

## United with Christ

Galatians 2:15–21, Part Two: vvs. 17–21; 1 Corinthians 15:12–22

The Gospel — or the Good News — is the essential center of Christianity. The Gospel is about holy God saving sinners from their sin and giving them eternal life. On Resurrection Sunday we celebrate the work of triune God: God the Father stamped paid-in-full on the sin payment that God the Son made. As proof of the Father's acceptance, God the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is the undoing of the death penalty we incurred through our father, Adam, and that we earned ourselves through our rebellion and treason against God who made us for his purposes.

If you haven't really thought about the fact you have been under a death penalty, walk with me through God's redemptive plan. In the beginning, God created all that is for his purposes and his glory, including humankind, man and woman, as the crown of creation. They had dominion over all that was made, with one restriction from God concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were made for communion with God, which is stunning. Before they disobeyed, the closeness and intimacy they experienced with God was described as though he came and had dinner with them in the cool of the evening. But sin entered. Intimacy and communion were ended by an act of treason against holy God. That treasonous act brought judgment under God's righteous decree. God had told them that in the day they ate of the tree he had commanded them not to eat of, they would surely die. With a deceptive temptation from Satan, Eve took of the fruit and ate. Then gave it to Adam, and he ate in willful disobedience.

"In the day you eat of it, you will surely die." That's the death penalty. By all rights God could have struck them down immediately with no further explanation needed. But God essentially put the death penalty in slow motion. When they wiped their mouths after the first bite, rather than dropping in the dust, for the first time ever dead skin cell fell from our parents' lips and mingled in the dust of the earth. God's grace and mercy rushed in, and time was granted to repent and learn to trust God. But even though God's mercy triumphed over their immediate death, ever since then we have been separated from holy God because of our unrighteousness — our sin. We have been under both the curse of sin and penalty of death ever since. And we drop to the earth in death, one after another. No one has escaped the righteous death penalty God imposed for sinful rebellion. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was perfectly righteous, took on himself the penalty for sin he did not commit, so that those who should pay the death would not have to if they will come to him in faith.

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God made us for himself — to serve, to worship him, to delight in him, to commune with him. And his plan cannot be thwarted. So even though the sin of Adam and Eve resulted in separation and broken communion with God, his plan was still that we serve, and love, and worship him. So God set in motion the rescue and recovery plan he had fashioned even before the foundation of the world.

Since the death penalty was a righteous judgement from Holy God, he could not simply overlook the sin. No, the price for sin would have to be paid, or God would not be righteous and true. But Adam's race is fallen and under the curse of sin and death. The only way any one of us could pay would be with our lives — God's righteous plan of judgement prescribed that we must die, and that would satisfy the penalty. God's redemptive plan of salvation still involves the penalty of death being paid — but by a substitute, Jesus, the Righteous One. In Adam, one trespass led to condemnation for all men. But in Christ, one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. By Adam's disobedience the many were made sinners; by Jesus' obedience the many will be made righteous.

Now let's look at our text today. We will not have to fully exegete it this morning, but I will be delighted to sit down and explore it further with you, if you'd like.

**Galatians 2:15–21 — <sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;<sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.**

**<sup>17</sup>But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.**

**PRAY** — Open the eyes of our heart, Lord Jesus, to see you, to know you as the ever-living Lord, and to place our faith in you. Bring to life dead hearts and illumine darkened minds. Conquer affections that are not worthy of you, and bring into your Kingdom all those who hear your word. Make the book live to me, O Lord. Show me yourself within your Word. Show me myself and show me my Savior.

**There are two main points to the sermon: Apart from Christ, and United to Christ.**

## I. Apart from Christ

Verses 15–19 is difficult passage to interpret in one sense, and scholars debate between two major views. Here is what I think this is what Paul is getting at. Focus with me for a minute.

If I am dying of thirst, what do I pursue? \_\_\_\_\_ I pursue what I lack but must have.

If I am starving of hunger, what do I crave? \_\_\_\_\_ I crave what I need and do not have.

If I must give account to a righteous God and I have no righteous on my own, what do I pursue? \_\_\_\_

**In Galatia they know they know that they need righteousness to be accepted by God, and they are trying to find righteousness in two ways. But only one way will provide the righteousness they lack. The first way we'll examine is keeping the law.**

Paul, a Pharisee turned Apostle of Christ, spent his life studying and practicing the Old Testament law of Moses. For Jews, righteousness was found in keeping the law, and the Pharisees thought they were experts at it. Righteousness **was found** in keeping the law — it was found... That's part of what we need to grasp to understand vvs. 15–19.

If I must do something to find righteousness, if I am keeping the law to gain righteous points, if you will — what does that say about the level of my righteousness? At best, it's lacking. It's not enough! The reality is, it's zero! Only God is righteous. Righteousness is exclusively his domain. So Jews, Judaizers, Pharisees... any of you wanting to add works of the law to be righteous, all you are doing is proving you are unrighteous. If righteousness is needed, you don't have what you need.

The law exposes my unrighteousness and my inability to perfectly keep it no matter how hard I try. It's no different for us than it was with them. Our attempt to gain righteousness by doing good things — our attempt to rescue ourselves from unrighteousness won't work. That's what we're seeing here. As with them, all our attempts to work up righteousness expose the fact that we lack righteousness. In failed attempts to fix myself, I acknowledge my irreparable brokenness. I need a Savior.

I said there were two ways, and only one worked. So we know “keeping the law” — which no mere human has ever done, nor ever will do — doesn't work. Trying to keep it reveals unrighteousness.

There is another way. The second way to obtain the righteousness I need is to get a substitute to pass the righteousness test. Can you do that? Can you just get credit for the

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***righteousness of a substitute?*** Yes! This is the Gospel. What I cannot do — the standard of righteousness I cannot pass — God the Son does perfectly on my behalf as I, **by faith, enter into Christ.** The Good News of Christ is, that though I can never have enough righteousness on my own, I can be united with Christ, who is inherently, perfectly righteous and have his righteous life be credited to me. That is the hope of the Gospel.

Last week we labored over the ***instrumental means*** by which we are justified. What is the instrument, or the vehicle that justifies and moves us into Christ? Faith! Where last week we focused on **the means** of justification — that is, being declared not guilty of sin — let's delight in **the end** of justification by faith this morning. What is the end result of being declared not guilty when we place our faith in Christ? **The end is recovered communion with holy God through union with Christ!**

Jesus came to perfectly fulfill the law, and free those who trust him from the law that exposes sin, but cannot deliver from sin. The Jews in Galatia didn't like the sound of that: "free those from the law..." ***What do you mean, "free from the law?"*** The law revealed righteousness. If we are freed from the law, then it must be reasoned that we are returning to unrestrained sin. So they said tried to make the argument that Christ would actually be serving sin if we are freed from the law.

Is Christ a servant of sin because he frees us from the law? Certainly not! He did what those under the law could not do. He was righteous in himself, and he did perfectly fulfill every aspect of the law.

Now that all sounds very legal... and I hope you're still with me, because it's in this union with Christ that causes our hearts to swell with joy and triumph especially on Resurrection Sunday.

## II. United with Christ — v. 20

**<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

**Those are stunning words! Those are substitute words! Those are words of union!**

I have been crucified ***with Christ!*** How does that work? This is the mystery of union with Christ. This is the recovery of communion that was lost through sin in Genesis 3. God came down and communed with Adam and Eve until they sinned — and sin produced a catastrophic separation. But what of the separation for those who have placed their faith in Christ? How much separation is there now between God and his child? We are ***in Christ!*** There is zero separation! The mystery of this union joins us with him on his cross so that we enjoy his payment of sin through his death.

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There were four things nailed to Jesus' cross. First was his body, of course. Second, the sign named above his head that proclaimed him as King of the Jews. Third, Colossians 2 tells us the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands — this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. And fourth? Everyone who enters into Christ by faith was nailed to cross through union with him. When he paid the penalty for my sin, I was united with him so that my sin debt is marked paid.

Today we celebrate this: Not only in his cross are we united with him, but in his resurrection!

**Romans 6:5 — if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** Christ rose from the dead conquering our final enemy, death. As we were united with him in his death, so we are united with him in his resurrection and enjoy his eternal life. **I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives ... in me.** He is not dead, but he physically rose on the third day and is now seated in his resurrection body at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is alive, and he lives in me, and I in him as I am united with Christ. He loved me, he gave himself for me so that as I come to him in faith, I would not perish, but have his everlasting life.

Does Christ's atoning work on the cross leave something undone? Is there one sin yet to be atoned for? No! He cried from the cross, "It is finished!" Sin is atoned for! In the overarching context of this letter and this chapter, Galatians, how could you possibly want to go back and add law keeping back into your life as though the imputed righteousness of Christ was slightly inadequate? To do so is to nullify the grace of God, slandering the perfect work of Christ, trying to improve its impact. If you could do that — if you could add some righteousness on your own through the law, then Christ died for no purpose, as he says in **v. 21**. If you could do it on your own, Christ was a fool to endure what he did. He did not come to help bad men do better; he came to make dead men live!

The atoning work of Christ is finished. **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus — He has absorbed the condemnation. Flee to Christ!** The victory of Christ over death is won. **Come to Jesus and live!** Those who have entered into Christ — who are united to him by faith are counted righteous through him, and right now have eternal life in him. I'm going to read **1 Corinthians 15:12–22**. As I read, I will interrupt myself and point out the certain hope of eternal life we have in Christ through our union with him. Listen for union words and phrases as we go, and know with certainty that whatever Christ's destiny is, it is also our destiny.

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**1 Corinthians 15:12–22** — <sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

**[Look at the thoroughness of the believer's union in Christ. If the dead don't rise, Christ didn't rise because we are united. One can't go without the other]**

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

**[So fundamental is the believer's union in Christ, so absolute, that Paul says if the humblest, lowliest, least gifted, unknown Corinthian from the worst background imaginable, who placed his faith in Christ fails to rise from the dead, Christ is not resurrected. Why? Because the humblest, least gifted, unknown Corinthian from the worst background imaginable, is absolutely united in Christ.]**

<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

There are only 2 options for our existence. We are either in Adam, which is our natural state — we are born in Adam — or we are in Christ. Whichever one we are in determines our destiny. In Adam, all die. They pay their own price for sin and rebellion. In Christ, all shall be made alive. He paid their penalty, and being united with him means my penalty is paid.

Let's be reminded what John Calvin said: All that Christ has done in his death and resurrection remains of no value to me as long as I am not in Christ.

**Where I end up is determined by what I get in.** Grammarians may not appreciate the poorly placed prepositions in that proposition, but it's a true fact, nonetheless.

Two of us are traveling this week. I am planning to drive my truck to Texas and drive through wildflower country. This is Bluebonnet season, and it does something for me to get out in the country and look at God's creation. Silvia is likely traveling to Guatemala to see her mom who is being

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treated for cancer. If you want to go to Texas, you're gonna have to get in my truck. Lord willing, that's where it's going. If you want to go to Guatemala, you're gonna have to get on the plane. You're not getting to Guatemala in my truck, and they aren't dropping you in Texas from the plane.

What vehicle are you trusting to get you to peace with God and eternal life? If you are trying to work up your own righteousness, you are just exposing your unrighteousness. If you are trying to clean yourself up, you are exposing your filthiness. The vehicle of self-improvement or self-righteousness or self-esteem, or anything else that starts with "self" — it won't get you there.

Christ calls us to come confessing what he already knows: that we are unrighteous, morally bankrupt, and without the capacity to clean ourselves up. It is at that point where **he says** turn from your sin and self to me, place your faith in me, trust me, and I will credit my sinless perfection to you. I will adopt you; you will be united to me. As I paid the penalty for sin, making peace through the blood of my cross, as I cancelled the record of debt, so in me your sin debt is cancelled. As I live, you will live. I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?

**PRAY**

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