

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON THIRTY)**

### ***“CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST” (PART 2)***

#### **GALATIANS 2:20**

#### **(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

*“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

Why does Paul make this great affirmation at this point in his argument in **Galatians 2**? The context of **Galatians 2** is how the believer is made right with God. The Judaizers were telling the Galatian believers that faith in Christ was not enough. To be saved, they said, believers must also be circumcised and become “Jewish.” Only then would they be wholly right with God. In verses **15** and **16**, Paul counters that false, legalistic teaching. He explains,

*15 We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,*

*16 yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.*

In verse **19** Paul says, “*For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.*” While he was trying to please God by keeping the Law, Paul was not really living for God. The more he tried to keep the

Law, the more he saw how much he was failing to do so. It was only when he gave up trying to achieve righteousness through his own efforts and accepted the righteousness of God by faith in Christ, that he truly began living for God. It is justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that makes it possible for a person to really live for God!

In verse **19** Paul states in effect, “I am completely delivered from the Law. The Law has nothing more to do with me, and I have nothing more to do with it, as it relates to my justification or my standing before God. And this freedom from Law is necessary to my living a truly holy life—a life devoted to God.” What follows in verses **20** and **21** is his explanation of this thought in which he makes one of the most profound statements in all of Scripture.

Brothers and sisters, as we read the New Testament, it should become increasingly clear to us that the mission of Jesus on the earth was not to issue some new call for a redoubled effort on the part of persons to keep the **Law** or any other system of rule-keeping. The mission of Jesus, was to issue an invitation to **Life** and this invitation to life is the heart of the Gospel. True righteousness is the result of new life which means both entrance into a new relationship with God and the dynamic of His power working effectively within us to make possible the love, goodness, and holiness which all religions hold out as an ideal but only the Christian faith is able to produce. Therefore, as believers in Jesus Christ we must always resist the subtle temptation to let our own focus shift from life to the Law, or any other legalistic principle.

**The Message** translates verses **19** and **20** in the following way:

*19 What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be God's man.*

*20 Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ.*

*My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Commenting on verse **20**, an anonymous writer makes the following remarks:

“This verse enunciates three striking paradoxes which are realized in the experience of every Christian.

**1 The Judicial Paradox**, or the mystery of the believer’s **legal standing**. The believer, be it remembered, is a dead man to begin with, i.e., before he becomes a believer. In his natural condition he is an unpardoned transgressor, and therefore in the law’s eye as good as dead. He is already taken, charged, tried, convicted, sentenced, shut up to the just judgment of wrath, and only waiting the hour of death to meet its execution. But now **in Christ**, who before the law acted as his representative, and for his sake became obedient unto death, he is executed too. So far as the claims of justice are concerned, he is crucified with Christ, i.e., Christ’s crucifixion stands for his, and he personally is free. He has died, and yet he lives!

**2 The Spiritual Paradox**, or the mystery of the believer’s **inner life**. The moment a man becomes a believer, he at the same time becomes the subject of an inward change, by which [his old self, spiritually dead and totally dominated and controlled by the fallen, unregenerate, adamic nature or the “flesh,”] is destroyed, and a new principle of holy life is implanted. Christ lives in him.

**3 The Practical Paradox**, or the mystery of the believer’s **outer walk**. While living in the body and in the world the believer is not under the dominion of either, but regulates his conduct and conversation by

principles superior to both-by faith in the Son of God. Christ's law is his rule of life; Christ's person the object of his love."

The phrase "*crucified with Christ*" obviously does not refer to a **physical** death with Christ. It therefore, refers to a **spiritual** death by identification with Him. The personal pronoun "**I**" (Greek **ego**), at the beginning of this verse is a reference to the old self. It is a reference to all that we were as sons of Adam, **prior** to our conversion.

The believer's identification with Christ in His death, resulted in the breaking of the power of the fallen, unregenerate, adamic nature or the "flesh," over his or her life. This victory over sin which the Lord Jesus secured for us at the Cross, is made actual and operative in our lives as we yield to the Holy Spirit and trust Him for that victory. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to apply in our lives, the deliverance from the power of the "flesh" which Christ secured at Calvary.

Our "**I**"-our old self, was crucified with Christ and therefore no longer has a valid claim on our life, for we are no longer in **Adam** but in **Christ**. This is now our **position** before God forever and it should increasingly be reflected in our daily **practice**.

*"I am crucified with Christ"* says the Apostle. The verb "*crucified*" is in the **perfect tense** which speaks of a past completed action having present finished results. Paul uses it to show that his identification with Christ at the Cross was a past fact, and that the spiritual benefits that have come to him through his identification with Christ are present realities with him.

It is important for us to understand that being crucified with Christ, also meant death to **self** to Paul. When Paul died with Christ, it was **Saul**, the self-righteous Pharisee, the arrogant blasphemer, the persecutor of Christ and His church, who died. What he was and did up to that time passed away as far as he was concerned. Saul was buried, and the old life with him. The dominating control of the fallen unregenerate, adamic nature or the "flesh" had its power over him broken.

God does not change or transform the old self. What He does is crucify him with Christ. Therefore, we do not need to crucify the old self for Christ has already done so for us!

Brothers and sisters, when we recognize that we have been “*crucified with Christ,*” we should indeed consider ourselves to be, “*dead to sin,*” as Paul admonished in **Romans 6:11**. But we must also think of ourselves to be, “*alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

It is with this in mind that Paul goes on to say, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*” Paul is informing his readers that his **ego**-his old self that lived in legalism prior to his being crucified with Christ, is no longer living. The principle of the old life in legalism has passed away, and a new life is implanted within him. The explanation of the paradox of him being dead in one sense and alive in another sense, is that the new life was not his own, but it was Christ living in him.

It is no longer a **self**-centered life that he lives, but a **Christ**-centered one. His new life is not a **principle** but a **Person**, the Lord Jesus living in him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The new life is no longer, like the former one, dependent upon the feeble, ineffective efforts of a man attempting to draw near to God in his own righteousness. The new life is a Person within a person, living out His beautifully efficacious life in that person.

In **Galatians 2:20**, Paul is describing the nature of our union with Christ. It is a mysterious union, one that we cannot completely comprehend in this life, a union in which Jesus Christ is now living in and through the believer. This mystical union does not mean that I no longer have any responsibilities in the Christian life. Paul is saying, “Yes, I still live, but there is something so different about my life, for Christ now lives in me. It is not me, alone, facing the demands of life; it is not me, alone, trying to work out my salvation; it is not me, alone, striving to live out the demands of the Gospel. It is Christ in me, living in me, living His glorious life through me.”

Brothers and sisters, it is critically important for us to understand that it is **only** what Christ does in us and through us that merits the approval of God! In **Matthew 3:16-17** we read the following:

*16 After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.*

*17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight.”*

**(New English Translation)**

The only One in Whom God takes great delight is Jesus Christ, and He only delights in us for Jesus’s sake! It is this One Who indwells us through the Holy Spirit, enabling us to live our lives in a manner pleasing to God.

In **John 15:5**, our Lord said to His disciples, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing”* (**New English Translation**).

The word *“nothing”* in this verse must be understood to primarily mean, “Nothing that can please God the Father—nothing in which He can take great delight—nothing for which we will be rewarded when we stand before the everlasting throne.”

As one commentator has observed,

“This is one of the most difficult truths to learn in the Christian life because our culture has so ingrained in us that we have to work for the favor of others. If we work hard enough, we might gain their approval! And yet when it comes to pleasing God, we could never **‘do’** or **‘work’** enough to please Him. Paul learned the secret that only God’s Son living and working through us via His Spirit could please the Father. What God does desire and what is a manifestation of true faith is our...

obedience, for 'to obey is better than sacrifice' (**1 Samuel 15:22**). But even our obedience ultimately is initiated and empowered by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, [ *I will put my Spirit within you; I will take the initiative, and you will obey my statutes and carefully observe my regulations* ] (**Ezekiel 36:27**). It is sad that undoubtedly much 'Christian work' that has been done in the name of Jesus is going to burn because it has been carried out not by Christ Who lives in us but in the power and motives of the flesh."

Paul is explaining to his readers that true Christian righteousness is the righteousness of Christ Who lives in us. We must look away from ourselves to Christ, so that we can see nothing else but Him crucified and raised from the dead for us. If we focus on ourselves and not on Christ, we will not be victorious.

In **Numbers 21:4-9**, we read the following:

*4 Then they traveled from Mount Hor by the road to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, but the people became impatient along the way.*

*5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness, for there is no bread or water, and we detest this worthless food."*

*6 So the LORD sent venomous snakes among the people, and they bit the people; many people of Israel died.*

*7 Then the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD that he would take away the snakes from us." So Moses prayed for the people.*

*8 The LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous snake and set it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live."*

*9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole, so that if a snake had bitten someone, when he looked at the bronze snake he lived.*

**(New English Translation)**

In **John 3:14-15**, Jesus applied this passage to Himself. He said to Nicodemus,

*14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,*

*15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”*

**(New English Translation)**

The word translated “*believes*” in verse **15**, is **Pisteuōn**, the **present active indicative participle** of **pisteuō**. The present active indicative participle indicates that the “believing” spoken of by our Lord is not temporary, but active and on-going. Brothers and sisters, we must fix our eyes on Jesus Christ our brazen serpent, and believe that He is **all** our righteousness and **all** our life. He is the One in Whom we live; He is the One Who lives in us; He is Lord over the Law, over sin, and over death. And our belief must be active and on-going.

In illustrating this great truth **Jerry Bridges** explains that prior to the invention of battery-powered watches, wristwatches had to be wound every day. The stem of the watch was used, not only to adjust the hands but also to wind up the mainspring. The gradual unwinding of the mainspring throughout the day drove the mechanism of the watch to keep time. He says that the Gospel of Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is the mainspring of the Christian life. And like the mainspring in old watches, it must be wound every day. Because we have a natural tendency to look **within** ourselves for the basis of God’s approval or disapproval, we must make a conscious daily effort to look **outside** of ourselves to the righteousness of Christ for that approval, and we must stand in the present reality of our justification. It is only by doing so that will we experience the stability that the great doctrine of **Justification by Faith Alone** provides.



In **Philippians 3:12-14**, Paul writes the following:

*12 Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.*

*13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead,*

*14 with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

**(New English Translation)**

This passage clearly indicates that though Paul was now resting in the righteousness of Christ rather than his own, this did not cause him to relax in his pursuit of Christlikeness. Rather, it motivated him to pursue it with even greater zeal and determination. His zeal was not now motivated by a desire to earn God's favour, but by his love and gratitude to God for the righteousness of Christ that was his by faith. This is the motivating power of the Gospel. And that is why we need to intentionally and consistently bathe our hearts and minds in the Gospel.

We must remember, that we need the Gospel not only as a door into an initial saving relationship with Christ, but also to keep our daily lives from becoming a performance treadmill. As we rely on Christ's righteousness in this manner, far from leading to a license to sin, it actually motivates us to deal with the sin we see in our lives by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God.