

Embracing Your New Identity

Galatians 2:20

2/15/15

When a person is brought into the military, an extensive process begins to change his (or her) way of thinking about himself. He is stripped of his old civilian clothes and dressed in a uniform consistent with his new identity. That uniform is a constant reminder that he is now a soldier. He learns to view his relationships from the perspective of who he is now. He salutes officers and operates according to military protocol. His boot camp experience is designed to transform his mind so that he lives, eats, and breathes military. Let me read you a quote from the U.S. Army Basic Training website. “Basic Combat Training (BCT) is a training course that transforms civilians into Soldiers. Over the course of ten weeks these recruits learn about the Seven Core Army Values, how to work together as a team and what it takes to succeed as a Soldier in the U.S. Army.”¹ The first thing they learn is the Seven Core Army Values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. So, on the battlefield, these values, your identity as a soldier, knowing who you are and why you’re there will drive the specific decisions that you make. The way we view ourselves is a powerful factor in the way we behave. The Army is smart enough to know that embracing the new identity as soldiers is absolutely essential for their success.

Absolutely essential to your success as a Christian, is the biblical revelation of who you are in Christ. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17 KJV). The moment you were born again you received a new identity. You became a part of the new creation in Christ. That is a reality based on what happened at the cross. We talked a lot about that last week.² But the challenge we face is to see ourselves in that light. I said earlier, the way you view yourself powerfully affects the way you behave. A soldier on the battlefield sees himself as a soldier and therefore he stands and fights—because that is what soldiers do. If that same person is in the same situation, but in his mind he is simply a tourist taking in the sights, when the first bullet buzzes by his head, he is out of there.

When a Christian tries to become something in God by good behavior, he is working backwards. God makes us something in Christ, He reveals to us by His word what our new identity is; and then He says, act accordingly. The book of Ephesians is six chapters long. The first three chapters are dedicated to telling you who you are in Christ. The last three chapters tell you how to live according to who you already are. That’s the way God approaches this. He brings you into His family,³ He makes you a child of God, He make you a new creature in Christ—all of that simply because He wants to and because He has loved you with an everlasting love, a love that reaches way back before you were ever born and before you ever did one good thing.⁴

¹ “Basic Combat Training: the Ten Week Journey from Civilian to Soldier. Accessed 2/14/15 at <http://www.goarmy.com/soldier-life/becoming-a-soldier/basic-combat-training.html>.

² See my messages entitled “The Cross: Absolutely Essential” preached 2/2/15 and 2/8/15.

³ Eph. 1:5; 2:8-10; 5:8; Rom. 8:15-16.

⁴ See my message entitled “Love Affirmed” preached 1/25/15.

I have given you a handout entitled “Biblical Affirmation: Who I Am In Christ.”⁵ It will strengthen your faith to write out those verses and meditate upon them. Let it soak into your brain and into your heart what God has already done for you and how He views you as His child.

In Gal. 2:20 Paul writes, “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me: and 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*” (KJV). Upon a first reading, that almost sounds like double talk. You have to think about it quite a bit before it makes much sense. Here is a contrast: I am crucified (I am dead), yet I am alive. Which is it? Are you dead or are you alive? The old Paul is dead. He died on the cross with Jesus 2000 years ago (Rom. 6:6). That is when God’s judgment was administered to the old creature.⁶ God’s way of dealing with the old, rebellious, unregenerated Richard was to crucify him. The old Richard was bound and determined to have his own way, he was prideful, rebellious, unbelieving, unyielding to God; that creature operated out of a nature he inherited from Adam.⁷ The way God dealt with him was to simply crucify him with Christ. But there is a new Richard who lives, a new Richard who is born of the incorruptible seed of God, a new Richard who is righteous in the sight of God because he is in Christ, the resurrected Son of God.⁸

So now, Paul says, the life I live I live out of a whole new relationship. Christ is now in me through the indwelling Holy Spirit. His incorruptible life works in me by the power of God. Now it is God (Phil. 2:13) who works in me *both to will and do His good pleasure*. It is God’s life in me that motives and activates my behavior. I am no longer the old Richard. He is dead. The new Richard is a new creation of God; he is joined to Christ;⁹ and now enjoys the Christ’s favor with God. “...*the life that I now live in the flesh (in this physical body) I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*”

So if you have been born again, that is your status, your standing before God. But here is the problem we all have with that. How do we bring that reality into our daily lives in a practical way? God has not just saved us in the abstract, but His salvation is a reality for our present living. “*Therefore, (John 8:36) if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*” So how does this reality become manifest in our daily lives? By faith! “*This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith*” (1 John 5:4). “*Without faith, it is impossible to please God....*” (Heb. 11:6). By believing what God has done (has told us He did at the cross in our behalf), and by relying upon what He has done.

I have been crucified with Christ. There is something in me that doesn’t seem to know that! The old Richard keeps trying to assert himself in my thinking and in my actions. That’s why I must affirm his death on the cross and deny his assertions. I am no longer obligated to act upon his impulses because I am dead to all that. I am alive unto God. So I act upon the impulses of Christ in me. Rom 6:11 “*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” The NIV says “*count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God...*” RSV says, “*consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God....*” What are we being

⁵ “Biblical Affirmations: Who I am in Christ” accessed 2/14/15 at <http://www.gracewired.net/documents/affirmations.pdf>.

⁶ Rom. 6:23; 1 Peter 2:25; Gal. 3:13.

⁷ Rom. 1:18-2:2. Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:25.

⁸ 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Rom. 5:18-19; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10.

⁹ 1 Cor. 6:17

told to do when the Bible says “*reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin*”? We are to think about the results of the cross; we are to consider that; we are to count on it and rely on it. And then act upon the fact as declared by God. That is not something easy to grasp; but the next two verses help understand what Paul is saying. We will read Rom. 6:11 again and then verses 12-13 as a further explanation of the practical action we take in reckoning ourselves dead to sin. “*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*”

In a secular court, if a judge makes a ruling, then we reckon it to be true; we count on it; we rely upon that ruling and act accordingly. If a judge issues a divorce decree and in that decree says the husband receives 100% of the printing business; and the wife receives 100% of the house; and the children will reside in the mother’s home. Then everyone is expected to “reckon” it to be so. If the father has been living in the home, he moves out. If the wife has been telling employees what to do at the printing business she stops giving orders and the employees stop obeying her orders. The judge’s decree is final and everyone is to act accordingly. The judge’s decree establishes a new reality for those people to live in. The decree specifies that reality. It began in the abstract, in the judge’s mind; then it was written and revealed through that written word; and as people obey the decree it becomes a physical reality in their lives.

At the cross, the Judge of All the Earth issued a decree. There God declared you crucified with Christ and alive unto God. Romans 6 is telling us to rely upon the Judge’s decree and act upon the facts of that decree. There is a big difference between taking over a property that the judge has decreed belongs to you versus trying to do that without the decree. We need to know what God decreed concerning the cross. We need to rely upon that decree and act accordingly. Follow with me now as we read Romans 6:1-14 (READ).

Notice the two sides of the transaction: crucified with Christ and alive unto God. “*For I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; And the life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” Paul is describing here a way of thinking that he wants us to embrace. It is a way of viewing ourselves. It is a way of relating to the world around us. It is a way of living life.

Let me give you three benefits of embracing this identity in Christ; three benefits of thinking this way.

1. It fortifies us against temptation. When I am tempted to behave according to my old nature, I rely upon the fact that “*I am crucified with Christ.*” I say to my old man, “No, I am dead to that. I no longer live in that.” I have personally found it helpful to actually say that out loud (if I am in a setting where I can do that without people thinking I’m crazy). The thought of temptation arises and I quote the first phrase of Gal. 2:20 “*I am crucified with Christ.*” I don’t have to live according to the dictates of my old nature.

Crucified: what is death? Death is not annihilation; death is separation. When I physically die, nothing is annihilated. My spirit is separated from my body. Since it is through my body that my spirit relates to this material world—that separation means I no longer operate in the realm of this physical world. Crucified with Christ means my realm of activity is no longer in the arena of sin. I am dead to that. In a sense, I am dead to Beijing, China. Yes, Beijing exists. But I

do not operate in that place.¹⁰ It is nothing to me. I am alive to Springfield, Missouri where I dwell. Col 1:13 says God has “... *delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*” (KJV). You and I now live in the kingdom of His dear Son. We are no longer of this world. We no longer love the things of this world.¹¹ Gal 6:14 “*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*” All the glitter, the pride of life, the vain ambitions of the world, the things of the world-- lose their appeal as we walk out our journey with Christ. We now live for eternal purposes. We now live in relationship with God. We deal with temptation on those terms. The Judge’s decree at the cross becomes a legal foundation that fortifies us against temptation. That is one benefit of embracing our identity in Christ.

“For I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; And the life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

2. A second benefit of seeing ourselves in that way is that it opens us to the flow of God’s grace in our lives.

Understand that grace is not just unmerited favor. It is that; but it is also divine enablement: the operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives that empowers us to live for God and do effective ministry.¹² Grace is ours because of the cross. Grace is not just for being born into the kingdom; grace is for living in the kingdom. Grace is not just for our justification; grace is for our ongoing sanctification. Paul asked the Galatians (3:3) “*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” His whole argument is this: It was by grace you came into the kingdom; but grace doesn’t end there. You are to grow in grace. You are to live in reliance upon God’s enablement by His Spirit. Immediately after his declaration in our text, Paul said in Gal. 2:21, “*I do not set aside (RSV nullify; KJV frustrate) the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*” If you could do it by your own resolve; if you could do it by sheer willpower, then Christ would not have had to die. The truth is we can no more get up today and live for God by our own strength than we could be born again by our own volition. It is by His grace from beginning to end.

When we think the way Paul is thinking, our thoughts focus on the Lord instead of our failures. Instead of looking at our problem and trying harder to fix it, our faith looks to Jesus and He fixes it by expressing His life in us. We live “*Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith*” (Heb. 12:2). He is our source from beginning to end. With our eyes fixed on Him we not only begin this race but we can finish well—because He who has begun a good work in you will complete it. You’re the clay; He’s the Potter.¹³ “...*the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God*” The invitation of Heb. 4:16 is, “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of*

¹⁰ This is an imperfect illustration because activity in Beijing does have an indirect impact upon me through world trade, international politics, etc.

¹¹ John 17:14-16; 18:36; Rom. 12:2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16.

¹² Charis: Strong’s #5485 “...the divine influence upon the heart...” Of course, the context in which the word is used is an important factor in determining the connotation the author intends to convey. I fully embrace grace as divine favor, but many have mistaken God’s grace as a reason for passivity. The influence of the Holy Spirit actually motivates us to labor (1 Cor. 15:10), live holy (Titus 2:11-12) and grow (1 Pet. 3:18).

¹³ Jeremiah 18:4-6.

need.” We can come confidently and boldly to God because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We can find grace (the favor and power we need) to help in time of need.

“...nevertheless, I live, *yet not I, Christ lives in me.*” The problem most of us have is that in reality there is still a lot of well-intentioned “I” in our lives. The “I” is trying (trying very hard) to live for God; but we are still discovering how to live the “*yet not I*” way of living. “*I live by the faith of the Son of God.*”¹⁴ When my faith is resting upon Him, then His life is expressed through me. Romans 6, 7 & 8 tell us what this life of faith and victory is all about. Romans 6 begins by telling us what is ours in Christ. We receive that with joy and decide to live in it. “*Sin shall not have dominion over me*” (verse 14). I will live a life that honors the Lord. I will live above the power of sin. I will walk in newness of life. But then Rms. 7 describes the next experience that most of us have. “*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do*” (Rom 7:15). This is crazy. I set out to do good based on who I am in Christ (according to Rom. 6). But when I try to do that I fail, and I fail, and I fail. I don’t want to do wrong; but I do. “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*”

So what is the problem in Rms. 7? I am trying to do the right thing; but I’m going at it all wrong. Instead of relying on the life of Christ in me, I am in reality relying upon my firm resolve. And my own resolve, though well-intentioned, is not sufficient to bring victory. Some people think Rms. 7 is the experience of an unsaved person. No, Rom. 7 is the experience of anyone trying to live right but operating under the principle of self-effort.¹⁵ Rom. 7 is about sincere Christians who have not yet discovered how to live as a branch drawing off the life of the vine (John 15). Most of us don’t get to the victory described in Romans 8 without going through some Rom. 7 experiences. Why? Because learning to rely upon the life of Christ in us instead of relying upon our own resolve is not an easy lesson at all.

What is the answer to the desperate cry in Roms 7:24 “*Who will deliver me....?*” Who will get me out of this cycle of failure? The answer is given in the next verse: Rom. 7:25 “*I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” It’s His life flowing through me that is the answer.

Rom. 8:2 “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*” The law or principle of His life being expressed in and through me frees me from the cycle of sin and defeat. So we learn to abide in the Vine. We learn to build up our most holy faith praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). We learn to trust and obey the gentle promptings of His Spirit (Rom. 8:14). We learn to go to Him in prayer to receive the grace and help we need (Heb. 4:16). We learn a life of dependence upon the flow of His divine influence in our hearts (Col. 1:10-11). When God sheds His love abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), a whole lot of problems get solved.

A couple of weeks ago, our Monday night Overcomers Outreach recovery group talked about steps 1 & 2. Let me read those and briefly relate them to what we’re saying this morning.

¹⁴ In Gal. 2:20, the NIV and others translate *pistis Cristou* as an objective genitive (faith in Christ). However, Daniel Wallace (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, Zondervan, 1996, p. 115-116) gives a rather compelling argument for it being a subjective genitive which would be translated the faith or faithfulness of Christ. It does not negate the Pauline doctrine of faith *in* Christ which is clearly taught in other passages. “...Christ lives in me...” and expresses His faith in my life.

¹⁵ Some interpret Romans 7 as the experience of an unbeliever. However, the statement (“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man...”) in verse 22 seems to contradict that interpretation. Romans 7 is a person trying to live according to God’s moral law in his own strength.

Step 1 “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.” Step 2 “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” So the Rom. 7 cycle of defeat is designed to bring us to an end of ourselves (even our seemingly good selves) so that we really and deeply understand our own powerlessness (step 1) so that we will really and truly look to the power of the Holy Spirit to bring us into victory. Rom. 7 is an experience that should lead us to utter daily dependence upon the life of Christ in us for victory. I have not fully come to that place. But I am learning to turn my problems over to God in prayer. I am learning to lean on Him rather than my own understanding.¹⁶ And I am experiencing some victories as a result. It is never God’s plan to leave us in Rom. 7. That is usually a necessary part of the journey. But God’s intention is to bring us into Rom. 8 where *“the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God....”* In Rom. 8 I have moved from trying to trusting. Christ is made unto me (by virtue of His life being expressed in and through me) *“wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Cor 1:30). *“For (Rom 8:2) the law (principle) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law (principle) of sin and death.”* When I am thinking right, when my faith is firmly planted upon Christ, then grace (divine enablement) operates in me and I experience victory.

So here are two benefits in embracing our identity in Christ and thinking the way Paul is thinking in Gal. 2:20. (1) I am fortified against temptation (2) this opens me to the flow of God’s grace or divine enablement; and embracing my new identity in Christ,

(3) Stabilizes my soul and stabilizes my walk with God. When I know who I am in Christ, I am not tossed to and fro by my emotions. I know that I am anchored in Jesus and that my relationship with God does not change based on the way I feel. I know that my relationship with God does not change based on the day’s performance. I know that nothing is changed by the way others think of me or say about me. I am a child of God. I am justified before God because of what Jesus did for me on the cross. I may have a bad day; I may have to ask forgiveness for some dumb things I did that day. But the Father who loves me with an everlasting love still accepts me in the Beloved. He still owns me as His own. He still knows the end from the beginning. And He is still leading me in the way everlasting. He may correct me (Heb. 12). He may teach me. He may do some work in me. But I am a new creature in Christ. *“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live; yet not I, Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me.”*

Pray

¹⁶ Proverbs 3:5-6. The words to the Hymn: “Learning to Lean” by John Stallings can be accessed at <http://christiansongoftheday.blogspot.com/2009/03/learning-to-lean.html> for further meditation on this thought.