

Discerning the Life of Christ in Me Part I

a sermon in the series
Saved by His Life: Union with Christ

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Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

This is my favorite verse of all Scripture because it contains the whole of the Christian life. It has our union with Christ explained in both the death and resurrection of Jesus. It contains justification by faith, as well as, sanctification by faith. Perfect balance. Not the imbalance that so many Christians have today in their understanding of the Christian faith and life.

Paul begins and says he has died with Christ, and, therefore, he is not the one who is living. We know Paul is not speaking of physical death; he is speaking of when he became a Christian, he died to the kind of life and identity he had up to that point, as well as, to the power source of his life before conversion.

Now the sainted apostle has a new identity and power source in him. It is the resurrected Jesus. However, Paul describes this change of identity and power source in a way that I think is somewhat strange if not somewhat confusing. He says Christ is living His life in the Apostle Paul's body but Paul is still alive. Sounds contradictory don't you think? It sounds as if Christ living in him is Jesus possessing him like a demon would possess somebody. And yet the Bible is very clear that Christ does not indwell us and possess us like a demon would. It's completely different. Even though Paul says I'm not alive but Christ lives in me, he's not talking about it in the same way you would talk about demonic possession

Another way to put it is in the form of a question—whose doing the living? Christ or Paul? The answer is both. Paul says, “Christ lives in me,” and he also says, “the life which I now live.” Both Christ and Paul are living in His flesh, meaning Paul's body. So, the question begs to be asked, how can it be both Christ and Paul living at the same time?

I know I'm throwing a lot of questions out there but if you ask the right questions you'll arrive at the right answers.

That question is the same question as this, how can I be saved by grace and not works, yet commanded to work to persevere in the faith with a warning of destruction if I do not? For example you have Jesus saying,

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

He says the way to eternal life is by doing something. Doing the will of the Father.

“[God] who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, ⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.” (Romans 2:6-9)

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” (1 Timothy 4:16)

“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.” (Hebrews 3:14)

All of these verses sound like they’re telling us we work our way into heaven. But the Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” So how can I be saved by grace when we have all these verses that say I have to do something?

If Christ saves us by grace apart from works, why must these works be commanded of us?

In addition to these verses we know we must do certain works, such as read the Bible, pray, witness, assemble with other Christians, give of our resources, forgive, serve according to our spiritual gifts. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church, wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ, children are to obey their parents. We are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, renew our minds, and refuse to be conformed to this world. The Bible commands all believers to care for the poor, exhort one another daily, rebuke the erring brother or sister, and be ready to give an answer of the hope that lies within. We are commanded to not lie, steal, or lose our tempers. We are to work for a living. We are told that we are not to worry, nor hate, or gossip, or let any corrupt communication come out of our mouths. The Bible commands Christians to be kind, tenderhearted, and to love one another.

These commands are not optional. God’s commands are not a buffet line where you pick and choose what you like and what you don’t like. They are all compulsory and must be done with all of our hearts. Once again, the question should be asked, “how are we saved by grace without works, and if we don’t do these commands we are lost?” Surely, it is the same question as how can Christ live in me and it not be me living and yet I still live?

Salvation by grace does not cancel obedience. Salvation by grace makes obedience possible. It does not say works are not necessary. Rather the grace of God makes doing what God commands possible for the very first time in your life. You were “free from righteousness” because you didn’t have what you needed—a free heart and will to want to obey God. Now you have that if you are a Christian. The grace of God in you is the life of Christ. And it is the life of Christ that is the law of life we discussed last week.

I want you to get this equation. The grace of God which we need not just to be saved from our past sins but from our present sins is the same thing as the indwelling Jesus Christ and that is the same thing as the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

The grace of God = the indwelling Christ = law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

They’re synonymous. When we say, “Oh, God, give us Your grace,” He already has because that grace is deposited in you in the person of Jesus Christ who is in us by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.” “I will give you another Comforter and He will do everything I’ve done because He is Me, He is My Spirit.” Only a triune God could pull something like that off. He’s in you and in me. The Spirit in me is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and He is the grace of God to me. So what I want you to do is to change your definition of grace and free it. It can’t do anything because you’ve constricted it to a time in your past when you asked Christ to come into your heart, forgive you of your sins, and make you a child of God. There’s where we leave the grace of God. That is wrong. Remember last week’s text, Romans 5:10?

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

I need grace right now. I need Jesus Christ just as much today as the day He saved me. I need something from Him that I don’t have and He’s provided it in Himself. We need to release ourselves to expand our definition of grace; it’s not just a gift. I understand it is a gift, but Jesus is the gift. It’s a person, it’s not a commodity. Grace is not like receiving a present and you open it up and put it on a shelf and say, “There’s God’s gift to me.” Or when you need it, you can pull it down and use it. Grace is not the kind of gift that you put in a drawer until you need it the next time. Grace is the very person of Jesus Christ in you, which means you’ll always have grace. You’re never without grace.

We’re going to take our first question. The question is: **If we always have grace, is it inappropriate to pray for grace?**

It’s not inappropriate to pray for grace so long as we remember that grace is not some impersonal force or energy, but the person of Jesus Christ activating Himself in us. “Grace and peace be unto you,” Paul writes to the Corinthians. We see the same Apostle praying that the Ephesians would grow in grace and the knowledge of God. Peter prays the same thing for those he writes, but what he’s really asking for is that they would die to their own self-control and be alive more

to Christ's control. That's what grace is—Christ controlling you and you submitting to that. So should I be praying for that? Yes, absolutely! That's my great need now that I am a Christian.

So, how does grace and works work, and how can both Christ and me be alive? How is that possible?

I. Recap of Last Week

Remember this is a series about union with Christ, which is foundational for the salvation God has provided in Christ. Redemption, salvation, is built upon a permanent foundation of being united one with Christ.

A. Union With Christ.

This union is a participation in the life of Christ. It's not just an identity. It's more than two people getting married and now they are identified with each other so that you can't think of one without the other. It does include it, but it also includes a participation in the life of Jesus. You are able to share in His life and His gifts and His abilities, which are unlimited. This is so awesome! How should we "escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" No wonder the writer uses the adjective *great*—it is great! I can tap in, share, and participate in the unlimited power of God, who dwells in me. He is also the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which is grace manifested in me.

However, this union with Christ does not end with our participation in the life of Christ. It is also His participation in our lives. Jesus wants to be involved in your life. He wants to share in your every experience. Why? The same reason I want to live with my wife. I love her. It is the same reason I look forward to being with you and getting to share in your lives—I love you.

Jesus loves us, therefore He wants to get involved in what you are involved with and He will do so as long as you let Him. He, on the other hand, never has to say, "Well, I'll think about it." He's already given us the invitation to come and dine. He's already spread the table out. His life is already in us. He's made access to Him available 24/7. The question is not how do I participate in Christ's life, the question is how to I let Christ participate in me? It is by absolute surrender. The word we don't like. That's union with Christ, participation with each other.

B. There Are Two Laws Fighting For Supremacy.

What is a law? A law is something that happens again and again and again when the conditions are the same. If I throw something up it will always fall down because the law of gravity says this happens every time. The law of gravity forces its will upon whatever I throw up in the air. It will always come down. The only way to escape the law of gravity is to have the law of aerodynamics. The law is something that happens over and over again the same way every time the conditions are the same.

We were born with a law called the law of sin and death, a principle in us that works the same every time all the time and that is: it influences us to sin. Before you were a Christian that's all you did—sin. You never did anything holy before the Lord, you've never not sinned, you've sinned your whole life.

The law of sin and death is always contrary to the glory of God and it says the same thing Satan said to Eve. "Trust yourself. Trust yourself because you can be your own God knowing good and evil. You're capable. *You're* capable of knowing what is best for you. In fact, it's wrong that God would impose His will upon you." That's the essence of what the devil said to her and, by the way, it's the essence of every temptation since then. Trust in yourself. That's what the law of sin and death that we were born with says. That's its constant mantra. *Trust yourself. You can do it. You don't need God. In fact, for God to impose His will upon you is morally wrong.*

None of us in this room would say that, but that's the truth of what we're saying when we sin. All of us were born with this law functioning in us. It is our nature to be independent of God.

But praise God when He saved you, He broke the power of sin so it does not have to enslave, control, or dominate you. You can be free because grace, which is not just God's kindness, is shown to us in the person of Jesus Christ. None of God's attributes are separate from Jesus Christ.

Thus, if you're looking for the wisdom of God, who is our wisdom? Christ. If you're looking for the peace of God, who is He? The Prince of Peace. If you're looking for joy, where is it? "In my presence there is fullness of joy and at my right hand are pleasures forevermore." It's Christ.

"My joy I give unto you." How? By giving us Himself. So when He came and gave you grace, grace now gives you the liberty to obey God. Your will is now free to choose the One it has always refused to obey.

The law of sin and death still works and tries to exert itself over us. Being saved doesn't remove the law. The Bible says that the Christian has died to this law of sin but that sin has not died. You died to it, but it hasn't died to you. So every Christian still has within them this law of sin and death still operating, still functioning, still there, still wanting to exercise control.

But there is another law. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We were given this new law, which is a new impulse, a new heart, and a new influence that will work and function in us if we do certain things. Therefore, Paul says there are two opposing laws now, and they are battling for supremacy. The law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus fight against each other to see who is going to lead you. The Apostle says it this way in Galatians five.

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

The law of the flesh and the law of sin and death are the same thing because the law of sin works through the flesh, the fallen mind and the appetites of the body. But the believer also has the Spirit of God. Paul continues,

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." (Galatians 5:16-17)

Paul says in verse eighteen that the answer is to walk in the Spirit. In other words, choose the Spirit and you'll not do what the law of sin and the law of death wants you to do. He states that by our choice one law will reign over the other. But what determines which law we will choose and be the strongest?

The law that you feed the most is the strongest.

What do I mean by that? I mean the one you choose to obey. That's what is meant by feeding it. But what constitutes or determines which law or principle in me I will feed the most?

This is the crucial question. The answer is of the greatest importance. What determines if I feed the law of sin and death or if I feed the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? **The one I trust the most.** If you trust the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus then you will obey it, which is feeding it. Obedience feeds one or the other.

Let me give you an example. You know you need to read the Bible. We're commanded to meditate on the Word of God. But you realize that once you get up and get your day started that there is hardly anytime left, our schedules are so packed. Then somebody like me comes along and says, "Well, just get up an hour earlier." And you say that's not realistic, but with time and more encouragement you begin to say, "You know, I need the Word of God. I need to start eating and feeding on it, so I'm going to get up an hour earlier." And you set your alarm an hour earlier in the morning because you know you need to do this.

Then the alarm goes off.

At that moment, you've got a choice. *Who are you going to trust?* Are you going to trust that if you get out of bed, the Spirit of God will help you and He will meet with you and strengthen you to face your day? Or will you trust the law of sin and death that says that if you're going to face this day and get it right you're going to have to have that extra hour of sleep?

Who are you going to trust? The one you obey. If you roll over and go back to sleep for another hour then you have trusted the law of sin and death or the flesh because you believe what it says. What it offers seems more believable. You believe another hour of sleep would be better for you than to be spiritually prepared for the day. By staying in bed you say the Bible will not prepare you as much as an extra hour of sleep.

If you get out of your bed and get your Bible and say, “Lord, show me Your Word, talk to me,” then you are believing the promise God has declared that He will do something in you. You might not feel strong, but I assure you the faith that acts in obedience and submission to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus will strengthen your faith.

Question: How do I discern when God wants me to do something or if it’s just my own desire to do good?

The question shows a level of discernment because most people who have been in church twenty or thirty years never think there is a difference. It’s remarkable that you’re even asking the question. And it just so happens to be my next point.

II. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MY WILLPOWER AND THE WILLPOWER OF THE SPIRIT

Is there a difference between our willpower exerted to obey God and the willpower of the Holy Spirit? And if so, what is the difference?

The Bible says there is a big difference. And it’s here I need to give an apology.

A. An Apology.

Oftentimes I have said to you, that there are days when you don’t feel like being a Christian. What I don’t mean by that is to say you don’t love God and you don’t want to be identified with Him. If you are a Christian you do want to be identified with Him, you do want to please Him. But what I mean is that there are days you don’t feel as strong as you do on other days. And on those days you don’t feel strong in the Lord, you don’t want to plow into the Bible and study and meditate. You don’t feel like praying because prayer doesn’t feel easy that day. You may not feel very cordial, and therefore you don’t care to be kind and tenderhearted.

Those are real feelings and we have to acknowledge and reckon with them. These feelings of not wanting to read the Bible and not having a heart to pray are a part of the law of sin and death working in a fallen mind and body that is easily fatigued, distracted, and apathetic. That’s part of our humanity that stays with us and is always fighting for supremacy over the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. You don’t set out to be apathetic, you just wake up and feel it.

Here is my apology. In the past I have said that we must take ourselves by the nape of the neck and say to ourselves that we are going to read our Bibles if it is the last things we do. We will pray. Grit your teeth and reach down deep and do this thing.

I want to say to you this morning that I was wrong. Those statements are based more upon my personality than Scripture. And for this I am sorry and I ask for your forgiveness. The encouragement to be diligent and take yourself in hand and force obedience is wrong because it is relying on the willpower of self.

You've heard statements like, "It may start with duty but it will end with delight." I've heard people say and I've said it, shamefully now, there are just some people you don't like. They just rub you the wrong way. But you are to love them anyway so here's what you do, you start praying for them and do something kind for them. Maybe even buy them a gift and give it to them. They say that by doing this your heart will change. That may be true, but that is nothing more than the law of sin and death at work. It's not Jesus in me. It's a different willpower. How do I know that?

B. The Willpower of Self Always Looks to Self.

Do not confuse the will with willpower. They're two different things. Your will is the mechanism by which you choose and we must choose to obey and to trust in the Lord. We choose to do that or we choose not to do that. But once we make the decision to do something, the question is, by whose power will you do it? Your willpower says *I'm going to trust in my strength to get this done. I'm going to read my Bible because I need to read my Bible. I'm going to pray because I ought to pray. I need to do good because if I do good, then God will be pleased and I will be a Christian.* These are all the suggestions of self and it's the law of sin and death. It's deceptively wrong because it does the right thing, but the right thing becomes the wrong thing. All we're doing is becoming a moralist. We're becoming Pharisees.

The Pharisees did many of the right things. Jesus said the Pharisees fasted twice a week, they tithed on everything, they didn't commit adultery, and He said, "unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." So doing good is not the answer.

I just finished reading a book called *Get Real: Sharing Your Everyday Faith Everyday* by John Leonard. In that book he uses an illustration that came from a popular movie several years ago when my boys were small children, *Toy Story* and it's a remarkable illustration I want to share with you this morning.

In the movie *Toy Story*, Woody and Buzz argue about whether he is a real spaceman and whether or not he can fly. Buzz then proves that he can, actually "fly." He bounces off the bed with the shout "To infinity, and beyond!" and through a series of bizarre circumstances, he ricochets off a ball, rebounds into the air, gets slung around in the fan, and lands safely on the bed. All the toys shout, "He flew! He flew!" Exasperatedly, Woody declares, "That wasn't flying; that was falling with style."

When you operate out of the realm of your own willpower, making yourself do something you don't want to do just because you've got to do it, let me tell you, you didn't fly, you just fell with style. That's not flying as God intended. You might look good to one another and to yourself but it doesn't look good to God. He knows the truth.

Self always turns to the law or lawlessness. This is very important. Now that I'm a Christian I know I'm to forgive otherwise I won't be forgiven. I know I'm to love you as I love myself, which

means putting your needs above mine. I know that I should witness and share my faith. I know I need to give out of my own material resources. I know I shouldn't be materialistic. I know I shouldn't have lustful thoughts. I know I should control my tongue and not lose my temper and say things I will later regret. I know these things and I want to do them. But I must realize that if I attempt to obey God in my own strength, I have failed and sinned against God.

So many who are members of churches have not come to understand that they can do good things, but not do them by faith in God. If I do as commanded relying on my own power, then it is sin because I trusted in me and not the Christ in me.

We have turned a deaf ear to the Bible that warns us that self or the flesh will turn to the law and say, "You must keep the law." If self turns to the law, even the law of God, the law of sin and death has supremacy. It will tell you, "You better not commit adultery, you better not murder, you better not bear false witness."

For evidence I give to you the young rich ruler, who said in response to Jesus that he must keep the commandments of God, "All these things I have kept from my youth." But Jesus said the young man missed the kingdom. Why? Because he said, "All these things **I** have kept." It was sheer willpower. The law of sin and death will control you by driving you to the commandments of God and saying, "Now **you** go and do this. **You** must do this and **you** had better do it right." The focus is on self, which is opposite of the Christian life and its focus.

And if the flesh does not turn to the law it will turn to lawlessness. But to do so is really no different than turning to the law because when a man turns to lawlessness he becomes a law to himself.

For example, the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 is really the story of two sons. We often forget this. Jesus shows in that parable how the law of sin and death manifests itself. We say, "Oh yes, look at the law of sin work in that younger brother. He shamed his dad and then took all that money out and partied and squandered it on prostitutes and drunkenness and drugs. There's the law of sin and death!" But Jesus would say, "Wait a minute. There's another brother." He never left home, never shamed his father, and always did what his father said for him to do. Yet, Jesus shows that the elder son was as motivated by the law of self as was the younger lawless brother. Both sons were manipulated and empowered by the same spirit—the spirit of the self, manifested in rule keeping and rule breaking.

What then is the difference of the willpower supplied by the Holy Spirit? Let us examine this for a moment.

C. The Willpower of the Spirit Always Looks to Christ.

We read, "be tenderhearted, kind, forgiving one another," yet somebody has broken your heart with their sharp tongue and everything in you is wanting to retaliate. Something within tells you

to justify yourself, protect yourself. At that moment you're being tempted and you have a crucial decision to make. Here's the decision that comes at the time of temptation: Who are you going to trust?

You thought I would say, "What are you going to *do*?" but that's wrong thinking. Who are you going to trust is the Bible's way to frame the situation. Are you going to trust that you have the right to protect your reputation and defend yourself? Are you going to look to self and take matters into your own hands and try to set things right? If so, then you are looking away from Christ and to yourself.

Or are you going to look away from self and to Jesus? Are you going to look to Jesus and say, "You promised me that You would make all things right. Lord, you have commanded not to return evil for evil, but have promised that You would make all things right one day. And I know, my Lord, You suffered innocently on my behalf. Therefore I can also innocently suffer this wrong. I choose to do so. Lord, help me to not retaliate but to love"? If you do, then you will obey by a different power source. It is the power of the Christ within.

The Spirit always says, "Look and live." It never points to self but to Christ. When Israel had committed immorality in the wilderness, God sent serpents into the camp to bite the people. Thousands died. Moses prayed and asked for guidance. The Lord instructed Moses to make a brazen serpent and put it on a pole and tell the people if they will look at that serpent they would be instantly healed. I mention this because Jesus does in His conversation with Nicodemus. He said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." The same principle as in the days of Moses—looks and live—is true now. If you'll look away to Jesus you will find the necessary strength. He is our strength; He is our power. Will you not say to the Lord as you look at Him dying on your behalf, "I'm going to trust you to help me"? He will save you. He will deliver you.

When you trust and obey the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus then it is Christ who is the One glorified. He is exalted as not you. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when He said that it was Christ living in him and yet he lived. Christ lives in us and His life becomes dominant as we choose to live yielded and in submission.

Question: In the hour of temptation and you're struggling between who you're going to trust, is that not a fight?

The answer is absolutely. The New Testament calls it the fight of faith.

Question: When I choose to fight the fight of faith is it still me fighting by using techniques to not think the evil thought, or dismiss the negativity, such as running to my Bible, or prayer, or something that gets my mind distracted?

Let me very carefully answer that question. There are some things we must do proactively when

we are under temptation. We see it with Jesus. What did Jesus do when He was tempted in the wilderness? He immediately went to the Word of God and He proclaimed that Word. Before He spoke that Word, do you not think He believed the Word? Of course He did.

He knew the Word of God, His heart was inclined to obey it and it was His first resource. But He didn't just quote the Bible, He trusted it. And that's why He quoted it. If you just run to the Bible and try to fill your mind with holy thoughts, it's just like an amulet. An amulet is something they wear in voodoo to ward off evil spirits. The Bible is not an amulet you wear around your neck. It is not a bag of garlic to keep the vampires away. You've got to believe the Word. This is what you must choose to do. When you believe it, then it is not your willpower. Why, because God responds to our faith with His power. Faith simply takes God at His word.

I have to believe the promises of God are better than the promises of sin, even my morality, doing good for the wrong reasons. I have to believe that. So I need to go to the Word to remember what it says so I can stake my faith on it. Without truth, faith has nothing to hang itself upon. Going to the Bible is to encourage your faith to believe God, not just doing it as an exercise to ward off the temptation.

There's a difference. Faith in God trusts the Spirit to teach you the truth and strengthen you, while quoting Scripture and not trusting what it says is using it like a charm to ward off the evil.

When you're tempted you cannot focus on yourself. Ever. You cannot focus on what you should do to fight the battle as if it squarely up to you to do so, rather focus on the Lord as your champion. Rehearse in faith that He is your ever present help. Remember, He has promised to never leave nor forsake you. He is all you need in your situation. Then let the Spirit talk to you and direct you in what you should do. He may direct you to a promise, to a word, to truth.

Next week we're going to show you how the Spirit operates in us as the life of Christ. I believe a Christian wants to do what's right not simply because it's right. I believe we want to do what's right because we love our Father; we love our Husband, our Christ, and our Redeemer. We know that this will ultimately glorify Him in us as we yield our control over to Him. When we so yield, He lives His life and we overcome. Amen.