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1/25/04

Galatians 2:20           “Christ Alive in Us!”

Intro. I want to ask you this morning, would you like to know that your sins are forgiven, and you are going to heaven? Would you like to be able to overcome sinful habits? Would you like to know that you are living in such a way that your life is pleasing to God, and that you are right with God? I hope so. And so this morning I will share with you how all of this is possible, based on this one verse of Scripture. It is packed with meaning, and it is one of the greatest Scripture verses in the Bible. This is one you should memorize.

In this verse Paul uses a paradox. He speaks of being dead, and yet he is alive. Yet, it is not so much Paul who is alive, but Christ is alive in Paul. But this is a paradox only to those who have not experienced the reality of what He is speaking. Is v.20 strange and foreign to you? If so, it may be that you simply need more explanation, which I hope to give this morning. On the other hand, it may be that you have never experienced these wonderful truths. Either way, I hope you will listen carefully, for what Paul shares here not only is instructive of how to become a Christian, but it also gives the secret of the Christian life. Now first of all, I want us to see in the last of v.20:

## I. THE FOUNDATIONAL WORK OF CHRIST

The book of Galatians teaches that salvation and holy living cannot be achieved by human effort. *Christ* had to accomplish a vital ministry to make it all possible. All that Paul says in the first part of v.20 is made possible because of what is said in the last of v.20, where it says of Christ, that He “loved me and gave Himself for me.” That is the all-important atoning work of Christ. In that brief statement we see 3 truths. First:

A. The Motive of this Work of Christ – Paul said that Christ “*loved* me.” Many other places in Scripture we read that it was the Father's love that sent Jesus (e.g. John 3:16). But here we read that Jesus Christ was very willing to do the Father's will and even go to the cross, for He Himself loved us. He was not forced to the cross by our need or by the Father's will, but He bound Himself to the cross by His own love.

I want you to know that Jesus Christ loves you, even more than you can imagine. All the proof you need is seen in the fact that He gave Himself in dying for you on the cross. Jesus Himself said in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”

Charles Spurgeon told of a Russian nobleman was crossing the steppes of his vast country in the snow. Some wolves followed the sledge in greedy packs, eager to devour the travelers. The horses were lashed to their utmost speed, but needed not the lash, for they fled for their lives from their howling pursuers. Whatever could stay the eager wolves for a time was thrown to them in vain. A horse was loosed. They pursued it, rent it to pieces, and still followed, like grim death. At last a devoted servant, who had long lived with his master's family, said, “There remains but one hope for you; I will throw myself to the wolves, and then you will have time to escape.”

We also see here in this verse:

B. The Purpose of this Work of Christ - Notice the He gave Himself “*for me.*” The word translated “for” (*hyper*) probably means “on my behalf” or “in place of.” Christ's death was indeed substitutionary. Jesus, the sinless One, died in my place, for I have sinned, and deserve death. If Jesus had not died for you, then you would surely face eternal death as a proper judgment upon sin from a holy God. I was the one who sinned. I was the one who should have been crucified. But He died in my place.

C. The Personal Focus of this Work of Christ - Quite often the Bible speaks of Jesus dying for all men, or for the whole world. How blessedly true that is! But again, Paul gives another perspective of the atoning work of Christ. He not only died for all, but I can say with Paul, “He died *for me.*” The love of Christ for the world is here focused upon the individual. Could I be so bold as to think that when Christ was suffering on the cross, He was thinking of me? It was not an abstraction that He died for, not a vague mass of unknown beings. When we say that the divine Christ loves all, we mean that He loves each one. Remember, Jesus compared Himself to the shepherd who searched for one lost sheep. He seeks the individual. He knows your name. In a flash of omniscience, perhaps Christ thought of each person He was dying for [look around & name individuals]. Indeed, every man may say, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

So the work of Christ at Calvary was the all important work. If He had not done that, then nothing else would matter. But since He did die for us, and pay for our sin, we need to move to the second step toward salvation and holy living:

## II. THE FOUNDATIONAL RESPONSES WE MUST MAKE

The fact that Christ loved you, and died for you, will be of no benefit unless you make the two responses mentioned in our text. And both responses are in essence a life of identification with Christ, both in death and His resurrection life. You will not understand this verse unless you grasp the concept of our union with Jesus Christ, so let me help you. It is similar to marriage. The Bible says that in marriage, the two become one. You are no longer just two separate individuals. Your life becomes bound up in the life of your spouse. You cannot think of your life apart from your partner. Even so, Paul said in Phil. 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ...” This identification reminds me of the teaching of Christ in John 15 regarding the Vine and the branches. He said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”

So what are the two responses we must make to the loving sacrifice of Christ for us?

A. Die to Self – Christ was willing to die for us, so we must be willing to identify ourselves with Him in His death. Before the new man can live, the old man must be crucified with Christ. Now this death to self is a decisive decision you should make when you become a Christian, so decisive and so real, that it changes the whole course of your life. I say this because the word “crucified” is in the perfect tense. That means that something marvelous had happened to Paul in the past, with abiding spiritual benefits for the present and for all future times. I believe this took place when Paul was converted. The old Saul was such a different person. He was a self-righteous and proud Pharisee. But when Saul repented of his sin, and died to his old way of life, the dominating control of the Adamic nature had its power over him broken. The old Saul died that the Apostle Paul might be born again. What about you? Has there come a time in your life when your old self died, the old self was crucified?

Let's examine this just a little closer. There are three ways in which we are to identify with Christ in His death. First,

1. We Are Crucified with Christ in Reference to the Penalty of Sin – Keep in mind that crucifixion was a form of execution for crimes committed. So combined with its context, there is a judicial meaning here. V. 19 says, “For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.” When you identify with Christ by faith, then God, foreknowing your faith, considered you to have died with Christ. The law demanded death as the righteous penalty for sin, and its penalty was executed upon us in the Person of Jesus Christ when He died in our place. Being crucified with Him, we are freed from the penalty of the broken law. Any lawyer will tell you that when a criminal is put to death, the book is closed. The state has no more accusation against him. The penalty is paid. So it is when we are crucified with Christ. We are absolutely free from the penalty of sin!

2. We Are Crucified with Christ in Reference to Sin - Since Jesus died *for* our sin, we should die *to* our sin. Three times in the Gospels Jesus says, “Take up your cross and follow me.” Paul uses similar language here. Crucifixion means death. The true Christian is dead to sin & self. The sins of the old life are in the past. Right here in the context of Galatians, Paul said in 5:24, “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” 2 Cor. 5:15 says, “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” Rom. 6:6 says, “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”

Have you died to sin, and to self, or are you still freely practicing sin in your life? Well let me give you a little self-examination. One way I can tell if someone has been crucified with Christ is to watch how easily they get their feelings hurt. If the old self has died, then we should not be so concerned about our feelings. A dead man has no feelings. But so often even Christians get their feelings hurt quite easily. They are so easily insulted, so easily hurt, so easily made to feel unwanted or unloved. They whine and complain about how they are being treated. When they are hurt, they are unforgiving, and more likely to hold grudges. Now we certainly should not knowingly hurt anyone. But the Christian needs to get beyond being so easily hurt, and one way is to reckon yourself as dead to self. But if you are filled with ambition, vanity, and self-seeking, then you lay yourself open to all kinds of hurt. On the other hand, if you are dead, you cannot be hurt. So again I ask you, have you died to sin, and to self?

3. We Are Crucified with Christ in Reference to the World – Right here in the context of Galatians, Paul said in 6:14, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” In Col. 3:2-3 Paul said, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. *For* you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” But the worldling seeks the things of the world, looking for happiness and fulfillment. He seeks happiness in immorality. He seeks joy & peace from the drug pusher. He seeks the so-call good life from godless parties and alcohol. But he never really finds real life, or real joy and peace. All he gets is disease and a trail of broken relationships. Is that life? No! Here is real life, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.”<sup>1</sup>

The Susan B. Anthony dollar coin was only circulated for 3 years. Do you know why it achieved such limited circulation? The main reason was that it looked too much like a quarter. Too often professing Christians look too much like non-Christians to be accepted as credible witnesses

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<sup>1</sup> We have also been crucified to the religion of the world. One form of worldly religion is living by legalistic rituals. Paul said in Col. 2:20-21, “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.”

for Christ.

So on the basis of the willingness of Christ to be crucified for you, I plead with you to make sure you have been crucified with Christ. If not, turn from sin right now. Turn away from the world as your source of happiness. Turn to Christ, and He will change your life. Only He *can* change your life in a real and lasting way.

In 1833 Charles Darwin, who wrote the *Origin of the Species*, and really popularized the theory of evolution in the world, visited the South Sea Islands looking for the missing link as he called it. He found a tribe of people who were so primitive and so backward and so base that he suggested he might have even found the civilization that was the link between the animal kingdom and man. He saw no hope they would be elevated for generations to come. Thirty-four years later Charles Darwin returned to those same South Sea Islands to see that same tribe of pagan people and he was absolutely astounded. On that island, among those people, he found schools and churches. He found those people clothed and gathering together and singing hymns. What happened? A missionary named John Patton came preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and when those people came to Christ, they were made brand new creations in Jesus Christ. That's the change that Jesus can make. But in order to experience such a change, you must first make that decision to be crucified with Christ.

However, that is not enough. Not only must we be crucified with Christ, but also:

B. Live by Faith in Christ – On the one hand, the old Paul was dead, crucified with Christ. But Paul went on to say, "...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." In the Greek there is an emphatic construction for the words "*by faith* I live." By faith in Jesus Christ, we share in His life. Faith is the means of appropriating this new life we can have in Jesus Christ.

Now if faith is so important, let's examine this responsibility that we have a little closer. Let's think of:

1. The Meaning of Faith - It may be better to use the word "trust" for faith. But what is most important about faith is the object of faith.<sup>2</sup> Faith is useless without a worthy object of faith. And the worthy object of our faith should be the person of Jesus Christ. So often we find that we cannot trust people. And there is good reason for our mistrust. So many people today are liars, and untrustworthy. But you can trust Jesus Christ with your life! So when you trust someone, it says something more about them than about how much faith you have. It means that they are trustworthy. It means that they are of good character. Friend, you can trust Jesus. You are not being asked to trust in just anyone, but in the one who loves you, and died for you. Surely, He has your best interest at heart. And notice that you are trusting Jesus as the "Son of God." He is not only willing to save and help you because of His love, but He is able to save you because He is divine.

2. The Need for *Personal* Faith - We must be sure that we personally have faith in Jesus Christ. Paul expresses a very personal faith here in these verses. He says, "*I* live by faith." Even so, our faith should be inward and individual. It is what I have felt, what I have heard, what I have known, what I believe, and what I experienced. The Christian faith must not be merely a faith of others. It must be your own faith. No one can experience God for you. The faith of your mother, father, or preacher will not substitute for personal faith. A person could be thirsty in a dry land, and a river of water could be flowing nearby. He could be told about the river, and he could believe that it could satisfy his thirst. But it will not do him any good until he personally goes to

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<sup>2</sup> "faith in the Son of God" is literally, "faith of the Son of God." But it is an objective genitive: Christ is the object of faith.

the river and receives the water into his dry mouth and weary body. Faith will benefit you only when it leads you to Christ, who loves you, and who can forgive your sins, and who can make you what you ought to be.

And as we have already observed, dear brother, you have the right to exercise such faith. The Christ who loves the world, and He who love each person, certainly loves you as well. You have as much right to claim every “whosoever” in the Bible as anyone else.

Have you reached the point in your life where you have died to self? Have you been crucified with Christ, identifying with Him in His death? Have you come to the place in your life where you have put your complete faith in Jesus Christ? If not, I invite you will do so today!

However, repenting of sin, and putting your faith in Jesus Christ is only the beginning. There is so much more to learn about living the Christian life. So let’s see not only how to begin the Christian life, but also:

### III. THE CONTINUATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Once you have died to self and put your faith in Jesus, that is only the beginning. The whole rest of your life is to be lived in the way Paul describes here. And in this text Paul speaks here of two types of life. One is the life lived in the flesh. That is the external, physical life that we have on this earth. But far more important than that for the Christian is the inner, spiritual life of the believer.

A. The Source of the Believer's Life - The Christian life is not lived by the flesh, but by the Spirit and life of the indwelling Christ. That is what Paul is referring to when he says, “Christ lives in me.” By faith, Christ Himself becomes the indwelling Guest in my heart. Indeed, this new life is a Person, the Lord Jesus living in us. The secrete of successful Christian living is not just doing the best you can, but allowing Christ to live *His* life *through* us.

Let me show you why it is important for you to learn to live this exchanged life with Jesus. I want you to see from our text:

B. The Benefits of the Indwelling Presence of Christ – I will mention 3 in closing:

1. A New Motivation & Inward Influence for Living – The problem with many people is that they do not live the Christian life because they do not *want* to live the Christian life. They want to live the life of sin. They want to live the way the rest of the world lives. Now we know this problem exists, so what do we do to try to change behavior? We usually try external pressure. We parents may try to get our children to do what is right by exerting external pressure upon them. To the degree our children are under our supervision with the real threat of consequence, then that can be somewhat effective. However, mama & daddy cannot supervise our children all the days of their life. The external pressure of law enforcement has so often failed to produce positive results. So we need an internal influence and motivation to help us live right. That is provided in the saving work of Christ. If you fully trust Jesus, He will help you *want* to live right. He will help you find far more joy in living right, than in living wrong. He motivates us from within by the influence of His personal presence. He changes our want to's. Phil. 2:13 says, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” He also motivates us by reminding us of His great love, the love that is expressed here by Paul. The one thing that stirs men to true obedience is that their hearts be touched with the firm assurance that Christ loved them and died for them. People will obey and serve someone who loves them greatly.

2. A New Power for Living – Men, which would you prefer to use? A hand saw, or a power saw? Ladies, which would you prefer, to wash clothes by hand, or to use the power of a washing machine? If a more powerful alternative is available, why not use it? Why try to live the Christian life in your own strength, when the power of Christ is available to live that life? We say, “Well, I’m doing the best I can.” We vainly suppose that in the spiritual dimension of life, we can get by with our own strength! But when you do so, such a religion is hard labor without joy. But Paul learned of a power beyond his own. He said, “Christ lives in me.” Yes, the mighty God lives in you, believer. Not your poor, weak, helpless self, but Christ by His power. Ah, why then do you talk about impossibilities? He said in Phil. 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” You can overcome the power of your own sin nature. You can overcome the power of negative peer pressure. And you can overcome the power of Satan himself through the power of the indwelling presence of Christ. 1 John 4:4 says, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Not only that, but the positive aspects of Christian living, such as loving service to God and others is joyfully possible through His strength. Someone said, “The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.”

So if we died to self, and allow Christ to come into our lives and be Lord of our lives, and trust in His strength, then life can be triumphant, patient, noble, hopeful, strong, and Christ like. For our lives will indeed be Christ living His life through us.

Conclusion: There was a North American Indian who stood up and said: “There came to our tribe a man and he told us about and extolled the God of the white man. We told him to leave. And there came another man and he said: “Do not drink any more firewater. Do not get drunk, and do not steal.” We paid no attention to him. Then there came a man and he told us about a God who came down from heaven to live among us, who so loved us that He shared our life and died in our place for our sins, and who opened the doors whereby we might be saved and enter heaven.” And the Indian said, “I could never forget it” [from Criswell, p.72].

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1962); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians & Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968); J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson’s, *New Testament Word Pictures in Online Bible* [CD-ROM]; Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957); Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on 2:11-21 dated 8/26/84); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944, 1973). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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