

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.

These are the words of a great Christian. They are the utterance of an intensely emotion. It is the utterance of a man who is well-nigh overwhelmed by the amazing wonder of his experience of Christ. As he thinks of the profundity of the change that has been wrought in his life by Christ, and seeks to make such a change of heart a living reality for others, language almost fails him for words which are deep enough and big enough to express all the glow that is in his heart. From this great text one gets the idea that Paul is here trying to explain that personal experience which, actually, is beyond the power of words to express. Words are a most precious vehicle of expression, but at times they fail.

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 are the expression of a sincere and loyal soul. They reveal to us 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 lived. His life was a model of excellence. It was honorable, noble, exemplary, and victorious. He was great in many ways. He was a great thinker, a great missionary, a great pioneer, but he was greatest of all as a Christian. What a wonderful Christian life he lived! What toil he endured, what difficulties he encountered, what obstacles he overcame! He fainted not, he halted not, but ever pressed steadily onward. Surely it would be of the greatest interest to know the secret of such a life. Concerning this, we are not left to speculation. Paul tells us 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 us.

"I have been crucified with Christ," said Paul. This statement carries us back to the historical scene where Christ was crucified between two robbers. Jesus entered into our pains in order that we might enter into his peace. He shared the shame of the robbers in order that Paul and we might share His glory. The atoning sacrifice of Christ, accepted by personal faith, was the open secret of Paul's wonderful and glorious life.

This statement refers to fellowship with Christ in His death. Paul states that, so far as the claims of justice are concerned, he has been crucified with Christ, that is, Christ's crucifixion stands for his and he is free. Paul means that, even as Christ Himself was crucified to the law, sin, Satan, and death, so that they have no further power over Him; even so I, being crucified with Christ in spirit, am crucified and dead to the law, sin, Satan, and death, so that they have no further power over me. He became dead to the law, dead unto sin, and therefore no longer the servant of Satan, and dead to the world and the world to him. His statement, "I am crucified with Christ," refers to the utter death of the whole life that is centered in self. This assertion means, "I, with all the hopes, emotions, and aims that are centered simply on myself, am absolutely crucified." The self-life is in reality the very root and ground of all sin. Being crucified with Christ involves a three-fold change of relation. One becomes dead to the law, dead unto sin, and dead to the world. Though the Christian is not literally crucified with Christ, he is crucified spiritually and henceforth is dead to human pride, worldly pleasures and degraded passions. Paul certainly had a genuine fellowship with Christ in His death.

Paul tells us that he is not living as he had formerly lived. A great change had been wrought and a wonderful transformation had taken place. The life he now lives is far different from the life of other years. His is a Christ-centered life. The moment one becomes a believer in Christ, he automatically becomes the subject of an inward change and a new principle of life is implanted. Christ lives in him. Our text says, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." Our death with Christ involves our life with Him. The Christian dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in the Christian. The world saw Paul, but at the same time it saw 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. It is the very genius of our faith. It is the vital breath of every saved man's experience.

Paul was fully conscious that Christ was living in him. Knowing that he was spiritually alive, he spoke the language of happy assurance. He said, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." By that he did not mean that the native Saul was extirpated and destroyed. When He takes possession of a man, Jesus does not destroy his personality but he uses it. Jesus wanted Saul's learning, his energy, and his flaming enthusiasm in His own service. When He laid hold of Saul, He did not repress or exterminate these qualities, but he converted them to higher uses and nobler ends. But while Saul remained essentially the same personality after his conversion that he was before, his whole life came under another direction and mastery. If the will is the governing faculty in life, it would be true to say that Saul came under the direction of another will. Prior to Damascus, it was his own will; after Damascus, it was Christ's will. And not only Christ's will in his direction but Christ's living presence as his power so that he could truthfully say, "It is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me." It was as if Christ's personality had invaded his and taken complete possession of it. Of course, this is what every Christian is expected to do--to let Christ live in him. That is really the meaning of the Christian life--allowing Christ's will to replace ours, and allowing His presence so to fill our souls that we shall have power to obey His will. But no one in all history allowed Christ to take such complete possession of him as did Paul.

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 a 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."

This life is lived under the usual human conditions. Paul's statement, "that life which I now live in the flesh," is simple, modest, and frank. He makes no claim to the extraordinary, the miraculous, or the spectacular. His life was subject to human weakness, sorrow, and trial. Temptation without, evil tendency within, wounds of friends, persecution of enemies, disappointments of aim, all were his. No man can live a life worth anything without an ample portion of disappointments, burdens, griefs, and cares.

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 better 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." Gal. 2:20.