

# Experiencing the Power of the Cross in Daily Life

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*Our Identity in Christ*

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Come with me to 1 Peter 2. We're looking again at the 24th verse, which was actually part of our assurance of pardon this morning. We began looking at this verse in detail last Sunday morning and we want to look at it again. The title of the message this morning is "Experiencing the Power of the Cross in Daily Life." Experiencing the power of the cross in daily life. We've noted that this section of Peter's first epistle, his first letter, that the larger context of the verse we're going to read, verse 24, is all about daily life. Peter is calling us as Christians to live a life worthy of the calling with which we've been called. He's calling us to a radical new way of life. He hammered home in the first section of the letter that we have been born again, that we have a new identity in Christ, chosen to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, to be separate and distinct and to live lives that demonstrate the power of Jesus Christ in everyday life, and then he comes into this section and he says, now let's start applying it, and he begins to challenge us to a radical, different way of living. That's the focus, really, of this larger section, 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 is about submission to authority. This new birth that we have received, if you're a Christian, this new identity that you have is to be evident in the way you respond to authority, Peter says. And he deals with this in three different realms. Chapter 2, verse 13, he started talking about the importance of responding to government authority and how now being new in Christ, we are different in the way we respond to the governing authorities. He says in verse 13, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, to the king, to governors." In chapter 2, verse 18, he says now it's not just government authority that you need to be different in the way you respond to it, you need to be different in the way you respond to the authority of employers, area of employment. "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect," verse 18. And here he begins to bring in that we're not just to be submissive and radically different in the way we respond to authority, he also says we're to be radically different in the way we respond to suffering and injustice because he goes on in verse 18 to say, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle but also to those who are unreasonable," and that means crooked, "for this finds favor if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly." He says we're going to suffer unjustly in this world and Christians are known by the radically different way they suffer through injustice.

So we're known by the way we respond to authority and the way we respond to suffering and it's radically different and so he says, in the area of government, you're going to respond to authority in a certain way. In the area of employment, you're going to respond to authority in the same way. And then he's going to turn the corner and say apply it in another area, in the area of family. And so he's going to talk about familial relationships, particularly the husband-wife relationship. And he's going to say wives need to be submissive to their husbands, even those who are disobedient to the word, ungodly men; you're still to be submissive, to have an attitude of respect and honor. And so this is to characterize the Christian life. We're to be radically different in these areas. Not only in submission to authority, but in suffering even as we submit. When you really carefully weigh what's being asked of us in these passages, all three about authority and suffering, when you carefully weigh it, the standard is so high. It is calling us to do things that are incredibly difficult, exceedingly hard for a godly woman to respect and honor an ungodly husband who mistreats her verbally. Now, obviously, if he's physically abusive, you call the police. God has appointed the government to deal with that. But Christian wives are to be of such godly character that they can have a gentle and quiet spirit even with an ungodly man. But how hard that is, when you really get down to the nuts and bolts, the brass tacks, it's not easy. Much easier said than done. The same thing with employment. I mean, to be mistreated by your boss, to have him treat you incredibly unfairly, and then to look down on you, even for your faith, and still to respond in a way that the verses 18 to 20 talk about, pleasing God, trusting God, entrusting ourselves to God in those moments. It's incredibly difficult and to submit to governing authorities when we see such wickedness and godlessness among our rulers. So helpful to remember that when Peter wrote these words, Nero was the emperor. You read about Nero, he was an amazingly perverse individual.

Now we talked about there are balances to that, we always only obey God finally, and so if people in authority encourage you to disobey God, you must disobey them because your higher allegiance is to God. But this attitude, these radical new attitudes to authority, this radical new way of seeing suffering is not only exceedingly hard, it's humanly impossible and so the question is how? How can you do what God has called you to do? Even though you know clearly what God has called you to do, how can you do it? That's the reason that Peter, to answer the question of how, inserts verses 21 to 25 in the midst of this threefold call to respond to authority and suffering in a similar way. Government, employment, family, in the middle of it he puts 2:21 to 25, which we're going to read now, and it's answering the question, how? How can you do this? Let's read verse 20. We didn't finish. I read verse 18 and 19 earlier. We'll read verse 20 through 25 of 1 Peter 2.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He

Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Let's pray together.

*Father, as we come to Your word, Lord, we come with gratitude that You have spoken in the pages of Scripture with perfection, that all Scripture is God-breathed. We come trusting that is perfect truth and we come rejoicing that we have the Spirit of truth, the helper, we read about earlier to help us, to lead us into all truth. Lord, may Your Spirit work in our hearts to lead us to a deeper understanding of the truth and the glory of Christ and the glory of His cross. We pray this in His name. Amen.*

Experiencing the power of the cross in daily life answering the question, how do you do that which is humanly impossible? How do you bear up under unjust treatment in a way that honors God? How do you show kindness? How do you not revile when you're reviled again? The answer is look to Jesus as your example, but more than that, verse 24, it's not just look to Jesus as your example, though it is that, it's look to Jesus and his cross for the energy to do what he's called you to do. The power is in the cross. That's what verse 24 is saying. In fact, verse 24 is all about how we can live holy lives in the here and now. When he says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." He's emphasizing here that the focus of what he's applying the cross, not so much to our justification as to our sanctification. That's why he's brought this verse up, is that the cross is the key to our sanctification. It's also the key to our justification but here the point is, you need to live this way. It's impossible to live this way. The only way you can live this way is through the power of his cross. That's the purpose of why he brings us up.

Now let's talk a moment about sanctification and justification, two aspects of our salvation. When Joseph, betrothed to Mary before they had become husband and wife, an angel appears to him and he's already heard Mary's pregnant. He's secretly decided, he decided to divorce her secretly. An angel appears to him and says, "Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." And he goes on to say, "You shall call His name Jesus." Why? "For He will save His people from their sins." Jesus means "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh saves, Jehovah saves, the Lord saves." Jesus' name means "the Lord is salvation." And he says, "The reason you're going to call His name Jesus is because He is the One, He is the Lord who will save us from our sins." Sins, plural. Not just sin as a concept, not just sin as a malady in the heart, but every single one of our sins, he will save us. You need to be saved from your sins. All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Salvation is of the Lord. And so Jesus came to save us.

Salvation from sin can be thought of in three tenses: the past tense, the present tense, and the future tense of salvation. This is one way of explaining this. He came to save us from

sin. Salvation has three tenses. The past tense of salvation is you are saved, past tense, from the penalty of sin. When you repent and believe the gospel, if you have repented and believed the gospel, at the moment you believed, you were saved from the penalty of sin forever. The penalty of sin is the wrath of God, the righteous judgment of God against all of our sins. So the past tense, but that's past tense to the believer. Past, present, and future is in terms of your experience. Do you see that? So if you are a Christian, you were saved in the past from the penalty of sin at the moment you believed. That's actually justification. So put past tense, saved from the penalty of sin, justification. Now, present tense of salvation, you are being saved. Not past tense, you were saved, you are saved, or you're saved past tense from the penalty, you are being saved from the power of sin. This is, and put out beside that, sanctification. Past tense justification, present tense sanctification, the future tense is glorification. You will be saved from the presence of sin. That's the third tense of salvation. When Jesus comes back, or when you die, you are saved from the presence of sin. You will never be not only have sin in you, you'll never see sin again.

So the three tenses of salvation. Now, what my point is, what he's talking about in verse 24 is the present tense of salvation. He's talking about sanctification. He's saying look to the cross for your ability to be saved in the present from the power of sin. That's why he says so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. So the past tense of salvation is found in the cross as well. I mean, and we're going to see this in a moment as we begin looking at the points of the message, but the present tense is the focus.

So with that said, let's now look at how the cross enables us to put away our sin and I want to add too that he's dealing with the issue of how to deal with unjust treatment, how to live a supernaturally empowered life, but you can think about any particular besetting sin that you have, God knows our hearts, right? Other people don't. You can fool others, but he knows your heart. He knows the sin that you wrestle with, that you struggle with, that you're failing in, and this message, this verse is so important for you to hear today so that you can understand how to walk in victory. The resources are the cross of Christ. So pray that as we continue to look at this, the Lord opens our eyes and our hearts to see the treasure that is found in the cross of Jesus Christ.

So how do we live for the glory of God in this world? How do we overcome the power of sin? Three points this morning. The first point is understand the power of the cross. That's the first point, understand the power of the cross. 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." He himself, emphatic, he himself. He wants us to see Jesus. "Look what he did. Look at Christ. He said, look at Christ as your example. Now understand what He Himself did," he says, "and He bore your sins," plural, "in his body on the cross." Interesting word here he uses, Peter uses, it means literally not just to bear, but literally it means to bear up. There's a preposition on the front of this word. By itself, the word phero means bear, and past tense would have meant bore. But this literally means bore up. He lifted up your sins on the cross.

He uses the word because he is thinking about Isaiah 53:11 and 12, where twice we're told that the coming servant of the Lord will bear our iniquities, bear our sin, Isaiah 53:11

and 12. And when you look back at that passage, the Hebrew word that is translated bear, he bore our iniquities, he bore our sins, the prophet speaking of a future Messiah speaks in a past tense. Look that he was pierced for our transgressions. He was wounded for our iniquities. The chastisement for our well-being fell upon him. All of it's past tense, past tense, past tense but he's writing about something that's going to happen 700 years in the future. And one of the reasons God does that, writes in past tense, is to say, even though it's coming in the future, it's as certain as if it had already happened. God is determined to deal with your sins and he will do it. He's, in fact, decreed it. You can bank on it. It's as if it's already happened. If you and I were living 600 B.C. and we were Jews and we were reading our Bible, we could know he is coming to bear our sins. The servant of the Lord will do it. And Peter says, he did it. He bore our sins, he lifted them up. And the word emphasizes that the Hebrew word there in Isaiah 53, particularly is a word which means to lift up and it has the idea of elevation. In fact, it's the same word that is translated previously in 52, verse 11, high and lifted up. It means to lift up. It pictures loftiness.

So it pictures separation. It doesn't just mean he's going to carry. Now think about this, think about the load of sin, the heaviness of our sin, how it weighs us down. Think about the guilt. Think about the pollution, nastiness, the vileness, and how heavy it is, how impossible it is for us to deal with it. We're helpless. We can't carry this load. Jesus has come and he's borne it off of us and he didn't just come alongside to help us with the load. Do you see that? If you're carrying a heavy load, have you found yourself, we've been moving stuff around a lot at our house the last few weeks and there are times where I pick something up and I'm like, "I don't think I can do this," and then you're kind of debating, "Should I go ahead and try or not?" And as you get older, you think about that a lot more than you used to because you tweak things and you're like, "I didn't know that that could hurt." Well, so sometimes you need somebody just to come alongside and help you and what a blessing it is when someone comes along and shares the load, but this is emphatically not what he's saying. You and I could not carry it. We were overwhelmed by the weight. We were collapsing under it, and he not only took it up, he took it far away. He lifted it up off of you. And in fact, when Peter then continues on, and he says so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, it's interesting, the word translated "die to sin" is actually not the normal word for death. In fact, it doesn't mean die at all. All the translations alike translate it "die" because it's in parallel to live to righteousness, and so you see the death and resurrection are clearly in view, but the word itself, interestingly enough, means to be away from. That's literally the word here that's translated "die."

So he bore our sins. He took our sins up on the cross. Far away from you. So that we might now being separate, in fact, the way that it should really read in the Greek when he says, "so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness," really, the way the verbs function here, it would be better if they translated it, "so that having died to sin, having died to sin, we might live to righteousness." The goal is living to righteousness. That's the main point. Jesus bore our sins in his body to take them out of the way so that we, and remember it doesn't really mean die to sin as much as it does, but it means having been separated from sin. He lifted them high off of you, and now having been separated from sin, having had it completely removed from you, you can live for righteousness. That's

what was accomplished on the cross. He's speaking about sanctification. Now, he's speaking about justification, too, because they're so intricately related.

Think about this for a moment. I mentioned justification as being declared righteous, the past tense of salvation saved from the penalty of sin, the wrath of God. How were you saved from the penalty of sin? Jesus took the load of guilt, the weight of every single sin you've ever committed, I've ever committed, every sin of deed, thought, attitude, every single one, he took in his own body and bore it up and took it away on the cross and now he's separated you from it so far that when God looks at you he doesn't see your sin. In fact, he not only separated you from your sin by taking it in his body, he gave you his righteousness. So when God looks at you, if you are trusting in Jesus, God sees you clothed in a perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's justification and nothing can change your standing before God, that is your positional standing. Paul says in In Romans 5, we stand in grace. That is, you stand in favor. You're standing, if you believe in Jesus Christ truly from your heart, your standing is favor. God looks at you with joy and delight and desire to bless you and to love you because he sees his Son's righteousness all over you. That's justification and it happened because he bore your sins in his body on the cross and he took them away. Separated you from them.

Now, he's saying the same thing about the power of sin. The reason that you and I can do what he's called us to do in his word, which is to live a supernatural, radically different life, is because Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross. That is, he, in his death, took our sins in such a way that he separated us from not only the penalty of sin, but the power of sin in a radical, fundamental way and he's basically saying that, "Now you're in My calling." You can do nothing to change your positional standing with God if you have placed your faith in Christ. The calling of God is irrevocable. If you've been truly saved, you're always saved. Now the question is, have you been truly saved? If you're truly saved, this is what's going to be true of you. Your positional standing, when it changes that dramatically, and you now, God looks at you with favor because you have been born again, you trusted in Christ, now, he says, he's given you a new nature in your heart, and you want to be and experience what you are in standing positionally. That is, your practical experience needs to reflect more and more and more your positional standings. Does that make sense? You're declared righteous forever because of your position in Christ, but God is glorified by you and me learning to trust in the cross and be made more and more like Jesus day by day in our practical experience and the way that happens is exactly the same way. It's by faith. You look at Jesus and you're justified, right? You look at Jesus and you trust in him. You don't trust in yourself. You trust in him and you are justified. You're declared righteous forever. You're accepted forever. Positional standing changes. You go from being under the wrath of God to being under the favor of God forever. In the same way, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so also walk ye in him, Colossians 3.

So he says, in the same way look to the cross of Christ and understand that you have been separated from the power and authority of sin in such a radical way that you can now have the power of Christ to live through you and in you a supernaturally different life. The power of the cross accomplishes both of these things, not just salvation from the

penalty of sin, but salvation from the power of sin. In fact, let me show you this. Look at Romans 6:3. Verses 3 to 14,

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

What he's saying is that when you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you look to the cross, the reason that you're justified is because what happened at the cross is God joins you to Christ and all that you are is imputed to him. All of our sins, past, present, future, like I said earlier, thought, word, and deed were credited to Christ and he suffered the wrath of God that you and I deserved in full on the cross. He was punished as if he had lived our wicked lives and then he gives us his righteousness. So what happened was we actually were with him on the cross is the language the New Testament uses. God punished your sin in Jesus and therefore he can reward you on the basis of Jesus' righteousness. Your sins have been atoned for, fully dealt with. In the same way, he's saying, that you were joined to Christ in dying to the penalty of sin, you also died to the power of sin. That is the death of Christ, the death of Christ itself liberates you from the power and rule and authority of sin. That's what he's going to go on to explain.

Look with me back at verse 8 of Romans 6.

8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

He's saying that Jesus, when he died, died to this whole realm and is no longer, I mean, though it is unthinkable that he could have sinned anyway, he was tempted and he had to fight temptation every single time in his full humanity. He's fully God, but he fought temptation. It was at times so difficult. Like we saw in the garden of Gethsemane, the anguish of following the Father's will, obeying the Father to go to the cross was so emotionally devastating that he sweat drops of blood, that is the capillaries in his skin, a rare condition happens when you're in such anguish that the blood capillaries burst near the skin and blood comes out of the sweat pores because you're in such incredible agony. That's what Jesus was going through the night before he was crucified. It wasn't an easy thing for him to overcome the sin of not doing what God told him to do, go to the cross. So he, having finished the course, 33 years, perfect obedience. He always did everything

the Father wanted him to do at every moment. He never did anything the Father didn't want him to do at every moment. A perfect record of obedience. He then gives his life and now he's removed from the possibility of sin because he has been taken on to glory. Resurrected on the third day, of course, on Sunday. Physically, his body not able to be held in the ground because sin has no authority where, I mean, death has no authority where there is no sin and he is the sinless one. He's victorious. And so he now is beyond the possibility of sin, and you, as you've been joined to him, he's saying that spiritually, in the truest sense, you have been removed from the power of sin. Not from the presence of sin, you still have sin in you if you're a Christian. Indwelling sin is an ongoing reality but the power and authority of sin has been broken for the Christian.

And that's why he says in verse 11, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Consider, the word "consider" here, *logizomai*, means to like to count up. It's a word that pictures the logical processing of information. Imagine you're looking at, you know, you're balancing your checkbook back in the day when you used to do that by hand, somebody remember what that was like? Anyway, I'm kind of glad we don't have to do that now as much. But anyway, so you're writing your figures down, you're coming out with everything, and you work through all the figures, and now you say, "This is the final analysis of where we are." He's saying, look at all the facts. Look at all of the facts. Look at what you see in yourself. You see sin in you. Everyone who's honest, you know that you struggle with sin. You feel the pull of temptation every day. You fail every day in certain ways. None of us lives a sinless day. How often we sin. Look at that. Those are facts. Put them on the balance sheet. Yes, there they are. I struggle with this. I struggle with that. There it is. Now put on the balance sheet Jesus Christ and what he accomplished. His perfect life, his atoning death, the fact that God says that when you place your faith in him, you're joined to him, now that means you're dead to the reign and rule of sin. That's the other facts on the side of the equation. What does that add up to? You are dead to the reign and rule of sin. Believe it. Even so, consider yourselves. Count it up and bank on it. That's what he says.

And then he says, verse 12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." Because you've died to the reign and rule of sin, you don't have to sin. You can at any moment say no, and it really works if you do it correctly. The problem is you and I do it, try to do it in our own strength. We don't draw on the power of the cross. We don't understand how union with Christ is everything. Clinging to Jesus is everything. Jesus said, "I'm the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in Me, you'll bear much fruit. But apart from Me, what can you do?" Nothing. "Abide in Me. Cling to Me. Cling to all that I am, all that I've done. Trust in Me. Abide in Me. Abide in My cross, in My resurrection. Cling to that. That's the way to victory."

So don't let sin reign. Sin's going to try to reign. Yeah, it's there. It's trying to reign. Don't be surprised at that. It's going to try to reign. That's the nature of sin. It wants to rule over you. Every moment of every day, sin wants to rule. Sometimes it hides out a little while and you think maybe you're doing okay, and then suddenly it comes back. The reality is it's always there. Romans 7, he really makes that really clear in this next chapter but for our purpose, we're going to go back to 1 Peter 2 and realize he's saying, "He bore our sins



in hHs body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." The power of the cross is the fact that it has created this separation. It has taken the power of sin, even though sin's still in us, the power of sin, the rule of sin has been removed from us. We've been taken outside of the realm of the rule of sin so that every time you sin, you're actually getting... I'm sorry, Romans 6, I forgot to say one thing we've got to look at before we go back. Back to Romans 6. When he says verse 12, in verse 11 he said, count it this way, you're dead to sin and you're alive to God. Just believe it, bank it, that's the truth. Verse 12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body." You have to actively resist the attempt by sin to reign, to rule. "And don't go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness or present yourselves to God." I love this, what he's saying here. He's saying that when a believer sins, a believer is willingly letting the foreign power that is no longer entitled to rule over you, you're just letting them rule. It's like a nation just letting another nation come in and take over. Lay down arms, just come on in, guys. You're letting this foreign power reign. In verse 13, when you sin, what you're doing is, he says, don't go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments. He's saying, when you and I sin, what we're doing is we're presenting the members of our body as instruments. We're presenting them. We're giving them. Now when you sin, you feel like you're doing what you want to do, but that is a lie. That's what you feel like, that's what you think. God says when you sin, when you commit that sin again, when you raise your voice and yell and scream, when you give your attention to sinful fantasies, when you allow your mind to do that, you're not doing that which you really want to do. You're not doing that which you have to do, though you think you have to do it. That's a lie. What you're doing is you're yielding freely your imagination to sin. "Here, sin, take my imagination and do what you want with it." When you speak harshly and sinfully, you're saying, "Take my voice, take my tongue and use it. Here."

And it's interesting, the word he uses, "presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness," the Greek word there could be better translated weapons. Now imagine this, somebody shows up at your front door. We live in an increasingly crime-ridden society, don't we? Many of you probably have, maybe you have those, I forget what you call it, the doorbell thing that's a camera. That's the technical title for it, the doorbell thing that's a camera, so that you can see who's at the front door before you go open the door because a lot of times people open the door and somebody comes in and invades their house. Now imagine you see there are home invaders outside and they look suspicious and you're worried. In fact, you see a weapon. You know they're coming for bad purposes. They're not wanting to help you and your family. But you decide to go open the door and to bring them right on in, and not only that, you understand they want to hurt your family and you say, "I've got a gun upstairs. Let me go get it for you that you can use to shoot my family." How insane is that, right? He said, every time a believer sins, that's what you've done. You've invited a foreign power into your house. You've turned over your instruments to them freely. You gave it to them. That's what Jesus says about what you're doing. I don't care how you feel about it. Your feelings are lying to you. The word of God, count it up, all that you feel, all of your experience, years of bondage you may have experienced, add it all up, and there put on the other side what Christ did on the cross, and count it up, you are free from the reign

and rule of sin. Act like it. That's what he's saying. Believe it. Act on it. This is not who I am. I don't have to give my members to sin.

But back to 1 Peter, the key though, is to look to Christ, to go to him in the moment. I said understand the power of the cross, the second point is understand your own powerlessness. Understand your own powerlessness. The only way to do what we're called to do is to go to the cross. That's why he's given this verse here. The only way for us to walk in holiness is to cling to Christ and his cross. This is where Christians get tripped up because we learn a lot of these things, but then we forget how we're to go, that it is the cross. Let me give you an example. A lot of times, we're tripped up by the fact that we are constantly if you are Christian, you've been born again, you have a new nature but your new nature is in your heart alongside your old nature. Your old nature has not been removed. It has been unseated as the authority. It's no longer in authority but it has not been removed from your heart. It's still there. And it is audacious enough that it keeps claiming to have authority and it keeps seeking to reign and rule over you. And one of the things we have to remember is, in the Christian life, listen, the Christian life is a fight. So you have to acknowledge your powerlessness. You cannot overcome the flesh in your own strength. You're powerless. I'm powerless to overcome any sin truly in my own strength.

Not only do you have an old nature, but listen, this is where we get tripped up too, your old nature cannot be reformed, cannot be tamed. Sometimes we think we're going to tame it. Now listen, you're supposed to read the word, you're supposed to change your thinking, you're supposed to be transformed by the renewal of your mind, the more that you think God's thoughts, the more quickly you are to run to Christ, but the answer is always, always, always, the answer is run to Christ, run to Christ, run to Christ. We tend to think that we can change our old man. So if we keep reading the word, the old man will behave himself better. If he does, he's just hiding out for a better, more opportune time. The old man always hates God. The old man always loves sin. The old man cannot be tamed, cannot be reformed. He must always be crucified. That is the call of the Christian life, to continual mortification of the sin nature. It must be crucified, and it's crucified in the cross of Jesus, the finished work.

I was reading a wonderful Puritan, Walter Marshall, talking about this issue in his book, "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification." He said, sometimes we even get tripped up thinking that we can and he said, you're tempted to think that you can incline your heart, you can incline your heart to love the things of God and to want to be obedient. Now there is a sense in which reading the word does strengthen our resolve but the fact is you can never reform the old man. You strengthen the new man through all of the graces of reading the word, being with believers. Yes, you do strengthen the new man. It becomes stronger. You become more habituated in ways of thinking and acting in righteousness and how important that is. But as you do that, this is what Marshall was saying, as you do that, there is the subtle, just tiny, it seems like it's just this tiny error that is actually a massive error that we can think that we can incline our hearts so that we will, that we should incline our hearts to go to Christ before we go to Christ. He says, listen, what you must always learn to do is you always go to Christ with your heart as messed up as it is

right now, go to Jesus first. He inclines your heart. Does that make sense? Go to him. Take your sin and your desire to sin to him. Say, "Lord, here I am. In the same way I came to You in the beginning, I come to You now. Here I am with this desire in this circumstance to respond this way. You know me, Lord. I can't fix my heart, but I come to You and Your cross and Your resurrection and You can put this to death and give me new life through what You've done." But it's continually acknowledging our powerlessness. I can't reform my old man. Don't be surprised. You're still going to have the old man continually bringing vile things up in your life. And at times it's going to get worse and worse. When you give into it, it gets more and more power. Yes. And so you want to fight it and the more you fight it, the more you're able to quickly kill it, but it's still going to need to be killed. Acknowledge your powerlessness.

So understand the power of the cross, acknowledge your own powerlessness, and remember that you access the power of the cross in the presence of Jesus, in the person of Jesus. What I mean is don't think of the cross as something detached from Jesus himself. There is this subtle temptation also in the Christian life to separate the benefits of Christ from Christ himself. You don't get the benefits of Christ unless you get Jesus. That's true in salvation. You don't get saved unless you get Jesus. Sometimes we can evangelize this way. We can say what you need is to be justified. You need to be made right with God. You need to escape the wrath of God. Those things are true, right? Absolutely they are. You do need to be justified if you're not saved. You're going to experience the wrath of God. But it can be, our evangelism can turn into this, believe on him so that you can receive this gift of justification, you can receive forgiveness. Believe on him so that you can have these things rather than go to Jesus and believing on Jesus is going to him and when you get Christ, you get all of the benefits of the gospel wrapped up in Christ. And the same thing is true in the Christian life. The same way that you go to Jesus and you give yourself to him, you believe in him and you trust in him and you're saved from the penalty of sin, you go to him continually and say, "Lord Jesus, I need You now. I need the benefits of the cross and Your resurrection. You see what I'm struggling with. You see how vile this old man is. Let me experience the power that comes from Your death. Let me live in the power of Your resurrection." And the truth of the word of God, all of these things, and your meditation on Scripture are all helping you with this but sometimes we can forget. We can try to live the Christian life in our own strength in this odd way.

Let's think about what this looks like in practice. So, you're mistreated at work by your boss or coworkers. Maybe they're making fun of you because you're a Christian or your boss doesn't like you, you know that. How do you respond to their reviling of you, their demeaning of you in a way that blesses them and shows kindness to them? And how do you love them with the heart of God? The only way you can do that is by running to Jesus and saying, "Lord Jesus, here in this moment, I want to let them have it. I want to defend my rights. You see how they're mistreating me. You see how ridiculous this is. I just wanted to offer the gospel to them, and here they are hating me. Lord, You see my heart, you see, even this is sin, O God. Give me Your heart. Let Your death and Your resurrection be effectual for me in this circumstance." And by clinging to Christ in that moment, now you lay down what you wanted to do, and that's taken into the death of Christ, and you're given now his righteousness. And "Lord, you are meek. You were like

a lamb before the shearers is silent. Lord, you didn't open Your mouth. When You were reviled, You didn't revile again. In fact, You blessed. You prayed for those who were hurling insults at You on the cross." Remember that? They're taunting him, unspeakable agony. Just the physical agony alone is indescribable and he's about to bear our sins and experience the turning away of the Father from him, and people are hurling insults at him and he says, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." He's praying for them. And you see, so what we have to do is say, "Lord Jesus, I'm not this way. I am not this way, but You are. Live in me." Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

You don't try to fix yourself and clean yourself up to go to the Lord Jesus. You know, you recognize that temptation is coming on you. You feel it coming. Maybe you struggle looking at things online you shouldn't look at; sexual sin grips so many lives. It's such an evil and wicked thing. It distorts and destroys the good blessing that God has given us in sex. We as Christians, we of all people ought to know the beauty of the sexual relationship, the glory of the sexual relationship is intended to be one man and one woman for life, and it's meant all the beauty of it, all the pleasure of it, was God's idea for the well-being of his people and Satan's twisted it, distorted it. He tries to get people to use what God has given, his good gift, Satan says, "Use it in your own way." Use it really his way, Satan's way. And what he does is he robs you of the pleasure and he gives you bondage in exchange. So you feel that desire again to look at something, cry out to Christ, run to him. Don't try to clean yourself up. This is what happens. Satan will tempt you and then he condemns you and your flesh is happy to join in on the act. "Here I am again thinking like that. I can't go to God. What am I thinking like that?" The next thing you know, you've sinned and you continue down that path. What are you supposed to do? When you see the temptation, "Lord Jesus, here I am again in my miserable rags. I need You! I want this but You were too pure to ever do anything like that. You never looked at another person and used them for pleasure. You only loved Your neighbor as Yourself. You perfectly fulfilled the law of God, and You are my righteousness. And in Your death, this power, even though it feels like I can't resist it, I'm going to believe Your word, I am free. I'm not going to yield my mind to that right now. Lord Jesus, live in me like what You would do. You lived to do the will of God." And you put action to that. You get away from the computer screen. You throw your phone over in the corner. You get away and you start praying for brothers and sisters. You seek the Lord's kingdom. But it's not that you do those mechanistic things. Yeah, you should have accountability in your life. Yeah, you should be confessing your sins to other brothers and sisters and that may be one of the key things you need to do, but listen, the fundamental key thing is learn to run to Jesus. Don't do all of those other things and forget the one thing that matters. Run to Jesus and know that he is a Savior who receives sinners. He receives you because he's done everything necessary to cleanse you. Don't let Satan tempt you, then condemn you, then make you wallow in your sin. You're a child of the King. Yeah, you don't deserve it. Agree with him when he says you're a sinner, you're lustful, your anger is ridiculous. Agree with him and run to Christ and then what happens over time as you become less and less lustful, less and less angry, more and more like Jesus in your practical experience.

But it's only through the cross. The Christian life is not lived through rules. Listen, I'm telling you, we need to memorize the Scripture. We need to meditate on the Scripture. We need to do all that the Bible says about encouraging one another. But listen, what is Christian discipleship anyway? Isn't everything that we do, follow Jesus? Isn't everything about, look to Jesus? That's what it is. So don't forget that. That's what Peter's saying here in this passage. He's saying, "Listen, I'm asking you to do things that are impossible. You can't live like this in your own strength, but I have great news. Our Savior, our Master, our Lord, He lived like this. He's the one who you now are joined to through the cross and resurrection, and He will empower you and you can be holy, not by virtue of your own ability, but by virtue of a mighty Savior, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He has overcome and in Him you can overcome." We can overcome and he gets all the glory and we become more and more, listen, you become more and more mature as a believer, you become more and more holy, and you become, listen very carefully, you become more and more dependent every moment of every day. The more you grow in Christ, the more you know how much you need Christ. Everything is of grace but we are going to pursue holiness. We're not going to let each other get sidetracked by the devil. We're going to help each other fight, but we fight through the cross and the resurrection.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the glory of our Savior. We marvel at the work of Jesus Christ. We see ourselves, we see what miserable people we can be. Apart from You, Lord, there's nothing good in us. And yet You have sovereignly chosen to place Your affection on us. You have chosen to do the impossible, that which was humanly unimaginable, to fully, righteously judge all sin that we've committed to every believer, to righteously mete out full judgment in the person of Christ, the sin-bearer and then to do that which is righteous in Your holy will to treat us as if we had lived His perfect life because in Your economy, in the way that You have balanced the books, that is now true for us in Christ. And You are glorified by having people who live in this world, who have been changed positionally forever to be Your children, now have to learn how to become and experience what we are in position. Lord, at times we get angry about that. We wish that we didn't have to fight, but yet Lord, we just want to acknowledge right now, Your ways are right and true and best and glorious. Your ways are better than our ways. So the fact that we have to fight means we have to cling to our Savior in a way that we wouldn't if we didn't have to fight. So keep satisfying us with the sufficiency and glory of Jesus. For those that are here that don't know You, may they run to You today, receive justification. For those who know You, Lord, who are battling, who are overwhelmed with sin, even to the point of despair, help them humble themselves to other believers and ask for help but most of all, help them to see and know that they know that they know that if the Son makes you free, you are free indeed and help them begin to walk along the path of freedom. Lord, we thank You that even that's three steps forward, two steps back, two steps forward, one step back, and in all of that, You're glorified. We praise and honor You, Lord, for so great a salvation. Make us walk worthy of that great salvation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*