

Rewired by the Gospel

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Bible Text: Galatians 2:20

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What a glorious night to worship with you, not just to rejoice in the music, but the looks on your faces as you sing. We rejoice together as the people of God who gather to celebrate our heritage and, more than that, the gospel by which we are saved and proclaim our Lord's goodness to man. How good to gather with you.

This evening I want to take you to Galatians chapter two as we continue the theme of our union with Christ. Galatians chapter two with our focus on verse 20.

To prepare you for the verse I want to take you to another time, 1692, less than 50 years since the Westminster Assembly had finished its work. A pastor in England is grieving. His grief is because he does not know anymore how to uphold the very things the Reformation had stood for.

Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone, so noble and yet it is becoming so hard to preach and to proclaim to his people.

Here is the problem. The more he proclaims the standards of God's Word, the more he watches his people wilt. There are those who are new in the congregation and they are saying, "There are others far ahead of us on this road of faith. We will never catch up."

But there are those long in the faith who sit before the preaching of the Word, hearing its standards who also say, "We will never measure up."

And both are despairing, those who think they will never catch up and those who think they will never measure up.

This word that Walter Marshall wants to preach to his people that is to be such encouragement, instead is becoming a weight on them. There are some people in the church who are so despairing of their lack of holiness, their besetting sin, their inability to make progress, that they are beginning to mutilate their own bodies with the hope of preventing sin. There are some who are contemplating taking their own lives rather than continue in the sin of which the Scriptures are convicting them.

And so Walter Marshall prays this prayer.

May God grant me means for the powerful application of holiness so far as to save some from killing themselves. May God grant me means for the powerful application of holiness so far as to save some from killing themselves.

An awful, dreadful, hopeful prayer. And for Walter Marshall, Galatians 2:20 was his salvation for ministry. These words, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”¹

Would you pray with me?

Father, these words are familiar, perhaps too much, so familiar they have ceased to impart their power to our hearts, power to redeem and to encourage and to strengthen anew. Grant us that we might understand what it means to find union with Christ, the Creator God of the universe to be made one with him. Grant us the wonder and the goodness of this truth this night we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

May God grant me the powerful means of holiness so far as to keep some from killing themselves.

What would be the answer? For Walter Marshall it was an understanding that our life, life itself, not just eternal, but life now is lived in union with Christ.

What did that mean? The opening words of Galatians 2:20 begin to explain, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.”²

We are united to the death of Christ. Now that doesn’t sound like much hope, but consider its meaning. What does it mean to be united to the death of Christ? You have only to back up one verse to see what the apostle sees as the source of his death.

“For through the law,” he says in verse 19, “I died to the law so that I might live for God.”³

Here was this law that God gave to his people. Say I am holy. You be holy. You want to be in union with me? Then here is a path. Walk this law. Live righteously and you will as I am and we will live and walk together. The law is your path.

Sounds easy. One little problem. No one could stay on the path and the very law that was intended to give life to God’s people instead became their death sentence. It was a dead end to true life with God. The reasons are explained even earlier in the same chapter, verse 15.

¹ Galatians 2:20.

² Ibid.

³ Galatians 2:19.

Paul says, “We who are Jews by birth,”⁴ that is, we who really know the law, “know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified.”⁵

Now if we are in a Reformation service you know these are familiar words. This is the *Sola Fides*, by faith alone are we made right with God, not by our observance of the law, not by our performance, not by our achievement, but by faith in what Christ has done. That is our justification. You accept it so readily, you children of the Reformation.

Think how shocking it would be to a Jew to hear it said, “Your keeping of the law is not what puts you right before God. In fact, it is your condemnation. Because you cannot keep it in its every measure, its standards will, in fact, be a death sentence to you. Your holiness will not be enough for a holy God.”

And so Paul takes the whole matrix of what it would mean to be a follower of God. One of his children says, “It is not based on your performance at all. It is based on your faith in what another has done.”

Hopeful to you, but for a Jew, an awful realization. All that I do, all of my knowing, all of my being, all of my accomplishing is not what counts. I mean, it is as though I am as good as dead.

We might compare it to one of those campy movies where a fellow wakes up one day and speaks to his spouse and she doesn’t even acknowledge his existence or his words at all. He speaks louder, no acknowledgement. Waves. No recognition. Jumps up and down. Still nothing. And ultimately he thinks to himself, you know what? I must be dead. Nothing I do counts.

Of course, the apostle says it far more starkly.

“I have been crucified with Christ.”⁶

There are nails in my hands, thorns on my brow. There are soldiers who gamble for my clothes at my feet. There is my mother. She weeps for me and she will not be comforted because the blood that pools at my feet is not the blood of another. It is my blood.

“I am crucified with Christ.”⁷

It is a horrible image, but as horrible as is the image, it is actually the antidote to our spiritual distress. It is first the antidote to spiritual pride, because if I am crucified and I no longer live, then all that I would think would distinguish me, all that would make me

⁴ Galatians 2:15.

⁵ Galatians 2:16.

⁶ Galatians 2:20.

⁷ Ibid.

right before God doesn't matter. My cry has to go away because I am not distinguished any more by my accomplishments.

How does that help the Church? It helps the Church because, you know, we often live the Christianity of being better than the next guy.

Oh, I am not holy, not perfect, no one is perfect. I am just better than you.

And it is that kind of even unrecognized competition that puts strife and pride and controversy into the Church. I have got to win. I have got to defend myself. My reputation is what counts.

No, no, your performance, your achievements do not distinguish you. When we are united to the death of Christ and we know it, pride departs the Church.

Being united to the death of Christ is also the antidote to spiritual despair. For just as my accomplishments do not distinguish me, my failures do not destroy me. They are nailed to the cross. I am crucified with Christ. They are not the basis of my standing before God. I am united to the death of Christ.

Why is that important? Because we can't gather as a body of believers without recognizing some of us deep in our hearts that there are those things we wish were nailed to the cross, the infidelities which even as I use the word now make us want to hang our heads in shame, the people we cannot be near, the places we cannot drive past without feeling the overwhelming conviction of our own past sin.

The people who have succeeded, but as they look back over the means, the lack of integrity, the people hurt, those taken advantage of for the sake of personal gain. We can hardly stand to think of it because then we could hardly stand ourselves.

What would it mean if you really believed that the worst of your sin was nailed to a cross and you bore it no more because you are dead, crucified with Christ.

I don't just have to talk about others. I can talk about myself. I can remember some years ago now not so distant in season from where we are, traveling from Saint Louis to Memphis to visit my parents at thanksgiving. And on the way back getting caught in a freak early snowstorm. There we were, I, my wife, our first born new child all driving home through a snowstorm in our vintage Ford Pinto. And my wife saying, "Bryan, can we pull off? Can we stay in a hotel?"

At that time I was pastoring a little church in southern Illinois, a little church, a little salary and I knew that if we stayed in a hotel it would quite literally take us months to make it back up in our budget.

"Bryan, could we please pull off the road?"

What did I do? I kept driving.

“Bryan, the baby.”

I kept driving until the highway department closed the highway and we had to get off and stay at a hotel.

Do you know that even now every time we go from Saint Louis to Memphis to visit my parents we have to pass that hotel? I want to hang my head and say, “Who was that guy? Who was that guy that for a few dollars would risk everything most dear to him in the world?”

It was I.

Do you know what it means to me to be able to sing the words, “My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious sin, my sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, oh my soul”?

Isn't it good to be dead? Isn't it good to know that all that is true of you is nailed to a cross and crucified with Jesus Christ and you bear it no more? It is that knowledge that actually enables us to be open with God about our sin, to come freely and readily to repent and to say, “God, you knew this already.” Why would I say it to you? Why would I offer it to you? So that you would, again, in my own heart nail it to the cross. I would know the freedom, the wonder of being united to the death of Christ.

But, of course, that is not the end of the story, is it? Verse 20 goes on.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but [what?] Christ lives [where does he live?] in me.”⁸

I got a question for you. Listen, if you are dead and Jesus is alive in you, who are you? See, it is the Reformation service so nobody wants to speak heresy. So I will ask you again. If you are dead and Jesus is alive in you, who are you? I'll change it so you can be ok? What is your identity? You are Christ.

Oh, I don't want to say that.

But don't you recognize that even the apostle would say your life is now hidden in Christ? For me to live is what, Philippians 1:21?

“For to me, to live is Christ.”⁹

Colossians 3:4. Christ is my life.

⁸ Galatians 2:20.

⁹ Philippians 1:21.

Paul says, remember, in 1 Corinthians, “Christ has become for us wisdom from God, our holiness, our righteousness, our redemption.”

Everything that is true of him has been applied to me.

Bunyan said, “It is as though every believer possesses a magic mirror. On one side of the mirror is just a regular old mirror. We look and we see ourselves, blemishes, warts, wrinkles and all. But on the other side is the image of God’s own Son and when God looks at us at which side of the mirror does he look? The side that pictures his own child.”

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”¹⁰

And that means I have his identity.

All that is true of him has been put to my account. All that is true of him is now mine. It is as though I were not standing here. If you could just let your mind fly and imagine that you were on a mountainside and I were to say to you, “Look at the birds of the air, they don’t sow or gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father takes care of them. Aren’t you better than they?”

And the wisdom of that Sermon on the Mount is mine.

There is a woman coming down the road. She is a widow and she is in a funeral procession. And the one in the casket is her only child. And as they get close to me I reach out and I touch the casket. As a Jewish holy man I am not supposed to do it, but I touch the casket. I bring the boy to life. I give him back to his mother and the compassion of that act is mine.

There is a man who lives among the grave stones. He is so possessed of Satan that chains cannot hold him. He is out of his mind with demonic possession. And I take that legion of Satan that is within him, cast him into pigs, return the man to his right mind and to his family and the victory of that act is mine.

I am in a desert 40 days and 40 nights. Satan comes and tempts me with the pleasures and the pride of this world. I resist him with the Word of God. And the righteousness of that resistance to temptation is mine. And it is yours. All that is—can you believe this—all that is true of Jesus is true of you in God’s accounting. All the victory, all the compassion, all the righteousness, all the wisdom is yours. What is true of you has been nailed to the cross and what is true of him has been given to you.

What do we compare it to? I think of the gas stations these days, you know, where we all like it. You don’t have to go through the snow and the rain to pay your gas anymore. What do you do? You just put the credit card in the pump. Actually I have discovered I don’t even have to go to the gas station anymore. I can send my son. He can’t pay for it

¹⁰ Galatians 2:20.

himself, so what does he take? He takes my credit card. He takes my identity. He takes my wealth. It is applied to him.

Do you see what God has done for you in his Son? He recognizes the pauperism of all of us, the poverty of our souls, the debt that we owe and says, “Ok. I will pay the debt with the righteousness of my Son. The riches of his are yours.”

Do you know why I need to know that, why I think other believers do? Because we sometimes are able to grasp the notion that our debt has been canceled by the death of Christ upon the cross. He took the penalty that was ours. Yes, our debt has been cancelled, but that is just half the gospel. I mean, think of it. If you had a debt of 10 million dollars and it was cancelled, what is your bank sum? It is still zero. But what if it just wasn't your debt cancelled, but you had access to the riches of heaven? That is what God is saying. Not only has your debt of sin been cancelled, but the riches of the righteousness of Christ are yours. Why? Because you are united to Christ. His life now yours. What are the implications of that?

The apostle unfolds it as he says, “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”¹¹

I have a pastor friend in California. He graduated from Covenant Seminary and he is honest. He says at times, he goes, “Bryan, I learned lots of good things in seminary, not everything I needed to know to be a pastor.” He said, “One thing I did not learn in seminary, at least I did not hear, was how messed up are most people's lives.”

And then he added these words, great wisdom. “And because people think they are worthless they are helpless.”

Do you hear that?

“Because they think they are worthless, they are helpless.”

What are the implications of your being aware that you are united to Christ? It is first the recognition that your status does not change. You are united to Christ by faith. You are not united to God by your performance. If you are united to God by your performance then you will think some days you have got a good day and some days you have got a bad day.

Others have said it. It is not original to me that most believers, even in the Church evaluate their justification by their sanctification. Do you know what that means? They say, “All right, am I ok with God? Well, how am I doing?”

That is not the question. You are not ok with God on the basis of how you are doing.

¹¹ Ibid.

“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”¹²

My faith is in a past action, a past completed action. My faith is not in how I am doing, but in what Christ has done. It is the present value of the blood of Christ.

Remember how Francis Schaeffer said that? It is the realization that what Christ did now applies to me, not my actions, not my doing, my faith in what he has fully, finally accomplished upon the cross. My status doesn't change. I won't be loved more because I do better.

What is the flip side of the coin? I won't be loved less because I do worse.

Your status does not change because your faith is not in what you do, but in what Christ has done.

Now we live in an era. I will tell you that there are people who will fight that truth. They will say that here is the problem with union with Christ. Here is the problem with believing that you are ok by your faith, your personal faith in another. This will be come individualistic, consumeristic. You will just begin to believe that because everything is ok with you and Jesus that other people don't matter. This is totally democratic, individualistic consumeristic. It cannot be.

If you are united to Christ it is not just that your status does not change, your desires do change. You are united to Christ. His heart beats with yours. You will love what he loves and whom he loves. You will desire to walk with him. You would love to walk with the one that you love the most, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you love that? You will love to walk with him.

And when you see lost people and when you see a hurting world and you know Christ's heart breaks for such, then maybe for the first time you can love lost people and desire to serve purposes beyond yourself, because you are not evaluating God's love based on your performance you know that you are his precious child, his treasured possession and the knowledge of that gives freedom as well as compulsion to serve him.

Remember that ministry of reconciliation the apostle talks about? The love of God constrains us to proclaim the gospel. When I fully recognize how greatly I am loved, I want to spread it around. The heart of Christ is mine now. I am in union with him.

But maybe you say, “It doesn't feel that way. I still struggle. All the things I want to do I wonder if I shall ever do.”

And there we need Galatians 2:20 also which reminds us not only that our status does not change and our desires do change, but our ability has forever changed.

¹² Ibid.

How do I know that? Because my faith is in “the Son of God how loved me and gave himself for me.”¹³

How did he give himself for me? He died upon a cross. But that is not the end of the story. He lives. Where does he live? In me. The resurrection power of Christ is in me. It is the witness of Scripture, the testimony of God...

“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”¹⁴

When I believe that, when I actually believe the resurrection power of Christ abides in me, then I know I have strength. If I don’t believe that, if I just believe it is me against Satan I have already lost the battle. I have already lost. But if by an act of faith, as the apostle says here, “I live by faith in that God who now indwells me.”

If I live by that faith then I begin to recognize I have a power not my own. Satan comes and says to me, “You can’t help this. You can’t stop this. You can’t change this. It is just the way God made you. It is probably his fault.”

Jesus says, “That is a lie. You are a new creature in Christ Jesus.”

Now I know sometimes your heart will say, “It doesn’t feel that way.”

But I will prove it to you. How do you know you are a new creature in Christ Jesus? Because of those new affections that are within you by your union with Christ.

There was a time when you sinned, you did not care. I am not telling you you don’t sin anymore. Bu the evidence of your new creaturehood is when you sin you hate it. You hate it. And as much as you hate it, as bad as it may make you feel, rejoice before God that that sense of grieving the Holy Spirit is the evidence of the Spirit, the very evidence of your new creaturehood. It is God saying you are a new creature. And when you claim that by faith, the knowledge of who you really are, you can begin to make progress in the Christian life secure in the knowledge of his love and strengthened by the knowledge of his indwelling power.

My wife for a number of years taught in high school. She was a music teacher. And she talks about the time that there was a learning specialist that came to her class and began to test various children who were struggling academically. And one youth man that was in her class there was the discovery by the learning specialist of this strange disconnect between what went into the young man’s brain and what he could reproduce on paper through his hand. If you ask him the question and he responded verbally he could answer. But if he had to write it down, he could not do it.

How well do you think he did in school? Terrible. And until that day he did not know why.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 1 John 4:4.

At the end of school faculty meeting the learning specialist not only came, but invited this young man and I will call him John.

She said, “John, before today what did you think about yourself?”

He said, [?] “I thought I was stupid.”

Then she said, “And now, John. What do you know about yourself?”

With tears streaming down his face he said the words, “Now, I know I am not stupid.”

She said, “There is still a little work to do, but now you know you can.”

Wasn't that a great gift that she gave him? She told him his true identity and his true ability.

Do you know what God has done in this little portion of Scripture this night? He has told you your true identity and your true ability. There are people here who say, “God must hate me. He knows my failure. He knows my sin. He knows how far behind I am. I will never get this fixed.”

And through the Word of God he has said, “No.”

All the weakness, all the sin, all the failure nailed to the cross and your identity now is that of God's own beloved child and that will not change because he is basing that not on your performance, but upon the work of his own Son in which you have faith. And as you have that faith in the risen Lord who is the reason that you have full right glorious standing before God, that same one indwells you to give you strength so that tomorrow doesn't have to be like yesterday. It can be new because you are a new creature. And with that knowledge you can know as a loved child of God that you are strong for the battle and loved forever because you are united to Christ.

Pray with me.

Father, I pray for these people that the words of the Reformation would not just be ancient history, but that the Scriptures that teach us of salvation that is possessed by faith, of a grace that gives us all the righteousness of Christ and of Christ alone being our hope is real because in a way more profound than we can explain you have united us to your son forever. Give us faith in him that the hope that is ours would become joy that is our strength for tomorrow. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.