

Not I but Christ (Discussion Guide on pg.11)

Galatians 2:20

Have you ever felt like it's hard to live the Christian life or heard someone say that being a Christian is hard? How many of you know, it's hard not to live the Christian life? Proverbs 13:15 says, *the way of transgressors is hard*. Have you experienced, as I have, that the greatest troubles in life come from not yielding to Christ and giving into unholy thoughts and desires?

Almost a decade ago, a woman, who had just begun attending our church, asked to meet with me for some counsel. She was dating a man, but she wasn't sure about his faith and walk with Christ. She asked me if I would meet with them together, and I cautiously agreed.

The man was very respectful, but it was not difficult to discern that he wasn't a committed Christian. Therefore, I shared the gospel with him and encouraged him to take advantage of our discipleship process here at our church. He respectfully replied that he would consider it.

A couple of days after the meeting, she called me to ask what I thought about his faith. She also shared that she had come out of a bad relationship and didn't want to make the same mistake. I gave her my opinion. I said, I'm not God, but from what I could discern, it didn't appear to me that he was a follower of Jesus. I also encouraged her to get closer to Jesus herself and let Him meet the deepest needs of her heart before considering getting into a relationship. Well, I saw her a few more times in church after that and then I didn't see her anymore. I learned later that they moved in together. That happened a number of years ago.

Some time ago I ran into her again. Keep in mind, I hadn't seen her for several years. After I greeted her, the first words that she uttered to me was, "Pastor, I should have listened to you. The last two years of my life have been a living nightmare." Beloved, I wish I could say that this was the first time someone said something like this to me.

Now, I'm not implying that if you're living the Christian life, you'll never experience any trouble. Jesus said to His disciples that in this world we will have tribulation. The Apostle Peter also said that all who live godly lives will suffer persecution.

But how many of you know, there's good trouble and bad trouble. Great is our reward when we suffer for righteousness sake. But only heartache, misery and regret come from suffering for unrighteousness.

Again, I'm not saying that living the Christian life will not come with internal and external struggles. But often when someone speaks about the Christian life being hard, they don't have in mind the spiritual battles that come with living the Christian life. Rather, they see the Christian life as a set of rules that feel restrictive to them and that would take the fun out of life. This is a distorted view of the Christian faith.

Truly living the Christian life is not like carrying an anchor that weighs you down. It's more like getting wings that enable you to soar.

So the reason you may feel like it's hard to live the Christian life is because you've been trying to live it in your own strength. But you don't live the Christian life by trying hard, but by trusting Him?

In fact, the truth is that it's impossible to live the Christian life. Only one person ever lived the Christian life and His name is Jesus. As we will see from our text, the Christian life is not about us trying harder, but about learning to trust Jesus so that He lives His life through us.

Main idea: The Christian life is nothing less than the risen Christ living His life through our surrendered lives.

This morning we are going to be looking at Galatians 2:20 which is a very familiar passage of scripture to many of us. As we will see in context, it speaks to how a believer's relationship and identification with Christ enables us to live the Christian life in the power of the resurrection.

1. Christ's death sets us free from the legal penalty of our sin

Regarding a believer's vital union and identification with Christ, the first point I want us to see today is that Christ's death sets us free from the legal penalty of our sin. Having explained that a person is not justified before God by the law, but by faith in Christ so that they might live to God, Paul continues: *"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."* (Galatians 2:20)

Notice that regarding his identification with Christ that came by faith, the Apostle Paul writes in the beginning of verse 20, *"I have been crucified with Christ..."*

Jesus was crucified on a cross to pay our sin debt so that we could be free from the legal penalty of violating God's law. As Paul also explained in Galatians 2:16, we cannot be justified, or made righteous before God by keeping the law.

We all fall short. Therefore, the law declares us legally guilty before God and deserving of God's justifiable punishment. But God in His grace and mercy made a way for guilty sinners to be forgiven of their sin. Christ died as our substitute.

The Apostle Peter put it this way: *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,"* 1 Peter 3:18

In this verse Peter points to Christ as the One who took our place of judgment on the cross. And He did so to bring us to God. Peter speaks of both redemption from sin and reconciliation to God.

As Leon Morris explained, *"Redemption* is substitutionary, for it means that Christ paid that price that we could not pay, paid it in our place and we go free. Christ took our legal liability, took it in our stead.

Reconciliation means the making of people to be one by the taking away of the cause of hostility. In this case, the cause is sin, and Christ removed that cause for us.”

So when we recognize that we our guilty sinners before a Holy God and place our faith in Jesus, who paid our sin debt, He saves us. What does it mean to be saved from sin?

To be saved from our sin means more than escaping the penalty of sin. It means that we who were dead in sin and separated from God, are made alive unto God, are brought near to God, are reconciled to God the Father so that we could enjoy a relationship with Him.

This happens because, when we place our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, we are joined to Christ through the Spirit and appropriate the spiritual benefits of both the death of Christ and His resurrection.

This bring us to our second point:

2. Christ’s resurrection sets us free to live in the power of the Spirit

Notice that after explaining that believers are crucified with Christ, which means that we died with Christ who absorbed our sin debt, Paul continues: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

If you’re a believer, Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, has taken up residence in your body. Paul explained in Romans 8:9, *“You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness”* (Romans 8:9-10).

Again, the Apostle Paul declared in verse 20, “Christ...lives in me.” And if you’re saved the same is true of you, Christ lives in you. You have been regenerated—made alive by the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, Christ lives in us and we live in Him. We are baptized into His body (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3-4).

All who have received Jesus by faith as Savior and Lord are identified with Christ in all that He has accomplished. We are joined to Christ in His death, and resurrection.

Now it's important to emphasize here that this vital spiritual union with Christ is not only the basis of our salvation, but also the basis of our sanctification. That is to say, our union with Christ crucified not only saves us from our sin, our union with the risen Christ is the means whereby we walk in the newness of life.

Beloved, it's my experience that many professing Christians today understand that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone. But when it comes to their sanctification, which is the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ, they live as if it all depends on them.

Remember, salvation is more than a ticket to heaven. Salvation is to know, as Paul knew, *Christ lives in me*. Paul, through the Spirit, was made new on the inside and thus was being changed day by day to live in conformity to the will and ways of Christ. Therefore, when it came to living for God, he declared, "*It is no longer I who live...*"

As Will Pound also explains: "This new life brought about a change in Paul's regard for himself. He can say, 'I no longer live.' The self-righteous, self-centered legalistic Paul died. His death with Christ ended Paul's enthronement of self, and he surrendered the throne of his life to Jesus Christ.

Paul stresses again and again throughout his writings that he does not live the Christian life in his own strength. The risen Christ Himself took up His residence in Paul's heart. The apostle proclaimed "not I but Christ lives in me." This became the source, the motivation and goal of his life. "Not I, but Christ!"

Beloved, do you know this great salvation? Do you know, like Paul, that you've been set free from the penalty of sin and that Christ lives in you?

There are great books today where you can learn about the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ. They highlight historical events, like the fact that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion. They show that Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ.

Additionally, through the preaching of these eyewitnesses, which had the resurrection at its center, the Christian church was established and spread throughout the Roman Empire. The disciples, who were tortured and persecuted as martyrs, would have gained nothing from preaching of Christ's resurrection if He were still dead. As Adrian Rogers put it, "A man may live for a lie, but not many men willingly die for a lie."

But now, it was much more than their first-hand knowledge of the resurrection that led these disciples, as their persecutors put it, to turn the world upside down. These men changed the world, and their gospel message continues to change lives today because the resurrection power of Christ was at work in them and through them.

Likewise, we can know the transforming power and hope of the living Christ not only because of the historical fact of the resurrection, but because He lives in the heart of all who put their trust in Him. He lives in us to make Himself known to us and to live His life through us. The old hymn says it best:

I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today
I know that He is living, whatever men may say
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer
And just the time I need Him He's always near

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today
He walks with me and talks with me
Along life's narrow way
He lives, He lives, Salvation to impart
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart

Can you say, as the hymn writer declared, “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.” Do you know the salvation that led Paul to testify, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me?*”

When you know Christ as your Savior, you know that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is more than a past event or a future hope; it is a present reality. Because Christ lives in you, you no longer need to depend on self to accomplish God’s will and purpose for your life. You can depend on Christ to work in you to give you both the passion and the power to live the life you were meant to have.

This brings us to our final point:

3. Christ’s life sets us free from the languishing prison of self

Christ’s life sets us free from the languishing prison of self. Having explained that he died with Christ, died to self-effort, died to trying to be right with God in his own strength and that Christ lives in Him to be for him what he could not be, Paul continues: “*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.*” (Galatians 2:20)

When Paul in the previous sentence said, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*” he’s not saying that he lived a sinless life, or that he’s like a robot that plays no role in his new life in Christ.

Notice that Paul explains in the next sentence that his new life in Christ is lived *in the flesh*, which is our body and also that it’s *lived by faith*. Although we’ve been given a new life in Christ, with new affections, with new perspective, and with new motivations, we are still in our fleshly bodies. And because we are still in our bodies, in addition to these new life realities, we also have a new battle.

We have a new battle, because although the old self has been crucified with Christ, we still live in these earthly bodies. As Paul further expounded in Romans 6:6: “*We know that our old self was*

crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (Romans 6:6).

Again, to be crucified with Christ doesn't mean that our mortal body ceases to exist, but that our mortal body with its sinful desires, is no longer our master (Romans 6:14). We have a New King, a New master—a New Person, Jesus, at work in us.

He's at work in us so that we would yield ourselves to Him and depend on Him to put to death our sinful desires so that His life shines through us.

As Paul also explained in Galatians 5:16-17: *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:16-17).*

Oh, how many of you know this internal battle that Paul is speaking of between the flesh and the Spirit? I'm sure that many of you could testify, as I have experienced, that before coming to Christ there were sinful desires and attitudes that you gave into without reservation.

But after coming to Christ you don't want to give into them anymore. After coming to Christ you are now conscious of sins that you were not conscious of before. Not only that, if you give into wrong desires you're convicted by the Spirit and sense the displeasure of God. And because of your new love relationship with God, you don't want to displease God. Rather, you trust that His will is best for you even when you have desires that oppose God's will.

Years ago, a friend of mine, who had recently come to faith in Christ, met up with me for counseling. He shared with me that since coming to faith in Christ he's been experiencing a battle of contrary desires that he didn't have before. And then he asked, does this struggle that I have now mean that I didn't really come to saving faith in Jesus? I replied, on the contrary. If you didn't have that struggle, that new battle I would be worried. The struggle is affirmation that Christ lives in you.

Moreover, I shared with him that because we are still in our mortal bodies we will not be sinless this side of heaven. But the more our faith in Jesus grows, we will sin less.

Notice again that Paul explains: *“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.”* When Paul said in the previous sentence that *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,”* he’s not saying that we have no role to play in living the Christian life.

As Will Pound also explained, “Paul would not give us the idea that Christ operates automatically in a believer’s life. He is not a robot. The Christian life is a matter of living the new life “by faith in the Son of God.” It is then faith and not works or legal compliance that releases God’s [resurrection] power to live a Christian life.”

Again, the **past** crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus not only assures us that our bodies will rise from the dead in the future resurrection, but that there are also spiritual benefits in the present.

When you receive Christ by faith as Savior and Lord, you are united with Him through the Spirit. Christ lives in you and you live in Him.

Consequently, you can know the power of the risen Christ to walk in newness of life as you live a life of faith, a life of trusting in, yielding to and depending on the Son of God who loves you and gave Himself for you.

Earlier I shared that some people believe it’s hard to live the Christian life. When they say this, they’re not talking about the opposition that Christians will experience when living the Christian life.

They find it hard to live the Christian life because they see it as only a list rules to keep, rather than a love relationship that you can know and that gives you faith to trust Christ to provide everything you need to live the life He saved you to live.

Do you feel it's hard to live the Christian life? The reason you may find it hard to live the Christian life could be that you've not come to saving faith in Jesus. You're trying to earn salvation by works, instead of receiving the salvation that Christ provided on the cross by grace through faith.

Or perhaps you have placed your faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, but when it comes to living the Christian life you've been leaning on self instead of on Jesus. You've been trying hard instead of trusting Him.

Remember, we are not only saved by faith, we are also transformed by faith, through a process of lifetime growth and struggle, to be more like Christ.

How do we grow in faith so that we learn to trust the risen Christ in us to live His life through us? Without expounding much on them because of time, let me leave you with a few keys to growing in faith. I learned these truths about what genuine faith looks like and how to obtain it from Adrian Rogers over twenty years ago and they've stayed with me. What is genuine faith and how do you obtain it?

- First of all, the **origin of faith** is the word of God; therefore we must make time to hear God's word, read God's word and get it in our hearts.
- Secondly, the **object of faith** is God. Therefore, know Him. Faith is as good as it's object. Don't just read the bible to gain head knowledge, read it and pray it to encounter the living Christ.
- Thirdly, the **objective of faith** is the will of God. Therefore, obey Him. Christ's resurrection power and presence will be manifested in you to fulfill His will for your life for your good and His glory. When we have a strong faith in God we not only trust His will for our lives but we will pray persistently for the strength to fulfill it. How many of you know, if you pray only when you're in trouble, you're in trouble?
- Lastly, the **operation of faith** is the work of God. Therefore, yield to the Spirit at work in you. Where God guides, He will provide. God is calling you. Step out in faith and obedience for God to

use you to serve the cause of Christ. He promised that when you do, He will be with you and work in you with resurrection power to bless others through you.

Conclusion

The Christian life is nothing less than the risen Christ living His life through our surrendered lives. May you grow in faith and in the love of Jesus so that you would die to self-reliance and testify daily from experience, *Not I but Christ lives in me and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Not I but Christ Discussion Guide

Galatians 2:20

Main idea

The Christian life is nothing less than the risen Christ living His life through our surrendered lives.

Review

Have you ever felt like it's hard to live the Christian life or heard someone say that being a Christian is hard? Why do you think people feel this way? What might make you feel it's hard to be a Christian?

Assess

Regarding his identification with Christ that came by faith, the Apostle Paul writes in the beginning of verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ..." What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? What are the spiritual benefits of being joined to Christ by faith and identified with His crucifixion? (Galatians 2:16-20).

What does 1 Peter 3:18 teach about the purpose of Christ's death on the cross? What does this verse teach us about the meaning of redemption and reconciliation?

After explaining that believers are crucified with Christ, Paul adds, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." When we place

our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, (Gal. 2:16), we are joined to Christ through the Spirit and appropriate the spiritual benefits of both the death of Christ and His resurrection. What are the spiritual benefits of being identified with the resurrection of Jesus? (Romans 6:3-4; 8:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:13). What are the implications of knowing, as Paul knew, that the risen Christ lives in you (Philippians 3:10).

In the message, it was suggested that many professing Christians today understand that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone. But when it comes to their sanctification, which is the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ, they live as if it all depends on them. What do some Christians do or not do that demonstrates that they are trying to live the Christian life in their own strength?

How did the reality and testimony that “Christ’s lives in me” become the source, the motivation and the goal of Paul’s life?

Paul explained in verse 20b, that his new life in Christ is lived in the flesh, which is our body and also that it’s lived by faith. Although we’ve been given a new life in Christ, with new affections, with new perspectives, and with new motivations, we are still in our fleshly bodies. And because we are still in our bodies, in addition to these new life realities, we also have a new battle. What is this new battle and why is it a good thing? (Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:16-17).

As Will Pound also explained, “Paul would not give us the idea that Christ operates automatically in a believer’s life. He is not a robot. The Christian life is a matter of living the new life “by faith in the Son of God.” It is then faith and not works or legal compliance that releases God’s [resurrection] power to live a Christian life.” What does it mean to live our lives by faith in the Son of God? What is genuine faith and how do we grow in faith so that we might experience the power of the resurrection (Philippians 3:10).

Apply

Do you know the salvation that led Paul to testify, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me?” How do you know? Do you know the new battle of living the Christian life in the body? How do you know?

What do you need to do differently to live by faith in the son of God so that you experience His resurrection power in your life? If your faith is weak, what do you need to do to grow your faith in the love of Jesus?

Pray

Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer