

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 8 – “The Christian Life, a Matter of Death and Life”
Galatians 2:15-21
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Simply stated the Christian life is a matter of death and life. This embodies one of those Christian paradoxes that are simply stated, but difficult to understand. The simple statement is *in the Christian life, you must die in order to live*. If you do not die, you will never find life.

Paul presents this paradox in his own personal life in our text today:

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:15-21 NIV).

The apostle may be recording for us what he said to Peter during their confrontation at Antioch. If he is, then he is reminding Peter that his relationship with the law radically changed when he became a Christian. Truly he can say, “I died to the law.” However, what follows can only be called “life.”

This text addresses us in different ways today. For some of us it will remind us that we truly need to realize our need to die. The good news of the text is that we need to die. For others, it is a reminder that we have died and we are now alive. I wonder if a person could ever forget dying. Spiritually the answer to that question is yes. As we live our Christian life, it is easy to allow our memory of our spiritual death to slip into the background of all the things that call for our attention. **So, in order refresh our memory, let's look at two basic principles.**

FIRST, EXAMINE THE DEATH WE DIED.

The personal pronouns in our text are very prominent. Paul is not presenting abstract theology. It is born out of his personal experience. His experience was that the life he knew in Christ followed a very significant death.

1. *It is a death we died to the law (v. 17).* The word “law” in this verse is used for “law in general.” The whole idea of the law had brought about death in the life of Paul. As a Jewish boy, Paul had accepted the law handed down to him by his elders as the true and blessed gift of God. With wholehearted determination he committed himself to live by this law. He was determined to gain acceptance before God by carefully observing and obeying the precepts of this law. At first, all seemed to go well for him, as it always does. But, as he began to gain a fuller understanding of the law and a deeper insight into himself, he began to realize that he was not keeping all the law. In fact, on his basis of his response to the

law, the more he knew, the more he discovered his failure. His hope of gaining acceptance before God became less and less. The law was useful in showing him what he ought to do, but it has some serious shortcomings. It offered no help or power to perform what it demanded. And, it offered no mercy when he failed to obey. All the law could do was condemn and call for the death of those who failed.

NOTE: Paul gives us some detail about his experience in the Epistle to the Romans. That which finally brought Paul to this death was specifically the tenth commandment which concerns covetousness (cf. Romans 7:7-11). In his smug self-righteousness, he was able to rationalize his way through the first nine. But the tenth dealt with his inner desires which he found to be evil. His disobedience could only result in his guilt and condemnation to death. He was without hope of acceptance from God based on his obedience to the law. He now finally admitted he could never live good enough to earn God's acceptance and approval.

2. *The other statement about this death is "I have been crucified with Christ. (v. 20)"* "Christ" is the emphatic word in the construction of the sentence. The literal rendering should be "with Christ I have been co-crucified." When Paul realized that Christ died in his place on the cross, he suddenly realized that the death of Christ was the only means through which he might become acceptable in God's eyes. It was completely due to the fact that Jesus actually took his sin on himself and suffered death in his stead. **This means two things are true:**

- **First, there is nothing "self" can do to make one acceptable before God.** "Self" is helpless and powerless to bring about the things necessary for divine approval.
- **Second, the death of Christ had satisfied all of the demands of the law against him, so that as far as the law was concerned, he was a dead man.**

NOTE: Paul uses the Greek perfect tense in this statement. While the death by crucifixion was a once for all event, there were also abiding results. The result is that we will forever be crucified. Our trust in Jesus Christ is our testimony that we have given up on the ability of self to ever do anything that will please God, or gain His favor.

You may have not been consciously aware that when you were born again you were actually dying to self. It probably never occurred to you that you were dying. For most of us the struggle we knew in the process of coming to life was the struggle of coming to the place that we gave up ourselves. We stopped looking for a way to work it out on our own. It was so hard for the old self to die that it has kept us from really finding life. **AND THAT BRINGS US TO THE SECOND PRINCIPLE.**

SECOND, EXAMINE THE LIFE WE LIVE (v. 21).

After all is said and done, the Christian life is a **MATTER OF LIFE!** In his personal witness, Paul brings before us some of the primary things about the life the Christian lives. There are three things to note:

1. *First, it is a "Christ" life and not a "self" life.* Paul says, "The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God". Without losing personal identity or personality, something wonderful happens. At the moment of death to self, the Holy Spirit establishes such a union

between the person and the living Christ that it can actually be affirmed. He declares, CHRIST LIVES IN ME! When we get to heaven no one is going to say, "I did that." We will all point to Jesus and say, "He did that." Interestingly, all the verbs Paul uses in this part of the passage are present tense. This means they are happening now and are continuing to happen!

2. *Second, the life we now live is still in the body.* Paul makes reference to the "mortal flesh." It is in this body that the transformation takes place. It is a here and now transformation, not just a then and there. We live out the Christian life day by day in these mortal bodies. These bodies of all are still subject to temptation, disease, and pain. They are still dying physically just like the bodies of all other men. However, the difference now is that we are not limited to that which is mortal in the living of these lives.
3. *Third, the life we now live is in the realm of faith.* It is a faith life. Paul uses an instrumental modifier to teach us that it is "by" faith. The modifier indicates it is the Son of God who is the object of this faith and nothing or no one else. The reason for this is that he is the one who died for us. Paul feels it is intensely personal. It is through this knowledge that we can be enabled to cling to Him in faith, trusting him day by day.

WHEN YOU DIE, YOU CAN THEN LIVE. Typically when these mortal bodies die, they are interred in some fashion. Usually there is a marker of some sort erected over the grave. We call them tombstones. On it we engrave the name, a short description, and the dates of our birth and death. On my marker the date of birth would be 1949. Of course, I don't know the year this mortal body will perish, but I could affix the date of my "death" as 1968. Actually that would be more correct. Because of that death, even though this body might die, I will live forever! What's the date on your marker?