

Getting Galatians 2:20 “into the Bloodstream”

by Jay Wegter

Faith in the Son of God is our ‘Lifestyle’

Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives within me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*

Galatians 2:20 encapsulates in a single sentence the more comprehensive explanation of co-crucifixion found in Romans 6. Co-crucifixion, or radical identification with Christ’s person and work, produces enduring, all-encompassing results in the life of the believer. Unlike the grace gifts of cleansing, a clear conscience, and the indwelling of the Spirit, the liberating force of co-crucifixion is a positional blessing that is not immediately experiential. It has to be *reckoned* as Paul enjoins in Romans 6:11 in order for its power to be appropriated day by day. “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

The behavior of the Galatian believers gives evidence to the fact that without sustained faith in Christ it is possible to lapse into a legal attempt to commend oneself to God, and into deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21). Paul condemns this dangerous tendency toward relapse as a departure from faith in the sufficiency of Christ. All attempts to put oneself right with God by law will be met with utter impossibility (Alan Cole, *Galatians*, p. 83). The saint must not return to the ‘old path’ of reliance upon law works. For life under law was characterized by reliance upon oneself. By contrast Paul exults in the fact that he is so transformed by union with Christ that he does not recognize his former sinful self (Geoffrey Wilson, *Galatians*, p. 50-51).

Legal working for acceptance with God is hostile to what is ours by God’s grace through union with Christ. The life of faith in Christ is dominated, controlled, and animated by the thought of the love of the Son of God (Ibid.).

“*Seeking to be justified in Christ*” (2:17) refers to the fact that justification (though a once-for-all forensic act of God) is a continuous experience for believers. In other words, Christians not only exercise initial faith, but continue to believe. They continue daily to reckon that Christ is their life, their righteousness, their favor, and their acceptance with God. Confidence concerning our acceptance with God is the fruit of ongoing faith. “*Christ lives in me*” is the distinctive mark of the saved person (Homer Kent, *The Freedom of God’s Sons; Studies in Galatians*, p. 74-77).

Luther on Gal. 2:20 – the necessity of knowing we are one with Christ

How do we live out union with Christ? “*It is no longer I who live*” says Paul. Christ and my conscience must become one so that nothing remains in my sight but Christ crucified and raised. If I behold myself only, and set Christ aside in my thinking and in my self-evaluation, I am gone. *It is no longer I who live*; thus Paul intimates that

the source of spiritual life is not in his own person. The ‘old I’ was separate from Christ and bound to do the works of the law. The result of that arrangement was bondage to sin, death, and hell. Paul *rejects* the old person, and his former orientation. The new man, the saved man is in union with Christ. But, our spiritual ‘sight’ is strained as we attempt to comprehend our oneness with Christ. *We cannot spiritually conceive of Christ joined and united to us—it is like gazing at a wall and then attempting to see the color of the wall as separate from the wall.*

Christ is joined and united unto us and abiding in us so that “*He lives this life in me.*” He lives this life in me which I now live. Christ Himself is the life I now live. Therefore, Christ and I are now one. This is the great and glorious mystery of Colossians 1:27, “. . .to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

This union with Christ, my conjunction with Him, is the reason I am delivered from the terror of the law and sin. I have been *translated* into Christ and His kingdom. It is a kingdom—it is a sphere of righteousness, peace, joy, life, salvation, and eternal glory. It is His, yet it is mine also by inseparable union. While I abide in Him, what evil can hurt me? If I behold and consider myself apart from Christ there is only sin, law, and condemnation. But, I look to Christ and behold by faith my union and conjunction with Him—then I am dead to the law and have no sin on my account.

If therefore in the matter of justification (right-standing with God) I separate the Person of Christ from my person, then I am in the law and live in law, not in Christ—I am condemned by law and dead before God. At this point Luther continues to reflect upon the reality of organic living union with Christ and wonders aloud about the actual spiritual condition of countless individuals who profess faith.

Paraphrasing Luther: *countless individuals have only an historical faith which accepts the facts of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. These individuals are not justified; for devils and the wicked have this kind of faith.* Historical faith is merely *assensus*, or mental assent, it is not *fiducia*, or moral trust. Faith (absolute reliance upon, and abandonment to Christ) must be purely and diligently taught.

The believer and Christ are made one person spiritually; the believer may boldly say I am now one with Christ. That is to say Christ’s righteousness, victory, and life are now mine. So radical is this exchange that Christ may say, *I am that sinner . . . his sins and death are mine* because he is joined to Me and I to him. By faith we are joined together so that we have become members of His body; His flesh and bone (Eph 5:30).

I live indeed, the faculties of my fleshly body express my thought, will, and affection, yet it is not I, but it is Christ that lives in me. There is then a double life. The first is mine which is natural. The second is the life of Another, that is the life of Christ in me. As touching my natural life, I am dead—but now I live by Another’s life, even Christ’s. If I lived my own life, the law would have dominion over me and hold me captive. To the end therefore that it should not hold me captive, *I am dead to it—dead to*

the law (Gal 2:19). This death (through my Substitute) purchased for me the life of Another, even the life of Christ; which life is not mine by nature, but is given unto me by Christ through faith in Him. How can this be? I look at my own person and see only flesh. The answer is that *this life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God*. Observers see my life; I eat, sleep, labor, yet they don't really see my life.

Yes, I indeed live in the flesh, but not through the flesh, or according to the flesh. I live through faith and according to faith. Yes, I live in the flesh and exercise the faculties of my fleshly body, yet every good work, whether self-control, or edification of the saints, or Christian virtue, comes not from my flesh, but from Christ. I cannot teach, give thanks, write, or pray but by means of the faculties of flesh that God has given me; but the ability to do these works does not come from my flesh but is given from God above.

So we see plainly where the spiritual life comes from, it is from the life of Christ in me (the natural man cannot perceive this). For this life is not visible to the naked eye. This life is in the heart by faith where the tyranny of the flesh has been killed and Christ reigns through His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Christ sees, hears, speaks, works, and enables the believer to do all things in Him, yet the flesh resists. What is the Apostle's aim in Galatians 2:20 for his readers? Namely the discovery that happy is the man who can say *I live by faith in the Son of God*. We have here the true manner of justification, and a perfect example of the assurance of faith. *He loved me and gave Himself for me*. How we must hear this diligently and allow it to sink into our innermost being. The kingdom of man's [natural] reason and the spiritual kingdom must be put far asunder. By depravity, what is in man's will is evil and what is in his understanding is error. Therefore by natural strength and ability, no man will fulfill the law and love God.

All begins with the divine initiative of the love and grace of Christ. He loved me first, He is the beginning. He found no good in me but had mercy on me. I was wicked, led astray, increasingly estranged from God, carried away and led captive by the devil. My reason, will, and understanding were at enmity with God, yet in spite of this He loved me and gave Himself to free me from the law, sin, the devil, and death.

The Son loved me and gave Himself for me. Let these words thunder against any attempts at righteousness by the law, or by any of the law's works. So great is the darkness in the will and understanding, it was impossible that sinful man should be ransomed but the inestimable price of Christ's death and blood. Therefore, it is terrible blasphemy to imagine any work whereby we should presume to pacify God. Only the inestimable price of the death and blood of the Son of God can bring us near to our Creator. *He gave Himself for me*; a wretched, damnable sinner.

What a travesty to choose a religious work, order, or sect that promises to commend us to God by *non-faith*. It is blasphemous to trust in something other than faith in *the Son of God who gave Himself* to commend us to God. Nothing but destruction can come from religious exercise born of *non-faith*. The only power against the solicitations,

overtures, and temptations of acceptance with God by *non-faith* is the imputed righteousness of Christ. It was necessary He be delivered up for me, no other price in heaven or earth could avail.

Christ the Son of God was delivered up for me; this is inestimable love. Saving faith wraps itself in Christ who was delivered to death for us. Our Savior is apprehended by faith; His gifts of righteousness and life are with Him to freely give to the believer. Paul sets forth the Priesthood and offices of Christ which are to pacify God and make intercession for sinners. *Christ offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins that He might redeem us, instruct us, and comfort us.* He is our Prophet, Priest, and King. Faith says *He is the Son of God who, not for any of our deserving or any righteousness of our own, gave Himself out of His free mercy. He offered Himself up as a sacrifice for us sinners that He might sanctify us forever.*

It is the greatest knowledge, treasure, and wisdom that Christians can have to define Christ as He is defined in Galatians 2:20. But of all things it is the hardest. Luther confesses that in spite of the great light and illumination of the Gospel which had shone upon his understanding so brightly, it is with difficulty that he is able to consistently define Christ in the way Paul does in Galatians 2:20.

Luther, the Reformer admits that his years in Romanism (Catholicism) served to steep him in the wrong definition of Christ. Says Luther, [Oh how much work it was] to hold this definition of Christ which Paul here giveth; so deeply had the opinion and pestilent doctrine that Christ is a lawgiver [entered] as it were into my bones. Thus, read these words with great vehemence: “lives in me,” “loved me,” “for me,” that you may conceive, print, and etch their personal statement upon your heart and fully apply them to yourself, not doubting but confident by faith that you are among the number to whom the “me” belongs (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 87-97).

James Haldane on Galatians 2:20 – the necessity of confidence in Christ

The believer is dead to the law by reason of having endured its curse in the Person of Christ, his Surety. Our Savior died a victim of the law’s righteous sentence. His death as our Substitute was sanctioned by God’s holy law that we might live unto God. Paul speaks of himself as one of Christ’s members. “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). The believing sinner is *baptized* into the body of Christ by God’s Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-13).

It is our union with Christ that communicates all of the benefits of His Person and His work to us. We are conformed to our Head. But just as the cutting off of the head kills the body, so also the death of Christ was the death of His members (His people). Death and the curse were pronounced by God upon the Son; He was cut off from God. All God’s waves and billows rolled over Him, the Father’s face was hidden from Him as He endured divine wrath. This was the price of our reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul's life epitomizes faith in the Son. Paul represents himself as *in Christ* having been nailed to the cross (*crucified with Christ*). The Apostle's statement illustrates just how fully Christ took our place. As the holy, only begotten Son of God, it was not possible for Christ to be held by the power of death (Acts 2:24). He went down into the grave for one purpose; that by Him, eternal life might be communicated to all those given to Him.

Consider that God's plan is for sinners, but it required that the Son of God voluntarily offer Himself. *A body Thou hast prepared for Me* (Heb 10:5). *For the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb 12:2). *Therefore God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name* (Phil 2:9). He accomplished the Father's will for our deliverance. On Calvary's tree the natural members of Christ's physical body were nailed to the cross. So also all the members of Christ's mystical body (the children given to Him) were spiritually present on that awful occasion. They died and rose with Him.

Not I but Christ says Paul—in Christ there is a new endless life formed in us at regeneration (when at the moment of our effectual call, the Son was revealed in us, Galatians 1:16). This new life is maintained by the supply of the Spirit of Christ. The truth as it is in Christ, the word of grace; the Gospel is the "food" necessary to our support. The truth of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection is the sustenance of our souls. In the Spirit's hands this truth quickens us and manifests Christ to us. The believer would die if he lost sight of Christ. The Christian is kept spiritually alive by the supply of the Spirit purchased for him by Christ's ransom. The Spirit keeps us spiritually alive by taking the things of Christ and showing them to our minds. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). Once the Lord has begun a work in us He will complete it (Phil 1:6). This is stated poetically in Isaiah 27:2-3. "*In that day a vineyard of wine, sing of it! I, the Lord am its keeper; I water it every moment. Lest anyone damage it, I guard it night and day.*"

The Christian is utterly dependent upon God's testimony, the promise of Christ in us, and we in Him. Therefore we walk by faith, not sight. Christ manifests Himself to His people (not the world). He forms in His people the hope of glory—they feel their security in Him. What is faith? Is it a body of facts to be believed? Is it truth claims? Saving faith is simply confidence in Christ. It is a confidence which under conviction, guilt, and helplessness casts itself on Christ alone.

The names of true believers (since the Apostles) are not published in God's Word. So how do we know who is in possession of saving faith? The conclusive proof is that they are trusting Christ, they are living Galatians 2:20. Pastors need to be discerning concerning those who profess salvation, for there is a false humility that says, *my sins are*

so aggravated that I cannot speak confidently about safety in Christ. If you are not confident in his blood removing your guilt, you are not yet a believer.

Satan as an angel of light holds men in bondage by urging them to consider their guilt more than Christ. By contrast, the Holy Spirit through the Gospel gives Christ's people the knowledge of salvation through remission of sins. Paul wants believers to know they have eternal life. Yes, there is always the danger of presumption; the antinomian danger that winks at sin. But there is an equal hazard in embracing a legal spirit which drifts away from reliance upon Christ and moves ever closer to trust in self effort. Apart from Christ living in us we are spiritually bankrupt. It is our Mediator's supply of the Spirit through faith that maintains the soul. The more confidently we rely on Christ for pardon, the more we shall experience His power in subduing iniquity, healing backsliding, and promoting sanctification. We ought to use every appointed means to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. *Read, pray, fellowship, admonish, flee sin, and don't doubt your acceptance in the Beloved* (James A. Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 87-98).

Again pastors need to be discerning. It is a legal spirit that is ready to substitute a faith decision in place of its object. But, saving faith looks directly at the object it wishes to behold. It deals directly with Christ. It's not content to know about Him, it longs to be familiar with Him (2 Pet 3:18). There is so much corruption that yet remains in us. If we seek comfort by observing how much we are conformed to Christ, we shall soon be disappointed and feel our comfort evaporating.

Some have based their comfort upon consciousness that they have believed, but that is to make a savior out of one's faith. And tragically, many are conscious they believe whose faith is not the faith of Christ. Hearts are immeasurably deceitful. Consciousness of having believed, or any feeling is not the bedrock foundation of hope. We are commanded to rest in Christ Himself—He is the great object of faith. In proportion to our confidence in Christ, we will have assurance of salvation (experiencing Thy lovingkindness as we have hoped in Thee, Psalm 33:22).

It is the Spirit's ministry to the saints to take the things of Christ, the things of His dignity, His Person, the infinite value of His atonement, the freeness of His salvation and show them to our minds. In other words, God reveals His Son in the believer. Our response is to believe and obey the truth through the Spirit's enablement. These *supplies of the Spirit* are essential to our continuance and commencement of faith. Those who profess salvation must never be satisfied to coexist with doubt.

Assuming that we shall be saved while we tolerate doubt is an unsafe position to maintain. The Scriptures command us to give diligence in confirming a full assurance of hope until the end (2 Pet 1:9-11). Never be satisfied until you can say and mean it *He loved me and gave Himself for me*. All who hear the Gospel are commanded to trust in Christ for salvation with assurance of acceptance. Justification by faith is God's gracious gift to those who believe; but to believe means to utterly forsake everything else you have

looked to for justification or acceptance with God. Having renounced every other ground of hope, look to Christ for salvation. Call on the Name of the Lord—we have the promise of God confirmed to us by His oath—we shall be saved (Rom 10:9-13, 17). As to God's promise of granting unwavering hope of salvation to the believer, Hebrews assures us with these words:

For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:16-20).

The remaining corruption of our hearts diverts us frequently from the enjoyment of our fellowship with God. What is the solution? Count all temporal things but rubbish compared to the infinite treasure of knowing Christ (Phil 3:7-8). View all around you in light of eternity. Seek after, and do not be satisfied until you have the enjoyment of the light of God's countenance. Practice the cultivation of His rest (gospel rest in Christ)—for a rest remains for the people of God (Heb 4:11). Plead with the Lord to take entire possession of your heart and reign there without rivals. He is standing, knocking, open to Him (Rev 3:20).

Where there is no revelation of Christ's majesty and glory reigning in the hearts of God's people, lawlessness and anarchy result. Only when our hearts are fully focused upon a revelation of Him and His splendor can we receive by Him a vision of the work He would have us do for Him. As we are captivated by Him we will not become overly infatuated with our work for Him. We must realize that the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Person of Jesus Christ and speak of His majesty. The delight and joy that the Holy Spirit has is the privilege of magnifying the Person and finished work of the blessed Son of God. For all eternity this will be His sublime ministry.

An anthology of quotations concerning active faith in Christ

Horatius Bonar, *Words Old and New*. That man who, daily, in the sense of his sinfulness and poverty, flees unto Jesus Christ, that he may be justified by His righteousness, and endeavors, by faith in Him, to bring forth the fruits of new obedience, and who does not put confidence in his works, when he has done them, but rejoices in Jesus Christ, the Fountain of holiness and blessedness—that man is a new creature (David Dickson, p. 142)

This is the misery of most Christians, that they mislay their justification. They lay it partly upon their faith, and partly upon their holiness. And this is the reason that, when a poor soul is tempted to some sin, he loses his faith, his assurance, and his peace of conscience, because he grounds his saint-ship and justification upon his holiness (Walter Cradock, p. 166). Christ will be a perfect Redeemer and Mediator, and you must be an undone sinner, or Christ and you will never agree. It is the hardest thing in the world to take Christ alone for righteousness; that is to acknowledge Him Christ. Nature would do anything to be saved, rather than go to Christ, or close with Christ, and owe all to Him (Thomas Wilcox, pp. 201, 202).

T. Austin Sparks, *The Prophetic Ministry*. So the final appeal is that everything must be adjusted and brought in line with the vision; *the vision is that God is never satisfied with anything less than the fullness of His Son as represented by His Church*, and the one question for us is this: are people seeing the Lord? It is not a matter of whether they are hearing what we have to talk about: our preaching, doctrine, interpretation, but, are they seeing the Lord, are they feeling the Lord, are they meeting the Lord? (pp. 22, 65).

We cannot have the knowledge of the Lord, the most important thing in the mind of God for us, except on the ground of the continuous application of the cross. Do not imagine that there will come a day when you have done with the cross (outgrown the cross), when the principle of the cross will no longer be necessary and when you have graduated from the school where the cross is the instrument of the Lord (pp. 74-75).

Christianity has become very largely a system which has reverted to the level of the old dispensation. That is, so many Christians have their lives based upon addresses and sermons and going to meetings and being told things by other people. *How many Christians do you find today who are really living in the good of a throbbing, personal revelation of Jesus Christ?* The great need of our day is that Christians should have the capacity for seeing: *'My eyes are open; I am seeing God's eternal purpose, I am seeing the significance of Christ, I am seeing more and more of the Lord Jesus* (p. 130).

A. A. Bonar, *The Person of Christ*. Many saints seem to be little aware how much of grace there is in the knowledge of the Person of Jesus. It would singularly benefit some of these, who have lived so much on what they know about Jesus, to try for a week the more blessed and fruitful way of dealing directly with Himself. There are treasures in the Person of Him whose doctrines they believe, if only they could use them (pp. 78-79). Many continue little children and weak in faith, because they do not presently attain a solid acquaintance with the Person of Christ (William Romaine, *The Life of Faith*, p. 159, quoted by Bonar in *The Person of Christ*, p. 120).

Eli Ashdown, *The Saving Health of the Gospel*. Dear friends, one hour's felt sense of this righteousness imputed is worth all your seeking; God help you to thirst (Forward, p. ii).

The apostles in their doctrine, being eyewitnesses of the God-man Christ, keep close to His Person, close to His sufferings, close to His resurrection, close to His mercy, close to His grace; and all teaching as well as all practice—outside this is outside the wall of the city, for in the foundations are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (p. 21). There are many in the Church who live on things short of Christ, and are quiet and satisfied all the year round. The foolish virgins were just like that, and had no thought or discernment of any lack, till the Bridegroom came (p. 35). When the ever-blessed Spirit takes up residence in the heart as the Spirit of light, of power, and of a sound mind—and as soon as He does, the man cannot live on the externals of religion. He will feel, “Lord in Thy house I read there is room, and venturing hard, behold I come; but can there, tell me, can there be, among Thy children room for me?” (p. 36).

One glimpse of Christ does more good than all moral walking. I would keep that in its place (moral excellence), but never let it jostle out a precious Christ and His merits and atonement (p. 46). Time is very short, and to be tantalized by a legal spirit, a proud heart, to rest on things that are not saving, I say it is a waste of time, of life, and all. We need the Holy Spirit that we may flee to the blood of Christ, and let nothing quiet us but the atonement (p. 53). How many here are feeling their need of the righteousness and atonement of Christ? [If so of you] that is the sinner that is partaker of the Holy Ghost, it is His rising beam in your heart, you will never be lost. See how close He is to you to move your heart after Himself. How sweet salvation is to a needy sinner (p. 57).

Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*. Such a one, as deals immediately with Christ, will do more in a day, than another in a year! And therefore I call it a choice. . . a high Gospel ordinance—now what this ordinance? The text tells you; *it is looking unto Jesus* (Heb 12:2) (p. 28). Consider that a thorough sight of Christ will increase your outward joy in Christ. A right sight of Christ will make a right-sighted Christian glad at heart (p. 40).

Horatius Bonar, *Words to Winners of Souls*. You cannot minister Christ unless you know Christ, walk with Christ, experience Christ, are controlled by Christ, and are endued with the power of Christ. In other words, Christ is first ministered to your own heart so that you can minister Him to the hearts of others. The goal of your preaching, praying, shepherding, and labors is *union with Christ*. The Apostle Paul suffered much for the sake of the sheep. He loved God’s people and was dedicated to their spiritual advancement. But what was Paul’s ultimate motivation? Was it that they might know more of Christ? No! His goal was that they might *know Christ*. Paul was a man who yearned for the saints to *possess a deep heart knowledge of Christ*. He labored to present every man perfect and complete in Christ (Col 1:28).