

GALATIANS

November 17, 2013

Lesson 8 - 2:18-21 - "The Life Crucified and Risen"

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Galatians 2:18-21 (N.A.S.B. – New American Standard Bible)

18-19. For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

20. I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me.

21. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

C.U.V. – "Crawshaw Unauthorized Version"

18-19. If I try to go back to the "be as good as you possibly can in order to please God" way of thinking, I would be displeasing God. The stringency of God's moral law taught me that I could never keep it perfectly, so I gave up trying to "be good" and now live in faith to "be God's."

20. When Christ died, he died in payment for all my sins, so in a very real sense, I was crucified with Him. When I finally acknowledged His death was for me, I died to my selfish ego. But Christ, by his Spirit, came to live in me. So this life you now see me living is a faith walk, trusting Jesus all the way. He loved me into this way of thinking by giving His all for me, which causes me to want to give my all for Him every day.

21. I absolutely won't dismiss this grace gift of God, for if being right in God's eyes comes by keeping God's rules, then Jesus died a needless death.

*** In our study of this very important passage let's set our sights on 4 considerations: 3 Great Doctrinal Truths taught, A Divine Riddle, Support Scriptures, and A Pivotal Transition in Paul's argument**

I. 3 GREAT DOCTRINAL TRUTHS

1. The SUBSTITUTIONARY (VICARIOUS) DEATH of Jesus

(Jesus died in my place, I being deserving of His punishment)

2. The REGENERATION of my spirit

(the "quickenings" or "making alive" of my spiritual self; my being "born again")

3. VOLUNTARY DEATH of SELF EGO

(my daily, willful choice to lay down my self interests for the sake of God and others)

Jesus died in my place – that’s the essence of substitutionary death.

When I accept that fact I realize, that Jesus was not only dying FOR my sins, but that I might die TO my sins. Clearly, I am not crucified – I’m alive. I couldn’t even crucify myself if I wanted – crucifixion is one death that takes someone else to cause it to happen (you can’t commit suicide by crucifixion). So to say “I’m living the crucified life” doesn’t make any sense.

Rather, we IDENTIFY with Christ’s death, realizing that our sins were paid for on the cross AND that in identifying with Jesus’ death I must “die to self” daily. So it is that in water baptism we are put under the water (baptism = immersion), symbolic of our death to self in identifying with Jesus’ death on our behalf. Thus, Paul could say “I am crucified with Christ.”

The moment I “die to self” in accepting Christ’s death on the cross for me, I am given a “new life.” In John 3, Jesus called it being “born again,” This is the essence of REGENERATION – being made spiritually alive in Jesus. This NEW LIFE is the essence of REGENERATION.

II. A DIVINE RIDDLE?

Galatians 2:20 comes across as a divine riddle. Am I dead or alive, and when did this happen? Is it real or symbolic? Does this refer to my salvation experience or continued Christian walk?

I suggest that this verse has two distinct (but related) parts, the first phrase and then the second phrase:

- (1) I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.
- (2) And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

And I further suggest that they can be seen as distinct in 3 specific ways. Let’s go from the easiest to see to the more difficult.

1. Each refers to a different part of my person – spirit and flesh
 - a. (2) specifically mentions my life “in the flesh.” This is the part of me you can see – my day to day walk in this life, struggling with a sin nature and human frailty. For this part of me, Paul says “I live by faith.”
 - b. (1) So we can now assume that (1) refers to the “spirit” part of me – the part made in the image of God which is my soul. This is the “I” that has been

crucified with Christ – once lost, but now found; once blind, but now I see; once dead in sin, but now made alive in Christ. Jesus now lives in my soul.

2. Each refers to a different time in my Christian experience.

a. (1) refers to my past experience of salvation. “I have been” is past.

This happened in actuality at the crucifixion of Jesus – my sins were paid for and He died in my place, therefore it is as if I was crucified with Him. This happened practically at my salvation, for the old self died and the new life of God entered in. I was “born again” or “quickenened” or “regenerated.” This is Christ, by the Holy Spirit, living in me, beginning at salvation.

b. (2) refers to my day to day yielding my life to God. This is the life that I “now live” which I live by faith in Jesus. In this sense, I choose to die daily to self and walk by faith.

3. Each refers to a different perspective in my Christian experience

a. (1) refers to God’s perspective. He sees me as dead to sin and alive to Christ – declared justified and righteous in His eyes because of Jesus’ crucifixion in my behalf. This is all His doing.

b. (2) refers to my perspective, which I see as my doing. I live by faith, identifying with the crucifixion of Jesus as the death of my old self and the beginning of my new life in Christ. Each day I make the choice to be His.

As we ponder and absorb these distinctions, we should be able to unravel the apparent “riddle” of this great verse.

III. VERSES THAT SUPPORT, CLARIFY AND AMPLIFY

God’s part (the gift of grace) - four verses to ponder

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

This verse conclude that “all died” when Jesus died. This can’t mean that all died to their sins, or else all would be saved. But all were given the opportunity to “die to self” resulting in being “born again” unto new life. The is like all humanity was drowning in

their sins before Christ died, but upon his death to pay for all sins, all who were drowning were thrown a “life preserver.” Not all accept that gift, but all are “saved” in the sense of being offered salvation. This sense is confirmed by the rest of the verse, which says that His death gave opportunity for all to no longer live for themselves, but live for God. Like Galatians 2:20, 1 Corinthians 5:14-15 speaks of all 3 doctrinal issues: Substitutionary death, regeneration and voluntary death of self in following Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

This verse emphasizes the REGENERATION of becoming something brand new, with old habits and sinful tendencies passed away and a new disposition to please God awakening.

Ephesians 2:1, 4-5

(v. 1) And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

(v. 4-5) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Again, this verse speaks of being “dead” in sin, but now “alive” in Christ – the miracle of God’s grace.

Colossians 2:13-14

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He had taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

This verse emphasizes that it is God who makes us alive in Him (REGENERATION) and also that He forgives and cancels our debt of sin. This cancelling (“It is finished”) was done on the cross, poetically described as our sins being “nailed to the cross” indicating their “death.”

Now ponder these four verses, that amplify the teaching on the VOLUNTARY DEATH OF SELF-EGO

Our part (the choice to receive and apply)

Philippians 3:10-11

That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I might attain to the resurrection from the dead.

This verse emphasizes that we must strive to identify with Jesus' death, meaning to "die to self." And it is this conforming that rewards us with new life (REGENERATION) and ultimate resurrection from the dead at our physical death. It is God's work ONLY that saves us, but we must live by faith in this accomplished fact. Our role is to "conform to his death" meaning to die to self. We don't earn the death of our sins – they are dead! But we live out our new life in Christ by exercising our FAITH.

Romans 5:12, 17

(v. 12) . . . through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

(v. 17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Verse 12 teaches of "original sin" through Adam. Verse 17 teaches of the "death of sin" by grace through Jesus. Note the emphasis is on our receiving that gift – our "part."

Matthew 16:24-25

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

This is Jesus' teaching on the life identifying with Jesus' death. Just as Jesus "denied Himself" by giving Himself in death for our sins, so I must "deny myself" in giving myself to God and for others. I must "lose my life" = die to self, in order to "find" my life = live out the regenerated life that God gives to each of His followers.

Philippians 2:3-7a

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant . . .

This verse teaches practical "self-denial" with Jesus' example as our supreme guide. This verse begs for an attitude like unto Jesus in SELFLESSNESS, HUMILITY, OTHERS ORIENTED and SERVANT-MINDED. In a word, it is the EMPTYING of ourself.

IV. A PIVOTAL TRANSITION

These final verses of chapter 2 both . . .

1. . . . Summarize the teaching that salvation (justification) is by faith alone, not by doing right things

2. . . . Introduce the teaching that living the Christian life pleasing to the Lord (justification) is by faith alone, not by doing right things

Note that just a few verses later, Paul will say in 3:3 “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

When I find myself trying to “do it on my own” I need to remember “I am crucified with Christ.” The “old me” is dead, and so is the old way of doing things by self-effort.

If I want to be a better husband, parent of child it is not to be achieved by “self-effort” but by complete reliance upon the Spirit of Jesus in me to give me what I need.

If I need a job, or need to solve a problem, or need to convince someone of something, it is not to be achieved by “self-effort” but by faith in the One who knows all the answers. This doesn’t mean I do nothing, rather it means that I take my marching orders from “Father who knows best.”

If I am struggling with a disease, or loneliness, or dysfunction or mistreatment I don’t try to “feel better” or “get better” by self-effort. Rather, I take my hurts and fears and issues to the Lord and trust by faith that He will fill my life with people, things and mostly Himself to get me through, trusting Him all the way for ultimate delivery.

This is what it means to be “crucified with Christ” and “living by faith.”

And Paul has so much more to teach us on this subject in the next four chapters.

We will resume our study in Galatians in the new year.

And you can always read ahead and be blessed!