

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Life in Christ Galatians 2:20

This verse is so well known to believers or it ought to be. It is not the memorization of it that is most important (though that is very important and we all should learn it by heart), but it is the reality or practical outworking of what we find in Galatians 2:20 that is so very important. This verse is about death and life. Nothing is more certain than death (either physical or spiritual). In this verse the life that is promised is dependent upon a death. In fact there is a two-fold aspect in connection with death. There is first of all the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and then our association with Him in His death. To say that “I have been crucified” implies death in so final and violent a form, and to say that “I have been crucified with Christ” implies association with His death. Quite simply, Paul is stating that when Jesus died, the believer died with Him.

Secondly, there is a great emphasis on life. This is life in view of the fact that a death has occurred. This implies a resurrection. This is not the bodily resurrection that we will experience when Christ comes, but this is how the impartation of new life in Christ is regarded. The new birth means just that. It is brand new – it is not a renovation of the old. The old has died and the new has come (2 Cor. 5: 17).

Thirdly, the great doctrine of our union with the Lord Jesus is evident in this verse. Paul states that it is “Christ who lives in me”. The living Lord Jesus Christ living in us is true because of our union with Him. The life of Christ is in us because Christ is in us and we are in Him. Our union with Christ is emphasized in passages like Romans 6:1 – 6 and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

This union begins with the death of Christ, and if we have been united with Him in His death, the certainty of being raised with Him is the corollary of that union (Rom. 6:5). Before we became believers, we were united to Adam and since he died we also were guaranteed to die. In Christ we are made alive. All those in Adam die, so too, in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22).

We do not understand the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20 as being literal when he says that he has been crucified with Christ. Nor when he says that he no longer lives, do we understand him to mean that he is dead physically. Should we understand these words then, in some other sense? Certainly we cannot understand them completely if we adopt the literal approach only. Is Paul simply identifying himself then with what Jesus did on the Cross for him? Is Paul viewing his crucifixion with Christ in a forensic or legal sense? He certainly would accept that as far as God was concerned, he was a guilty sinner (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul also knew that in view of Christ’s redemptive sufferings that this sentence of death has been commuted to life eternal and righteousness has been imputed to him. In this sense, Paul would be right to say that he was crucified with Christ (cf. Isa. 53:4 – 6, 8, 12; Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 1:29; Gal. 1:4; 3:13; Eph. 2:1, 3, 5,6; Col. 2:12 – 14, 20; 1 Tim. 3:6). All of these views do not quite get at what Paul is saying.

Paul is saying that the process of crucifixion has been fulfilled or carried to its conclusion, and therefore, he is no longer alive. In what sense is this true for Paul? It is true for Paul in the sense that as a self-righteous Pharisee, who had based his entire life and existence in the future on his complete dedication to and

observance of the Law (in this sense Paul thought he lived), but now he finds that he has actually died because of Jesus' death, and therefore, he is no longer alive.

What we must remember in Galatians 2 is that Paul is explaining his conduct in dealing with Peter's hypocrisy when Jews came to Antioch from Jerusalem. When Paul confronted Peter about Peter cutting out the Gentiles in his eating habits because he was afraid of the Jews (with their dietary prohibitions), Paul was saying that Peter had made acceptance with God on the basis of conforming to some legal requirements. Paul is saying to Peter that that was how he used to be himself, but no longer. Paul is saying that his righteousness is no longer his own self- righteousness, but is the righteousness of Jesus imputed to him. In this way, he is therefore, dead to the old way of life. He has died with Christ – it is now Christ who lives in Paul. Paul goes on to explain in the verse how he has died, or rather, how he now lives. The life he is now living in his flesh (body) is a life of faith in Christ. In Galatians 2:16, Paul has explained to Peter and his hearers that justification before God is by faith in Christ and not by law-keeping as a means of acceptance. It is in relation to this law-keeping attitude that Paul says, he has died with Christ. The life he is now living is the life of faith. It is really the life of Jesus in him. There is gratitude to Christ for what He has done. Paul refers to the Lord Jesus as having loved him and given Himself for Paul. It is precisely this heartfelt thanksgiving that is the expression of someone who truly knows and appreciates what Jesus Christ has done for him or her. Paul's faith is personal – it is in Christ who loved him. The death of Christ was the "giving" of Christ's life for Paul - Christ's life for Paul's life. In this way, Paul, says "I live."

Martin Luther said that what links us with Jesus is faith. To be united with Christ is life, but to be separated from Christ is death. Faith therefore, embraces and wraps itself in Christ Jesus the Son of God, who was delivered to death for us, and who is apprehended by faith, and who gives to us His perfect righteousness and life. This is why Paul says in verse 21 that he does not nullify or set aside the grace of God. If he were to abandon (like Peter did in his practice with the Jews for Jerusalem), the righteousness of Christ as his only means of acceptance before God, then he would have had no need of grace in salvation. This is why grace is so marvelous – it is a great gift.

Paul speaks of living "in the flesh" in the present tense – "the life I now live". He is concerned to live out Christ day by day. This is what is upon his heart. In everything he does and says Paul wants to magnify Christ, because Christ so loved him and gave Himself for Paul. This is the response of faith expressed in thanksgiving. This is why an unthankful Christian is contrary to the Bible. If we spend our time complaining about this or that, we are demonstrating ingratitude towards the Savior. Thankfulness is the expression of the life of faith. We can thank God everyday for our salvation and we should. We can thank God for his grace toward us. We can thank God that we are accepted in Christ.

In Galatians 2:20, we see the death of self. It is a horrible death - it is crucifixion. It is in the way of death on the Cross that Jesus secured our salvation. Each disciple is required to take up his or her own cross and follow Christ. The path of discipleship is the way of death and self-denial. We are to deny ourselves. This self-denial can only occur if we truly recognize and practice the truth that we have been crucified with Christ.

Paul says that this crucifixion kills self. He expresses it this way – "I no longer live." This is not the end of Paul's life, but only the beginning, because he says, the life he was living was because "Christ lives in me." Now that he truly lives, he lives by faith in the Son of God who saved him – "who loved me and gave Himself for me." Are you truly alive in Christ? Are you living in Christ? Is Christ living in you? Do not add legal burdens to salvation. The only righteousness acceptable to God is not our own, but that of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us live this way to the glory of God. Salvation makes all the difference – thank God for it! Now we truly live.

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