

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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I Myself: The I's of Galatians 2:19-21

Introduction

In the Bible, it is significant that many, if not most, profound truths are conveyed by the most simple of words. I am assured that this is by design, so that we see that it is not necessary for words or phrases to be complicated before we can understand the deep, profound message that God has for us.

This is certainly true of the message that we have in today's portion. As to the words used, they are clear and simple indeed. They give us the Apostle Paul's own, personal statement of his assessment of his present position and lifestyle. He speaks for himself and for himself alone. He makes a personal assessment of his own individual position before God, and the practical implications of this for him. And we need to do exactly the same for each of ourselves.

First of all, let us concentrate our minds by reading Galatians 2:19-21: *"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

Our subject today readily lends itself to division into three elements:

1. Analysis of the main theme coming to light;
2. The help given to the understanding of it by other relevant texts; and
3. The application and challenge to our lives as Christians as a result of our study.

There are three identities involved. In all passages considered, we shall be looking for:

1. The Person: Paul sets himself forward as an example of that person;
2. The Old Man: The old nature that Paul, and we, each inherited from fallen, sinful Adam; and
3. The New Man: The new nature implanted in all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ by and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at the teaching of each verse, in turn.

Galatians 2:19 reads: *"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."*

Colossians 3:9 tells us, *"ye have put off the old man with his deeds"*. Again, Romans 10:4 reads, *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."* Applying the truth to himself, the Apostle gives a beautiful summing up of the Christian position. The gospel proclaims the righteousness of God to man. The law demands righteousness from man and pronounces death upon the man who does not keep it. *"The soul that sinneth it shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:20). No-one other than the Lord Jesus personally, in His life upon earth, has ever fully kept the law. *"All we like sheep have gone astray"* (Isaiah 53:6). We have all sinned (see Romans 3:23). The penalty for breaking the law of God is death (see Romans 6:23). As a sinner, I had broken the law. Therefore, it has condemned me to die. But Christ paid the penalty of the broken law for me by dying in my place. Thus, when Christ died, in God's eyes I died. He died to the law in the sense that He met all its righteous demands upon me. Therefore, in Christ, I too died to the law.

The Christian is thus now dead to the law. He has nothing more to do with it. Does this mean that the Christian is free (at liberty) to break the law of God in all he wants? No! No! He lives a holy life, not through fear of the law, but out of love for Christ, the One who died for him. Christians who desire and choose to be under the law as a pattern of behaviour do not realise that this places them under its curse. Moreover, they cannot accept the law on one point without being responsible to keep the whole of the law in every detail. The only way we can live unto God is by first being dead to the law. The law could never produce a holy life. God never intended that it should. His way of holiness is described in Galatians 2:20, as we shall see. Before that, let us enjoy the well known words of the poet Philip Bliss (1838-1876):

*Free from the law, oh happy condition;
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission.
Cursed by the law and bruised by the Fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.*

What had set Paul free from the law? Death! He had died to the law, and that by its own act in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, here Paul was very much alive in making this profound assessment. How then had he died to the law? In what sense was it true that he had died to the law through the law?

Galatians 2:20 says: *"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."*

In the days of the Roman Empire, in New Testament times, crucifixion was the most painful, and most degrading, capital punishment, reserved for the worst crimes and the lowest social order of people. One thing for sure, for anyone cruelly executed by crucifixion, the life he had previously lived had been brought to a sudden and painful end! This is the line that Paul here picks up and develops.

Jesus was certainly crucified to death. All four Gospels, and most of the other New Testament books, testify to this. There was no doubt that the personal history of the Lord Jesus as a man on earth was terminated at the cross. Likewise, for the believer, his sinful history is finished before God because of the cross.

In graphic terms, Paul could say of himself that he was crucified with Christ. That is, he accepted that, because Christ had been crucified, he, Paul, was absolutely finished with the world which had crucified His Saviour. The world was just as definitely finished with him. He accepted this judgment of himself in the cross, and that he was just as surely cut off from the world.

Taking this further, Paul puts the same assessment to the credit of all Christians. It is said of Christians in Romans 6:4 that their 'old man', that is, their old life before conversion, controlled by the old sinful nature they had inherited from fallen Adam, is crucified with Christ, absolutely finished.

For any person who believes in Jesus as their Saviour, in the sight of God the sentence of death they deserve as sinners has been carried out on their behalf in the death of Christ our Substitute. His death upon the cross was the death deserved by our 'old man'. So the believer can say, *"I am crucified with Christ"* (Galatians 2:20). It means the end of the old 'me' as a person seeking to merit, earn or deserve salvation by my own efforts. The old sinful 'I' has been crucified. This is true as to my standing before God. It should also lead to my being true to God in my behaviour here upon earth.

Paul takes the teaching a little further. It meant the end of him as a child of fallen sinful Adam, as a man under the condemnation of the law. In Paul's case, of course, as a Jew, that was The Law of Moses, which most people would identify as being summed up in The Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-27, Deuteronomy 5:1-21 and Luke 10:25-28). His old, unregenerate self had passed through death in the death of his Substitute, so he was now free from the law. The law can condemn a living man to death because of the life that he has led, but directly the man is dead he no longer lives in the life to which the law applied. The law has no jurisdiction at all over a dead man.

For Paul, and for any Christian, as believers, we have died to the old life to which law applied. We are no longer subject to sets of rules and regulations as a means of getting right with God. Instead Paul was, and we are, given new life in Christ. So Paul could now 'live to God'. Paul would now have God before him as the reason, the object, the sole purpose for living. He, as a Jew, had been under The Law of Moses, but then God had given him life, divine eternal life, and light, divine light, and he realised his utter powerlessness to keep the law. The law only brought death, not life, but in his new state he is dead to the law, but alive unto God. And God is much greater than the law He gave.

The crucifixion of Christ was not merely an act of evil men. Viewed from God's side, the very essence of it is seen to be that act of God whereby Christ was made sin for us, and wherein was borne for us the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). As dying under the curse of the law, Christ died to fulfil the law, and as crucified with Christ Paul was able to say that he had died to the law, through the law, in order that he might live to God. From the moment we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, in God's sight we are spiritually dead to the law but alive unto God.

For any person who believes in Jesus, this sentence of death has been carried out on their behalf in the death of Christ our Substitute. So the believer can say, *"I am crucified with Christ"* (Galatians 2:20). Then, having passed through death in the death of our Substitute, we are free from the law. The law can condemn a living man to death because of the life that he has led, but directly the man is dead he no longer lives in the life to which the law applied. The law has no jurisdiction at all over a dead man. As believers, we have died to the old life to which the law applied.

Happily, we Christians have a new life in Christ. The Apostle can say, *"Nevertheless, I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"* (Galatians 2:20). The life Christians now live, by faith in Christ, is according to the new nature he now has as planted within him and controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit. If I would see this new life in all its perfection, I must look at Christ personally. Truly, in me it might well be at least partially obscured, or even a mere shadow, but it is nonetheless true. That is my life. It is indeed our privilege to hold ourselves as being dead to the law so that we may live this new life to God, in the new nature implanted within us by and in the power of The Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus, in His death, was the believer's Substitute, bearing his sins. But He also thoroughly identified Himself with us in our sinful state, being made sin for us, though knowing no sin Himself (see 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:2 and 1 John 3:5). So that one of the things we are to know as a matter of Christian doctrine, is that *"our old man is crucified with Him"* (Romans 6:6).

The believer does not cease to live as a distinct personality or as an individual. But it is now not I as such who lives but Christ who lives in me. The Saviour did not die for me in order that I might go on living my own life as I choose. He died for me so that henceforth He might be able to live His life in me. *"The life which I now live in this [human body], I live by faith in the Son of God"* (Galatians 2:20). The Christian lives by continual dependence on Christ, by yielding to Him, by allowing Christ to live His life in him. *"The faith of the Son of God"* (Galatians 2:20) does not here mean the faith which the Lord Jesus possesses personally, but rather the faith which believers have in Him.

This new life, like all life in a creature, has, and must have, an object to sustain the life within it. The Lord Jesus is that life. He is also personally the Object of that life. So the Apostle adds, *"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). Faith sees Christ, looks to Him, confides in Him, feeds upon Him, abides in His love, in the blessed consciousness that He is for us in all the depths of love that led Him to give Himself for us.

This is so much grander, more wonderful, than striving each day to please God by endeavouring to keep His law. Do I try and find peace through my own feeble efforts? Do I strive to attain to a standard of holiness that is completely beyond even the best of us? Or do I rest quietly on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's own dear Son at Calvary, an offering that satisfied, and, indeed, glorified God and answered completely every claim of His holy throne?

Galatians 2:21 reads: *"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

Galatians 2:21 is a devastating conclusion to his reasoning. If righteousness may be obtained by the law, the grace of God is being set aside. If such were the case, why need Christ have died? To turn back to the law is not only to make myself a transgressor for having given it up as a means of justification, but it is frustrating the grace of God. Furthermore, if righteousness could come by the law, there would have been no need for the death of Christ. We cannot have it both ways. We either trust in our ability to keep the law or we rest in the grace of God which has provided a remedy for our lost condition. In Galatians 2:21, Paul states the stark fact that if it had been possible to obtain righteousness by keeping the law, then Jesus Christ had died pointlessly. Literally, 'Christ would have died for nothing'.

It might well swell our human hearts with pride, but it is deep heresy to think that our salvation can be achieved by works by us, that salvation can be earned, rather than received in grace from God. And preaching is totally ineffective, as well as heretical, if it calls on men to work for their own salvation rather than to behold God working for them in Christ.

Let us in our day, then, take to heart the lessons of this important chapter. My salvation has been eternally secured by the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. That work is sufficient in itself. There is absolutely nothing I can do to add to it. But, having received salvation as a gift, I do have a moral responsibility to live in the good of it - *"by faith [in] the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20).

Conclusion

Paul was fully assured that his old nature, which he called 'the old man', inherited from fallen sinful Adam, had been brought to an end in the death by crucifixion of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Is the situation the same with us? Indeed it is! Our 'old man', the old nature we have by being part of a fallen race, has been crucified for us as for the Apostle Paul. If, indeed, we are really and truly believers, we have 'died' with Christ even as Paul had. But, we have to take it up in our own personal experience as Paul did, so that it is to us, not only a matter of Christian doctrine, but also a matter of rich Christian experience, which transforms and ennobles our lives, lived out daily by the new nature imparted to us by the Holy Spirit.

We have the opportunity to live out those other well-known poetic words:

*Do this, and live, the law demands,
But gives me neither feet nor hands.
The grace of God speaks better things.
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.*

Anon

Having reached this very happy, and logical, conclusion, the moment had arrived for a very pointed appeal to the Galatians. This appeal we have in Galatians 3:1-4. But that must be left for another day, another talk, perhaps even another series. In the meantime, thank you very much indeed for listening.

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