

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE---A MATTER OF DEATH AND LIFE

Galatians 2:16-21

Simply stated the Christian Life is a matter of death and life. This embodies one of those Christian paradoxes. 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. He may still be recording for us what he said to Peter in the confrontation at Antioch. If he is, then he is reminding Peter that his relationship with the law was radically changed when he became a Christian. Truly he can say, "I died to the law." But that which followed that death can truly be called "life".

This text addresses us in different ways today. For some of us it reminds 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 among us, it is a reminder that we need to remember that we have died, and that we are now alive. Could a person ever forget dying? Yes. As you live the Christian life, it is rather easy to allow the memory of your death to slip to the side. Let's see where this text touches your life this morning.

I. THE DEATH WE DIED.

The personal pronouns are very prominent in this passage. Paul is not presenting abstract theology, but the theology of a personal experience. His experience was that the life he knew in Christ followed a very significant death.

The death we died was a death to the law. "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." The word "law" in this verse is used for law in general. The whole idea of law had brought about death in the life of Paul. As a Jewish lad, Paul had accepted the law handed down to him by his elders as the true and blessed gift of God. With whole hearted 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 everything seemed to go well for him. 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 the law. Indeed, on the basis of his response to the law, his hope of acceptance before God became less and less. The law was very useful in showing him what he ought to do, but it had two very serious shortcomings. First, it does not offer any help, any power to perform that which it demands. Second, it does not offer any mercy when you have failed to do that which it demands. All the law can do is condemn and call for the death of those who fail. It declares, "The soul that sins, it shall surely die."

From Romans seven we know that particular statement of the law that finally brought Paul to this death. It was the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not

covet." In his snug self-righteousness, he was able to rationalize himself through the first nine, for he had kept them in an outward kind of way. But the tenth dealt with his inner desires. He could not ever claim that he had never desired that which belonged to his neighbor. He found evil desires within himself often. If a man must always have loving desires toward his neighbor and his properties, or be condemned to eternal death---he was without any hope. Here he died of any expectation of ever being accepted before God on the basis of his obedience to the law of God. He now admitted to himself that he could never live good enough to earn acceptance and approval.

Have you ever died that death? You will never truly live until you die that death.

The other statement about the death we died is "I am crucified with Christ." "Christ" is the emphatic word in that statement. "With Christ I have been co-crucified" is a literal rendering of it. When Paul was made to see that Christ had died for him on the tree, another aspect of this death came to the front. He suddenly realized that if the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross had been necessary for him to be acceptable before God, and that if Jesus actually bore his sins in his body on the tree, then two things were true. One, was that there is nothing "self" can do to make one acceptable before God. "Self" is helpless and powerless to bring about the things necessary to gain divine favor. 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. Paul uses the Greek perfect in this statement. While the death by crucifixion was a once for all event, there are some abiding results. The result is that we will ever be "crucified men." We will ever be men who have died to self. 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 the favor of God.

You may have not been consciously aware that at the time you were dying to self. It probably would never have occurred to you to describe what happened as being a death, but does the language not seem to fit. For most of us the greatest struggle we knew in the process of coming to life was the struggle of coming to the place that we gave up on ourselves. We kept looking for another way to work it out by ourselves. It was so hard for the old self to die. This is still keeping some of us from finding life.

Now when someone dies, it is proper to put up a tombstone, or monument to commemorate their death. Do we dare? Since I died, I can fix my own tombstone. "D. L. Lowrie, born May 18, 1935, died---." When shall I put the date of death? Since I was "co-crucified" with Christ, I will have to put the date of his death on the tombstone. If I am going to be technically correct, I would put 1944. It was during that year that I really came to the place in my experience that I admitted to myself and to God the truth --- I could not make myself acceptable before God, I

forever took the position that the crucified Christ is my only hope of acceptance. Self died that night. Have you been fixing your tombstone in your mind along with me? It is not important that you be able to fix the exact time of death, but can you be sure of the fact of death? That is the important thing. There can be no life until there has been a death.

II. THE LIFE WE LIVE

The Christian life is a matter of Life. In his brief personal witness, Paul brings before us some of the primary things about the life the Christian lives.

First, it is a "Christ" life and not a "self" life. "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." 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 "Christ liveth in me." What happens in the life thereafter is not explained by saying "I did that", but rather by saying, "Christ did it." The very power, peace, and purity of the Lord Jesus himself begins to be expressed through that life. This means then that the Christian life is not the best "I" can do for God, but is rather "Christ" doing his best in me. Interestingly all of these verbs for "live" in the passage are present tense verbs; this means that they have the continuous force. "Christ continues to live in me."

Second, the life we now live is still in the body. "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." "Flesh" is used in this statement to refer to the mortal body of man. So even though we died to the law and to self, and even though we have been crucified with Christ, our mortal bodies are still alive. And we live out the Christian life day by day in the realm of these mortal bodies. These bodies 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 in the mortal bodies in the living of this life. In the moment we are living in the mortal bodies, we are also living in the realm of faith.

So thirdly, the life we now live is in the realm of faith. It is a faith life. "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The emphasis is on "by faith". The mighty Son of God is the object of this faith. That He is a worthy object is demonstrated by the fact that He is the one "who loved me and gave himself for me." This love and giving of self was expressed in the deed of the Cross. While it is true that He loved all men, and died for all of His people, Paul feels it to be very personal. It is knowing that He so loved me and so gave Himself for me that enables me to cling to Him in trust day by day. So Paul is declaring that the life he continues to live comes from trusting the Lord Jesus Christ day by day.

Here Paul exposes one of the serious errors of the Judaizers. They were agreeing that a person became a Christian by placing His faith in Christ, but they were also teaching that a person lived the Christian life by observing the law of Moses. You would never know the inner circle of the Lord unless you added to your faith legal obedience to the law of Moses. So Gentiles not only needed to trust Christ, but to live the life they needed more than faith in Him --- they needed the righteousness which the law could give. Paul declares that it has not been so in His experience. He is not depending on his work or his obedience to the law to sustain his Christian life, but rather the mighty Son of God. His death of the law and to self was final! His commitment to trust Christ was a commitment to a continuing trust in Him.

This makes some of you a little restless. This touches a sore spot. You are still contending that the Christian life is a matter of works. While you admit that only Christ can take you to heaven, you are still holding out that you will perfect that which Christ has begun in your life. Unfortunately God has to allow some of children to go through a severe personal crisis before they realize that you live by faith in the Son of God. Many of you have been blessed by the writings of men like Jack Taylor. Jack had to go through such a personal crisis. Others have grown into it as they have continued to walk with the Lord. But if you have not come to the place that you realize that Christ is your only hope --- for living life today, you need to!

Conclusion:

Some have called Paul a mystic because of passages like this. Not so. This is very much in touch with the real world. The reality in the Christian life is that it is a matter of death and life. When you die to yourself, then you begin to live. When you continue to live life as a crucified man, you continue to know the abundance of the life of Christ in your daily walk.