

**Introduction:** As we return this Fall to a study of Paul's letters in our Bible notes, the crucial doctrine is Union with Christ in His death and resurrection. For the believer, death to sin, death to our former way of life, and death to worldly associations and priorities are necessity of Christian experience. In short, Christ did not just die *for us*, He died *with us* on the Cross - wearing our humanity so that we could experience new resurrection life with Him as our living Head and well-spring of our *new* spiritual life. May God give us grace not to be offended at this union with Christ in His death, for it is at the heart of our understanding of the sacraments and at the heart of what it means to live for Christ.

**Mon/Tues: Read Acts 16:11-25 and Philippians 1:15-21**

**Bond of Suffering**

As we review in our minds Paul's ministry in Philippi, that Roman colony where He suffered flogging and imprisonment – and yet also witnessed the birth of the first church in Europe (in modern day Macedonia), we see how Paul's suffering for the sake of the Gospel was front and center in His evangelism.

It is no accident that Paul shared the experience of persecution with His risen Savior in this Roman colony. Having cast out a demon from a young girl's life, the owners of this enslaved girl who made hitherto made her masters money through fortune telling (Acts 16:19) dragged Paul before the city's authorities where he was severely beaten and thrown in jail – in this way seeking to silence his testimony to Jesus in Acts 16.

But Christ was with Paul and his co-laborer Silas as they sang hymns in their chains, drawing in the whole prison population to listen with wonder to their praise of the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:25).

The rest of the chapter, including Paul and Silas' miraculous release, is even more amazing. But it is Paul's joy in His afflictions and persecution that is evidence that, for him, "to live was Christ" (Philippians 1:21). There was this bond in his sufferings that He shared with Christ, a fellowship with the Ascended Lord Jesus. Just as Christ had an intimate connection *to those whom the Apostle persecuted* (see Acts 9:5 when Saul had formerly hurt and jailed Christians as persecutor of Christ's church) so now Paul's beatings in Philippi gave the Apostle a joy that he could not contain – because he was joined now to the same Lord Jesus Christ in union with Him in His death and finding new spiritual life and purpose for living *even in his own sufferings at the hands of the world*.

**Meditate and Pray:** The amazing joy and vitality of Christian living which comes from being joined to Christ in His sufferings and death, using hymn # 708:

1 O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee;  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
that in thine ocean depths its flow  
may richer, fuller be.

2 O Light that follow'st all my way,  
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;  
my heart restores its borrowed ray,  
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day  
may brighter, fairer be.

3 O Joy that seekest me through pain  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
and feel the promise is not vain  
that morn shall tearless be.

4 O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
and from the ground there blossoms red  
life that shall endless be.

**Wednesday: Read John 6:56-66****No New Life except by Dying**

This awesome doctrine of union with Christ in His death also explains the distaste which so many nominal followers of Christ show to the calling to be Christ's disciples in John 6. When Christ explicitly tells them that they will have to participate by faith in His body and blood if they are to "abide" in union with Him (John 6:56) He is simply stating the doctrine of death to self and living a new life by faith in Christ's death in a different way. The result in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59) is the same as it is today when superficial people who profess to follow Christ discover the cost of what following Jesus means: they were offended (John 6:61) and ceased to follow Christ (John 6:66).

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask the Lord to help you not to be offended at the cost of being known as a living, fruitful and joyful follower of Jesus. Use hymn # 707 as your prayer:

1 Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
all to leave, and follow thee;  
destitute, despised, forsaken,  
thou from hence my all shalt be.  
Perish ev'ry fond ambition,  
all I've sought or hoped or known;  
yet how rich is my condition,  
God and heav'n are still my own.

2 Let the world despise and leave me,  
they have left my Savior too;  
human hearts and looks deceive me;  
thou art not, like man, untrue;  
and, while thou shalt smile upon me,  
God of wisdom, love, and might,  
foes may hate and friends may shun me;  
show thy face, and all is bright.

3 Man may trouble and distress me,  
'twill but drive me to thy breast;  
life with trials hard may press me,  
heav'n will bring me sweeter rest.  
O 'tis not in grief to harm me  
while thy love is left to me;  
O 'twere not in joy to charm me,  
were that joy unmixed with thee.

4 Take, my soul, thy full salvation,  
rise o'er sin and fear and care;  
joy to find in ev'ry station  
something still to do or bear;  
think what Spirit dwells within thee,  
what a Father's smile is thine,  
what a Savior died to win thee:  
child of heav'n, shouldst thou repine?

**Thursday: Read Galatians 2:17-21****The Complete Work of Christ**

For the rest of this week, we will hone in on Galatians 2:20, a stand-alone verse and celebrate Christ's self-giving love in our place. Because Christ gave Himself on the Cross for us, we by faith can now live so fully for Christ that it is actually not we who live, but Christ who lives for us! We have been crucified with Christ – not as a sort of spiritual suicide, but so that the old sinful nature would not rule us as we now live in Christ a life free from the dominion of sin. Now we have a new Lord and Savior and can live a new, fruitful, joyful life, in and through His resurrected life at work in us by His Spirit. All this is contained in Galatians 2:20.

To understand the full meaning of Galatians 2:20 we need to see the broader concern in this part of Galatians 2. Paul has a two-fold concern here. First, he emphasizes our new bond with Christ and the new life of discipleship that flows from it to guard against the wrong teaching that because of Christ's saving work we are free to live in sin without consequence. "Let us sin it up! Jesus will forgive us no matter what! The more sin, the more grace! (Compare to Romans 6) No, Paul says, Christ is not a "servant of sin" (Galatians 2:17).

On the other extreme, because Christ paid the price fully for our sin and because His good works (not ours) earned our salvation, the Christian cannot pursue righteousness through the law either. (Galatians 2:21)

Not even our death to self and our living to Christ, as essential as that is for Christian discipleship, can contribute one iota to our righteousness purchased by Christ alone. We are justified through Christ's work alone: Actively, he kept the Law for us fully, and Passively, he suffered our penalty for disobedience. The gift is complete.

**Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Galatians 2:20****By Christ's Faith Alone**

Our death to sin and living for Christ boil down to a simple reliance on Christ alone in all that *He did to be our Savior, and all that He does to be our Sanctifier*. Let us rejoice that we can live by faith with a hearty and unreserved trust in Christ alone and His saving work. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson can help us do this. The following quotes are extended excerpts from his sermon preached on Galatians 2:20 at Gilcomston South Church of Scotland on this subject of union with Christ.

(Galatians 2:20 means that) ... Christ took this human flesh of ours and all its frailty, He took it through His teenage years, He took it through His youth, He took it through His early manhood into His mature life. He hid His glory within our human nature as though for all the world He were a sinner Himself, because for our sakes He was utterly determined that this human nature that He took in the womb of the Virgin Mary should be sanctified and made new. He wore that human nature on the Cross when He died. He took that human nature and flesh down into the tomb and it lay there for three days and three nights. He took that human nature out of the tomb new and risen, and showed it to His disciples, and allowed them to touch it and handle it and put their fingers and hands into the places where the nails had been, and then showed them that nature for forty days and insisted that they gather round Him as He went up to the mountain and took that nature and flesh back into the presence of God for us. And He wears that nature now, your human nature and my human nature, in the presence of His Father.

Now, let me say just what this implies for our Christian lives. It implies first of all that if Christ has stood in our place, and if for our sakes He has really displaced us in His life and death and resurrection and ascension, then Paul goes on to say—if this is true then the Son of God has not only died for us but He has had faith for us—he goes on to say: "The son of God loved me and gave Himself for me (and the consequence of this is) that the life I now live in the flesh I live (not by faith in the Son of God, not by my faith trusting in Christ) but by the faith of the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Now, you see, this means that in whatever circumstances we find our own faith assailed, if by Satan or if by the temptations of our own flesh, then our answer is not to look into our own faith, our answer is not to summon up the energies of our own faith, our answer in a sense is not even to say, our faith is in the death of Christ; our answer is to say, "The life that I live I live by the faith of the son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me. I don't trust in my own faith. I trust in Christ's faith." And we are able with all confidence to turn round to Satan and say to him, "You may assail my faith as much as you like, you may tear it to shreds, you may break it, you may bring upon it a pall of darkness, and doubt and fear, you may also ruin my faith, but you won't succeed with the Son of God in my human nature... And the life that I now live I live not by my own faith but by His faith."