meant, "I, with all my emotions, aims, and hopes that are centered on myself, have been crucified." Using his experience as an example of what has happened to all true Christians, Paul did not remind his readers of anything further that they must try to do, but of something which had already taken place.

Paul declared that he was not living as he had lived formerly. A great change had been wrought and a wonderful transformation had taken place. The life he was living was far different from the one he had lived previously. It is very important that we understand that the Christian life is an entirely new life. Many have the idea that the Christian life is the old, unregenerate life improved or patched up, or reformed, but that is not the case. The very moment one becomes a believer on Christ he automatically receives the divine nature and a new principle of life. As Paul said, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."

Thereafter Christ dwelt in Paul. The world saw Paul, but at the same time it observed Christ in the person of His disciple. Every grace that Paul possessed

was but a faint reflection of the beauty of Christ. Every virtue which Paul exhibited was only a manifestation in lesser degree of the holiness of his sinless Lord. Christ within means refreshment, enjoyment, and abiding strength for the daily life. It means victory in the battle against Satan and sin.

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. When Christ laid hold upon Paul He did not repress or exterminate his learning, energy, and enthusiasm, 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, in order that they may have the strength and ability to obey His will.

We speak of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives as if it were a very simple matter, but we must never forget that His incoming and indwelling constitute one of the greatest mysteries and miracles in the universe. Only through a miraculous operation can Christ dwell in the human heart. Is Christ at home in your life? Or, are there some rooms marked "Private" where He would not be welcomed? If Christ dwells in your heart, you will experience victory, and have purity, and sufficient energy for what you may be called upon to do.

This text brings before us very vividly a view of Christianity which we are in danger of overlooking. What is the usual way of thinking of Christianity? Is it in something like this: Christianity is believing in Christ, imitating Christ, and doing as Christ did? Our text conveys a new and deeper thought, namely, Christianity is Christ living in us. True religion is not imitating something on the outside but it is Christ living in the soul. It is not a vision, but an incarnation. With us, it is as it is in nature, the life is within. In the springtime, the trees do not put on foliage from the outside. The leaves are but the outward manifestation of the inner and quickened life. Christianity is not the imitation of a splendid model but the indwelling of a living presence. It is perfect unity of the soul with Christ.

Christ supplies the motive of useful and worthwhile living. George Elliott declared that what makes life dreary is want of motive, and it is true that without motive life is insipid and wearisome. When Christ enters the life, the transformation is surprising. Christ, by His presence, brightens up the dull, monotonous days and makes life worth living. When Christ lives in us, life takes on new meaning. In the Christ-centered life dormant powers are aroused and greatly improved. Just as the flower grows on the plant so Paul and we, who are Christians, get our life and nourishment from "Christ who lives in us."

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 to us. "The life which I now live in the flesh" refers to the sphere in which the believer lives the Christian life. Paul did not make any 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 a Christian life without an ample portion of disappointments, burdens, griefs, and cares. The wonderful and encouraging thing is that the Christian life has been made possible for us in the very bodies in which we were previously defeated, and in the very circumstances where we formerly suffered losses.

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.

Paul's assertion, "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God," is a grand saying. The historic Christ, the divine Christ, the living Christ is here in the fullness of His revelation of God, in the glory of His perfect person, and in the power of His divine being. Indeed, faith in Christ is the necessary condition and source of spiritual life. Faith receives all of His doctrines, bows to all of His commands, trembles at all of His threatenings, and rejoices in all of His promises.

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 have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).