

Introduction

I'm going to start out this morning with a nonsense poem I learned as a kid.

Ladies and gentlemen, hobos and tramps,
cockeyed mosquitos and bowlegged ants,
I come before you to stand behind you
to tell some things I know nothing about.

The admission is free so pay at the door
Now pull out a chair and sit on the floor.

One bright day in the middle of the night,
two dead soldiers came out to fight.
Back to back they faced each other,
drew out swords and shot each other.

A deaf policeman who heard the noise
Came to stop the two dead boys.

He lived on the corner in the middle of the block
In a two story house on a vacant lot
A man with no legs came walking by
And kicked the lawman in his thigh

He crashed through a wall without making a sound
Into a dry creek bed and suddenly drowned
A long black hearse came to cart him away
But he ran for his life and is still gone today

If you do not believe my story is true,
ask the blind man who saw it too.

Even if it is a bit silly, I don't mind the nonsense because the poem makes an art out of contradiction. Now, our text this morning is so seriously awesome, I may not should have introduced it with a silly nonsense poem. But hopefully I have succeeded in obtaining your attention. The reason I went this route is because Galatians 2:20 contains a number of seeming contradictions. I am crucified ... but I live. I live ... yet not I but Christ. I live in the flesh ... but I live by faith. Paul uses paradox to get attention for a most wonderful expression of the facts of the gospel which he is defending as he rebukes Peter for conduct that was not in step with the truth of the gospel.

[Read text and Pray]

Imagine your excitement if you were to happen upon a cave and as you enter it, you discover a gold mine. You would plausibly be like the man Jesus described in his parable who found a treasure hidden in a field. He covered it up, and in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field. Our text this morning is a gold mine of truth. It has been called a systematic theology in one verse. It is jam packed with the doctrinal substance of the gospel.

Yet this verse is not cold, clinical, and detached like facts in a text book. It reads in a profoundly and unmistakably personal way. The riches of this verse should excite and soothe the heart of every believer in Jesus. There are several seeming contradictions but they are in fact true. The key to understanding them is to understand that everyone who believes in Christ is united with him, is baptized, immersed, into Christ. We share in Christ, who he is and what he has done. The words of this verse actually and literally begin by saying, "with Christ." "With Christ I have been crucified." Every person who believes in Jesus Christ is "with Christ." We are united with him and have a share in him. In Christ we share ourselves with him and he shares himself with us. Everything about us is upside down due to sin, but Christ turns it right-side up. It is turned upright through what Christ shares with us. I want you to see four things Paul testifies that Christ shares with me and you who belong to him, that what is his is also ours.

I. His Crucifixion is Mine.

The way most English translations put Paul's words is this: "I have been crucified with Christ." What Paul is saying here is a further explanation of the statement he made back in verse 19 where he said, "through the law I died to the law." What did he mean by "through the law I died to the law"? Another way of putting it would be that in accordance with the law I died to the law. Now, it is a fact that by nature I am dead in trespasses and sins. The commandment of the law coupled with my sinfulness results in transgression. When comes transgression, then comes death. That's what the Lord told Adam in the Garden: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Paul reflects this same principle in Romans 7. He writes, "I once was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died."

However, the death of which Paul speaks in Galatians 2:19-20 is not my death before God due to sin. Rather, however, it is death to the law. Dying to the law means I enter a state in which the law has no claim or hold over me and I am no longer bound under it. That happens whenever a person dies. We can see how this is true in reference to the laws that govern our nation, state, county, and city. We are bound to obey the laws of the land, and face charges and punishment to the extent that we are convicted of breaking those laws. But if we die, it's over. If I murder someone but in the process am killed, then I cannot be punished for my crime. The law only applies to me in a meaningful way if I am alive. Just this week evidence was uncovered which proved a man murdered two young women in Milwaukee decades ago. But alas, that man is dead. The law has no hold over a dead man. The same is true for everyone else who dies. Once I die physically, I am dead to the law. It no longer applies to me.

Now, how can this be in regard to God's law, especially if I am very much alive in the body? Here is how. I can enter a state where the law no longer applies to me if, one, I satisfy the demands of the law and, two, I die.

First of all, then, I must bear the curse of the law. Deuteronomy 27:26 declares, "Cursed be anyone who does not keep all the things written in the law." The law calls for a curse to be upon the law-breaker. So through the law I must bear the curse and die. This curse is eternal punishment and eternal death. The only way of escaping these consequences is through being justified, or being ruled righteous. If I am considered righteous and dead, then I am free from the law.

The work of fulfilling the requirement of the law for sinners was accomplished by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. At the cross Jesus, though he committed no sin, became cursed. The law says, "a man hanged on a tree is cursed." In Jesus' crucifixion that is exactly what happened. He was hung on a tree and died.

Through Christ's cross, God has done what the law could not do. "By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled" in those who are in Christ (Romans 8:3-4).

Christ's crucifixion permeates Galatians 2:20. The verse begins and ends with Christ's crucifixion. On the front end, the crucifixion is mine through his sharing it with me. On the back end the crucifixion is Christ's work FOR me. But here on the front end, the emphasis is that I share in Christ's law-satisfying crucifixion. "I have been CRUCIFIED WITH Christ." Not merely I have died with Christ, but I have been crucified with Christ. That is, I have borne the curse of breaking the law with Christ because I have hung on the tree with him.

For Paul, likewise for all who believe in Christ to be justified by faith, it is as though we were hanging there with Christ. But our crucifixion "with Christ" is not like the thieves who were hanging on either side of Jesus. They were hanging there in his company beside him. The crucifixion of which Paul speaks is a crucifixion of unity with Christ, sharing in Christ's own crucifixion. Being crucified like Christ or merely in the company of Christ would do no one any good. It is sharing in Christ's crucifixion, hanging there with him and in him, that the benefits of his crucifixion accrue to me.

He died FOR me. He died in my place. His crucifixion is credited to me if my faith is in Christ Jesus. It is no different than if I was the one hanging there except that my hanging there alone would not have been able to purchase my redemption.

I appreciate the way that Phil Johnson puts it. What Paul is describing is "a personal faith that looks back to the historical event of Christ's death and resurrection and rests in the knowledge that my union with Christ makes me the beneficiary of his death in the cross and a participant in that historical event so that I am dead to the law because Christ died in my place."

It is in this way that I have been crucified, ... and yet I live.

Now, here is the kicker: all true believers in Jesus are privileged to reckon this same reality to be true of us. Paul is not a select individual in terms of the benefits of Christ's cross. Those benefits accrue to every single person who calls upon the Lord in faith. If you are not crucified with Christ, you are still under the curse of sin. If you have believed in Christ, then you are in union with him. He gets your sin credited to him. You get his work credited to you. If you are a believer in Christ, then 2,000 years ago you were there on the cross with him, in him! His crucifixion is yours. And that means you have fulfilled the law's demands for your sin. And it means you are no longer under that law! You no longer have to resort to trying really hard to do the impossible—to keep the law. It has already been kept for you.

Now, not only is Christ's crucifixion mine. Paul shows that also ...

II. His Resurrection is Mine.

Paul says it like this: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Christ, who was crucified and died, nevertheless is alive in me! Romans 6:4 provides commentary on this statement. There Paul says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Verse 5 says, "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing."

When Paul says in Galatians 2:20 that it is no longer I who live, the "I" that he is talking about is the "I" that "I" used to be before Christ came. It is the old-self with its domination under the prince of the power of the air. The old self was dead to God. The new self with Christ living within is alive to God. It is newness of life brought by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Paul is still living life here, but he is not the person he used to be. He has been made alive. He has been brought from the dead. He is changed. He no longer lives for Paul. All the things that were gain to him he has counted loss for the sake of Christ. And the change is due to the indwelling Christ. Christ is Lord of Paul's life. Christ is the passion of Paul's heart. Christ is the power to put down the deeds of the flesh. Christ is the essence of living. For Paul to live is Christ. His priorities, pursuits, patterns, and ponderings are all Christ's life lived in and through Paul. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God. And it is a deep and indescribable union. Jesus spoke of it in John 14:20: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

If you are in Christ, he has shared his resurrection life and power with you. He has made you new. He rules in you. He lovingly leads you by His Spirit. You cannot remain the same as you were. Your old self has been crucified with him. Your new self has been raised. Your drive to live to God is alive, and your ability to resist temptation is supplied by the power of Christ in you. Listen, if you were there in him when he was crucified, he is in you today. Believe it and rejoice in it.

So, in Christ his crucifixion is mine and his resurrection is mine. In addition, observe next that ...

III. His Life is Mine.

"The life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." This one verse is loaded with paradox. A paradox is when two seemingly contradictory propositions are actually true. When you juxtapose these propositions side-by-side it draws attention. We hear it in phrases like boneless ribs, self-help group, awfully nice, seriously funny, jumbo shrimp, nothing much, and educational tv (Credit to Phil Johnson). In this text, we have already seen Paul say he has been crucified but he lives and then he said, it is not I who live but Christ. Next, he places in juxtaposition the opposites of flesh and faith. He lives IN the flesh but he does not live BY the flesh. He lives BY faith.

Here is a description of how Paul makes his way forward in life. Having been born again or regenerated, having been raised to life through union with Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection, Christ now lives in Paul. His old self is done away and the new has come. Christ shares life with Paul. So how does Paul pursue holiness? How does he go about living to God on a moment-by-moment basis? What he is talking about here is sanctification. He is talking about living a life unto God as one who has been justified. He is talking about the life he now lives in the flesh. The flesh here is clearly not a reference to his old self or his sin nature. It is a reference to being still in the body, still in flesh, as in "the word became flesh." All of us who are currently alive are living in the flesh. Until we die we are in the body. Paul exhibits this line of thinking in 2 Corinthians 10:3 when we states that "though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh." Similarly, here Paul is saying that though he lives in the flesh he is not living according to the flesh.

There are three items of importance here. First, not living by the flesh but by faith means I am not depending on rules and regulations. That is a fleshly endeavor with its confidence in what I can do independent of what Christ can do in me. This was the mistake of the false teachers who had come in to Galatia. they said, "Now that you are believing in Christ, you must adopt and live by the Jewish law." "No," Paul is saying, "that is NOT how you grow in the Lord. That is fleshly; that is dependent upon your own effort; and it results in no gospel at all." Paul opened this letter saying that Jesus gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present age. Part of the present evil age is its

insistence on personal performance and law-keeping. That is evil. So not living BY the flesh means not living for the sake of keeping certain rules and regulations.

A second item of importance is this. Not living by the flesh but by faith means I am not depending on my own ability or my own strength. I am living by faith not flesh, by trust in the power of Christ not by confidence in my own strength. I am trusting in the strength of Christ Jesus by the Spirit. I am not convinced that I can do it. But I am convinced that HE CAN. Jesus depicted this principle by the image of a vine and its branches. John 15 is where we find this vivid illustration of living by faith. Jesus is the vine. His disciples are the branches. And Jesus exhorts us, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me ... apart from me you can do nothing." Apart from union and communion with Christ, we cannot bear the fruit of godliness. Faith in the Son of God is obeying Christ with the trust and conviction that Christ will supply what I need to do exactly what he requires.

A third important matter is that living by faith does not mean being passive. In other words, I don't live by faith in Christ by inactivity or waiting for a detectable power to take me over by which I become an observer to what is being done through me. Paul doesn't live by the flesh but he does carry on the activity of living. We do not live by the law, but Christ has given us commands. He has said, he who keeps my commands is he who loves me. We cannot ignore indicators that we are to exert ourselves in the pursuit of godliness. There is this emphasis both in the divine supply of strength and the exertion of ourselves in faith. Hear what Peter says. The is 2 Peter 1. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature ... For this reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge" and so on. So you see, Peter declares that God has provided everything we need for life and godliness, including promises. It is by them that we become like Jesus. And for this very reason we are to make every effort. This is living by faith in Christ, believing his promises and trusting in his power at work in us.

I want to show you one more verse. Colossians 1:29 expresses the intermingling of faith and effort. Speaking of his goal to present everyone mature in Christ, Paul writes, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

So, in sum, living by faith in the Son of God is not living according to the law but it is actively living with great effort out of the power of Christ in me. In Christ he shares with me his life and his strength for living for him.

This is how Christ's disciples pursue holiness. This is how we please God. This is how we grow into Christ's likeness. This is how we deal with temptation. By faith we look to Christ, we lean on Christ, we rely on Christ. Our sufficiency comes from Christ. Out of that sufficiency we obey him.

Finally, I want you to see that not only does Christ provide his people a share in his crucifixion and resurrection and life, he also shares with us a personal love. I want you to see that in Christ ...

IV. His Love is Mine.

Paul says "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." And then he went and put on display that this is how he loved his friends. Paul can live by faith in the Son of God because no one has ever or could ever love like him. The law does not love. The law is not personal. The law is ruthless and unbending. One transgression of the law brings eternal

penalty. But the love of Jesus is incomparable. He is worthy to be loved and his love shows he is worthy to be trusted.

Everyone wants to be loved. It is a fundamental human desire. It is a deep desire. It is almost an unsatisfiable desire. We ache for the lack of it. Sometimes when we are loved we are not satisfied. But there is no love like the love of Christ Jesus. It is a selfless love. His is a self-sacrificing love. He loved and gave himself for his friends. He suffered what they justly deserved. The spotless lamb took their SINS upon himself. It was not just the moment of the cross either. His love involved being born and living on the earth when heaven is his home. And once he was crucified, his love is the guarantee that he will come back to get us and bring us home. Christ's love is eternal and it meets us at our deepest point of not just desire but need. And therefore, it is incredible. This is the love he shares with his disciples.

But even more than that it is a love that is personal and specific. I want you to look back through this verse and see how focused Paul is upon himself. It is really unusual for Paul. He is captivated with himself here. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in he flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Count the times Paul refers to himself. I, I, me, I, I me, me. Seven references to himself in one verse. But why? Paul is not the star of the verse is he? No! The law is the enemy and Christ is his hero. Why so much emphasis on I and me? Because it is personal. Christ shares with his people as a group for sure, but it is also one-to-one.

Galatians 2:20 was one of the first verses I memorized. I distinctly remember meditating on it as I was walking across the campus one day. I was saying, "I have been crucified with Christ ..." with all these I's and me's, and it dawned on me that this verse wasn't just about Paul. It is about every single believer in Christ, and it is also about ME!! I, Ross Layne, am crucified with Christ. It is no longer the old Ross who lives but Christ lives in the new me. And the life that I, Ross Layne, live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved ME and gave himself for ME!

Conclusion

It is true for you too if you are united by faith to Jesus Christ. The death, resurrection, life, and love of Jesus Christ are personal to you. And that's a compelling reason to flee from the law. Stop trying to keep rules. Live in the freedom provided by one who loved you and delivered himself up for you on a cross. To him be the glory!

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

May the LORD fill you today with the hope and promise of all he has done for you in Jesus Christ. May he do great things through the power of Christ in you, the hope of glory! Amen.