

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST— A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH A CORPORATE GOAL AND RESULT

BY JAMES FITE

As a high-school student—somewhat at the influence and encouragement of a dear brother in Christ who at the time was a seminary student—I began to memorize verses. I did not consider myself a very good memorizer; thus, when a particular verse impressed me from my daily Bible readings, I would write the verse on a card so that I could read and reread it during the day. To form a mnemonic device I would often vocalize phrases of the verse when I was alone. I spontaneously found myself using these phrases as prayers and would often converse with the Lord concerning the verse.¹

Galatians 2:20 was one such verse. I was intrigued by it and spent an unusual amount of time—multiple times a day for over a week—repeatedly returning to each phrase, especially the introductory one: *I am crucified with Christ*. I was puzzled with many questions such as, If Christ was crucified, why do I need to be? How is my crucifixion different from that of Christ the Redeemer? How could I be crucified with Him since I was not even born? If I was crucified, how can I still be living?

Then I had my “Eureka!” moment, when I saw and believed: “*I am crucified with Christ!*” Being quite happy about my “discovery,” that evening I excitedly told my church youth director, “I am crucified with Christ!” His discouraging response was, “I am not.” So began my journey to understand and experience this verse. On the course of this journey the Lord revealed that my personal experience—indeed, the experience of all the believers—of this verse has a corporate goal and result.

The Context of Galatians 2:20

Galatians 2:19 through 3:3 touches nearly every major topic in this Epistle, including the Triune God, the cross, faith, grace, the fallen man, the flesh, and the redeemed and regenerated believers. The Trinity is implied in the mention of God, Christ, and the Spirit. Christ is the “Son of God” (2:20—implying the Father) and is received as the Spirit (3:2). He is the Triune God who in His economy passed through the steps, the processes, of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. Because the Son of God loved us, He gave Himself up (2:20) to be crucified for us and for our sins (1:4), referring to Christ’s redemptive death on the cross. That Christ now lives in us implies His resurrection (2:20), which was carried out by “God the Father, who raised Him from the dead” (1:1). Through the word of the gospel—“Jesus Christ was openly portrayed crucified” (3:1)—the believers receive the Spirit “out of the hearing of faith,” a faith that is versus “the works of law” (v. 2). Because we have received the Spirit, we can now live and walk by this Spirit in faith, the faith of the indwelling Christ (cf. 5:25; 2:20). In so doing, we enjoy, rather than annul, the grace of God (v. 21).

In Galatians 2:19-21 Paul uses the nominative pronoun *I* seven times and the objective pronoun *me* three times, thereby amplifying the very personal nature of this passage:

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AND THE GRACE
OF CHRIST WITH A
"DIFFERENT GOSPEL."

For *I* through law have died to law that *I* might live to God. *I* am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer *I* who live, but it is Christ who lives in *me*; and the life which *I* now live in the flesh *I* live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave Himself up for *me*. *I* do not nullify the grace of God. (emphasis added²)

Verse 19 begins with Paul's assertion that he has died to law, and verse 21 concludes that if righteousness comes, or is attained, through law, Christ's death would be "in vain" (KJV), "pointless" (CJB), and "for nothing" (NIV). After stating in verse 19, "I...have died," Paul continues by identifying the objective of this death: "That I might live." These declarations are not mere judicial pronouncements. The juxtaposition of *died* and *live* in these two phrases contrasts the organic consequences of choosing law or God. This is reminiscent of the contrasting trees in Genesis 2.³ In Galatians 2:19 the preposition *to*, as in *to law* and *to God*, indicates obligation, responsibility, and relationship with. Here a person has died and a person lives. "I...have died *to law*," and "I...live *to God*." Whereas verse 19 seems to describe a historical event ("I...*have* died"), "I *am* crucified" (KJV, Darby) in verse 20 suggests an ongoing state of remaining in the death that has taken place.⁴ This seeming dichotomy is restated—"It is no longer I who live" and "I now live." The first "I" lives "no longer," but the second "I" lives "in faith" and does "not nullify the grace of God" (v. 21).

Paul's intimate declaration, "Who loved *me*," expresses his appreciation for being the personal object of the Son of God's love (v. 20; cf. Col. 1:13). Paul then declares that Christ "gave Himself up for *me*" and now "lives in *me*" (Gal. 2:20). This is the third time in Galatians that Paul refers to the indwelling Christ. Verse 21 concludes chapter 2 by contrasting grace with righteousness through law. Hence, the co-crucifixion with Christ in verse 20 is distinct from and an alternative to law-keeping. Galatians 3:1 continues the thought of Christ crucified: "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly portrayed crucified." Paul then proceeds in verses 2 and 3 to the first mention of the Spirit in this Epistle: "Did you receive the Spirit?...Having begun by the Spirit..."

Galatians 2:20 should also be considered in the context of the entire Epistle. In *Life-study of Galatians*, Witness Lee states, based on 1:4, that the subject of Galatians is the "rescue of the distracted believers out of the evil religious age" (6). In his outlines and notes in the *Recovery Version of the Bible*, Lee further identifies the subject as "Christ replacing the law and being versus religion and tradition." This subject derives from the various outcomes accomplished on the cross, as mentioned in Galatians. First, the Lord Jesus Christ "gave Himself for our sins" (1:4), implying redemption by the Son of God, whom Paul personalizes as the One "who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (2:20). Second, on the cross the world was crucified (6:14). Verses 12 through 15 speak of the flesh, keeping the law, and being circumcised, which is in contrast to the cross and the new creation. Verse 12 speaks of those who, to avoid being "persecuted for the cross of Christ," compel others to be circumcised, and in verse 14 Paul declares, "The world has been crucified to me and I to the world." Hence, in this context *the world* refers particularly to the religious world with its traditions and practices.

After identifying that God's will is to rescue us out of the present, evil, religious age, Paul proceeds in the first four chapters of Galatians to contrast the gospel of Christ and the grace of Christ with a "different gospel" (1:6-7). This different gospel is a perversion of the gospel revealed to Paul directly by Jesus Christ and entrusted to him to announce to the Gentiles (vv. 12, 16). Paul's gospel comprises the good pleasure of God to reveal the indwelling Son in His believers, to dispense the Triune God into them as the Spirit (3:2), and to thereby constitute them to be sons and heirs of God (cf. 1:15-16; 4:6-7). Anything other than this is a different gospel. The final two chapters of Galatians focus on the practical living and walk of God's children (cf. 5:16, 25; 6:16). The gospel presented by Paul in Galatians is deep, rich, profound, and practical.

The Seven “I”s in Galatians 2:19-21 Referring to the Two Statues of the Created, Corrupted, Redeemed, and Regenerated Man

The created, corrupted, redeemed, and regenerated man has two statuses. From a negative perspective, he is the old “I” and can be described as being crucified, having died, and no longer living (vv. 19-20). From a positive perspective, he is the new “I”—one who now lives, lives in faith, lives to God, and does not nullify the grace of God (vv. 19-21). These two statuses encapsulate the history of created, fallen, corrupted, redeemed, and regenerated man.

When God evaluated everything that He had made in Genesis 1, He declared that the created man, in particular, was “very good,” especially because this man was in His own image and likeness (vv. 26, 31). This very good man, with a free will, was placed in a pleasant garden, within which were two particular trees—representing two specifically identified choices (2:8-9). The first choice was simply designated “life” (v. 9); the second, labeled with a more complex terminology (“knowledge,” “good,” and “evil”), was explicitly warned against. Jehovah placed the equivalent of a “warning label” on this second tree: “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (v. 17). Contrary to the popular portrayals of human struggle being a battle between good versus evil, the divine record frames man’s struggle as a choice between these two trees—a choice between life and death.

The created man became a fallen man through his conscious choice to eat of the forbidden tree, the tree of death. In her self-justifying confession to God, the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (3:13). On this point Paul concurs, going so far as to say, “The woman, having been *quite* deceived” (1 Tim. 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3); however, he is unsparing with the man: “Adam was not deceived.” (1 Tim. 2:14)—he made a deliberate choice.

Isaiah 14:12-14 exposes the heart of the one embodied in the deceiving serpent, identifying him as Lucifer, Daystar. Each part of his secret and premediated five-step plan of rebellion was prefaced with a nominative pronoun: “I will ascend to heaven; / ...I will exalt my throne. / ...I will sit upon the mount of assembly / ...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; / I will make myself like the Most High.” This self-directed decisive declaration pronounced the invention of an alternative will, a will that is versus the will of the Most High. This second will became a second source—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁵

In Genesis 3, as this one conversed with the couple in the garden, he subtly misrepresented God’s instructions so as to raise doubts concerning the accuracy of God’s word and concerning the motivation of God’s heart. The woman rushed to independently answer the serpent’s insidious query rather than turning the matter to her husband or, at the very least, consulting with him. In her subsequent conversation with the tempter, the woman was persuaded to accept the serpentine premise and was instigated to partake of the poisonous fruit. Likewise, the husband, who was apparently present “with her” during this entire conversation (v. 6), also acted independently, rather than consulting with God and looking to Him for direction. This remarkably capable man—who long before Aristotle could identify, classify, distinguish, and name all manner of fauna (cf. 2:19-20)—was in this circumstance remarkably passive. There seems to be no biblical hint of Adam attempting to stop his wife from eating the forbidden fruit or of his protesting or hesitating to follow his wife: “She also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate” (3:6). Paul’s assertion that the man was not deceived reinforces the conclusion that Adam’s partaking of the tree of knowledge was a deliberate act of self-reliance and a willful decision to act independently from God. In his partaking of that tree, man joined himself and aligned his will with the satanic alternative to God’s will. Thus, the created man, a couple, became a fallen man. Since their act was not merely one of judicial disobedience but also one of eating and digesting a contaminating substance, they became the organic bearers and transmitters of a corrupting infection of sin. This is the root, the source, the manifestation, and the characteristic of the first “I” in Galatians 2:20, necessitating a need for both termination and redemption.

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Galatians opens with the declaration that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead (1:1). When He died to redeem man and to deal with the multiple problems that separated man from God, Jesus bore multiple statuses. In His death He was the Lamb of God, who took "away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) and put away sin "through the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). The Lord Jesus Christ was also our righteous Substitute, who "suffered once for sins...on behalf of the unrighteous" (1 Pet. 3:18), "gave Himself for our sins" willingly (Gal. 1:4), and "died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Because He loved us, He "gave Himself up" for us (Gal. 2:20) and gave His soul, His life, as "a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Through His death He "made peace through the blood of His cross" and reconciled us "in the body of His flesh through death" (Col. 1:20, 22). Furthermore, through His death the flesh and the world were crucified (cf. Gal. 5:24; 6:14).

In His death Christ was also the bronze serpent, having the likeness of the flesh of sin but without sin. The apostle John, as an eyewitness of the Word of life (cf. 1 John 1:1), asserts that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (4:2). According to John's Gospel, Jesus predicted that just as the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness, so He as the Son of Man would be "lifted up" so that all the serpent-bitten people who believe "into Him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). He was in the image of the poisonous serpent but without the poison. Therefore, through Him, both as the Son of Man and the Son of God, God condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). In Galatians 2:20 Paul expresses his personal, tender feelings and appreciation for "the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Hence, in His crucifixion Christ was the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Redeemer, the Lamb of God, and the bronze serpent to deal with the negative problems between man and God, that is, to deal with sin, sins, the world, the flesh, the old man, and the old "I."

In the concluding section of Galatians Paul testifies that by the cross, "the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" and relates this fact to the new creation and the Israel of God (6:14-16). This indicates that the goal of the Lord's redemption was not merely to produce many new individual "I"s but to create in Himself one Body, one new man (cf. Eph. 2:15-16; Col. 3:10-11). God's original intention is to have a corporate man, a people in Christ who would be His duplication and expression. However, in his fall man became a corporate old man. In Romans 5:12 Paul says that through the one man, Adam, "sin entered into the world, and through sin, death"; hence, "death passed on to all men." All the descendants of Adam thus became the world, a corporate old man who is independent of God.

The first sin, that of Adam, caused man to leave God's presence and awakened in him the innate sense of right and wrong, which is the conscience in his created human spirit (9:1; cf. 8:16). After partaking of the forbidden tree, man realized and became ashamed of his nakedness (Gen. 3:7; cf. 2:25), indicating the functioning of the conscience. Man continued to fall further from God and from his conscience by inventing his own religion, as Cain did when he offered the fruit of his own labor rather than taking God's way of redemption (4:3). As if this was not enough, man continued his wicked descent by abusing the fallen body and becoming flesh (6:13), falling to the extent that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (v. 5).

When man reached such a corrupted state, God judged the earth with the flood, sparing only Noah and his family. Nevertheless, man's downward trend continued in the post-diluvian era. In this further fall, mankind renounced God and attempted to make a name for themselves, as seen in their collective effort at Babel. There they declared, "Let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is the heavens" (11:4). This statement is similar to the self-exalting utterance of Lucifer when he said, "I will ascend to heaven" (Isa. 14:13). Hence, at this stage man became the expression and representation of Satan.

God dealt with this fourth fall by confounding mankind with divisions and confusion in language and by scattering mankind into peoples, nations, and cultures. Against this backdrop of a fallen, rebellious, and divided corporate old man, God in His wisdom still worked

to carry out His original intention—to have a corporate new man, who would express Him with His image and represent Him in His dominion and authority. Therefore, at this juncture God forsook the created race and began with a called-out race. God initiated the called race by appearing to Abraham “while he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran” (Acts 7:2; cf. Gen. 11:31). In so doing, God provided a way for His original purpose with man to be fulfilled. From this called race there eventually came a seed, Christ (Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:14, 16). Paul indicates that this seed of Abraham is a corporate seed that includes all the “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 26; cf. vv. 28-29).

Christ’s death to resolve the many negative consequences of man’s fall also had a positive issue—His reproduction. According to John 12:24, the Son of Man died as a grain of wheat to duplicate His life in His believers in order to make them the many grains. The multiplication of grains emphasizes the organic aspect of God’s salvation and also implies a process that issues in a corporate result.

The God-ordained instructions to His Old Testament people helpfully explain the importance of wheat. God instructed them to process the grains into “fine wheat flour” in order to make unleavened bread for the meal offering (Exo. 29:2; Lev. 2:1). That this kind of bread was very important in God’s eyes is evident by the prominence given to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was ranked among the three annual festal gatherings established by God for His called-out people (cf. Exo. 12:17; 13:6-7; 23:14-15). This feast was a continuation of the Passover.

First Corinthians mentions the corresponding New Testament fulfillment and reality of this Old Testament type by connecting this celebration with “our Passover, Christ” and urging us to “keep the feast...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (5:7-8). In the fellowship of the Lord’s body and blood at His table, the “many are one Body,” being partakers “of the one bread” (10:16-17). When eating the “Lord’s supper,” in the corporate remembrance of the Lord Jesus (11:20; cf. vv. 24, 26), each partaker bears personal responsibility (vv. 27-29). Verse 18 speaks of coming “together in [the assembly of] the church.” Verse 20 speaks of coming “together in the same place.” The proper meeting for the Lord’s supper, the Lord’s table, should be a mutual, corporate enjoyment and partaking of the elemental symbols, which commemorate the Lord’s person and work.

In John 6 the Lord spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood (v. 56), symbolically describing the process of His work by which He would redeem sinners and reconstitute them into a corporate bread. However, many of His disciples, after failing to understand what He was saying, considered His word as hard to take and “no longer walked with Him” (vv. 60, 66). Jesus had fed a great hungry crowd, and they sought Him for more food. He used this setting to describe symbolically the steps that He, the real bread, was taking to give Himself as the eternal life (cf. 3:15). In order to present Himself as the “bread of life” (6:35), He first had to come down from heaven (6:32-33, 38, 41, 50-51). After becoming a man in the flesh, He would be slain, shedding His blood for redemption (cf. v. 53). Then those who would eat His flesh and drink His blood by receiving Him and believing into Him (1:12 would have eternal life (vv. 53-54). This eating and drinking was possible because He would be resurrected so that He could live, dwell, and abide in His believers, who would also be enlivened and live because of Him (vv. 56-57). Jesus then went on to say that after His resurrection He, as the Son of Man, would ascend (v. 62) and then come as the Spirit who gives life to His many believers through words that “are spirit and are life” (v. 63). Through this process, which involved His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and becoming the life-giving Spirit, He, as the living bread, is now practically embodied and realized in the words of life. By eating this bread, His people become a corporate bread.

Ephesians 2:14-15 reinforces the fact that the Lord’s death had the goal and result of producing a corporate people, comprising both Jews and Gentiles. Through the cross He created “the two”—the Jews and the Gentiles—“into one new man” and reconciled

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"both in one Body" (vv. 15-16). Furthermore, He reconciled "all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). In Galatians 6:14-15 Paul indicates that "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" had the specific objective to separate all God's people, both Jews and Gentiles, from the divisive religious world.

The Relationship between the Old "I," the Old Man, the Flesh, the Self, and the Soul-life

The New Testament uses several distinct terms related to fallen man: *I, the old man, the flesh, the self, and the soul-life*. Romans 6:6, a parallel portion to Galatians 2:20, says that "our *old man* has been crucified with Him." Galatians 5:24 says that "they who are of Christ Jesus have crucified *the flesh* with its passions and its lusts." In the Gospels the Lord Jesus referred to denying the self and losing the soul-life. In Matthew 16:24-25 Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny *himself* and take up his cross...Whoever loses his *soul-life* for My sake shall find it." In a practical sense, to deny the self is to lose the soul-life for the Lord's sake. In *The Experience of Life*, Lee says, "There is a created, fallen man, whose name is *the old man*. He calls himself 'I.' The life within him is the *soul-life*, which when being lived out is the *flesh*" (217). According to Galatians 2, the old "I" has died through law, is crucified, and no longer lives.

As believers, our experience in this regard may somewhat follow three steps: knowing, accepting, and experiencing. Romans 6:6 states the accomplished fact: "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified." When we know this fact, we need to accept it. Galatians 2:20 is the acknowledgement—the declaration and acceptance—of this fact: "I am crucified." We then need to go forward with the experience and application of the accomplished fact that we have seen. This third stage involves dealing with the soul-life, the flesh, the self with its opinionated ideas and suggestions, and the natural disposition. My initial excitement when I first saw that I was crucified was in the first stage. My youth director's less-than-enthusiastic response may have perhaps stemmed from the necessary experiential dealings in the latter stages.

Law and the Flesh versus Faith, Grace, the Cross, and the Spirit

In Galatians Paul utilizes judicial terms to draw the contrast of his gospel to "another gospel." He repeatedly refers to law (over thirty times), justification (eight times), and righteousness (four times). The Judaizers, "false brothers" (2:4), were very zealous in their attempt to bring the Gentile Galatians into obedience to the Old Testament law. They were so insistently persuasive especially on one aspect of the law—circumcision—that even Peter and Barnabas were intimidated by them (vv. 11-13). Paul, however, asserts that the law brings a curse to anyone who cannot keep it (cf. 3:10). He points out that everyone who is circumcised is a debtor bound "to do the whole law" (5:3). Paul argues that the original promise God gave to believing Abraham was in faith (3:18)—a promise that would be fulfilled by Christ as the seed of Abraham. At most, the law had a dispensational benefit before the original promise was fulfilled in that it functioned as a guardian, schoolmaster, or "child-conductor" (v. 24) to protect God's people in the interim, until they were brought in faith to Christ.

On the one hand, the law positively and objectively describes the spiritual, holy, righteous, and good God (Rom. 7:12, 14). On the other hand, the law primarily functions on the negative side, including giving "clear knowledge of sin" (3:20). The law instructs and protects by exposing the sinful nature of man. When man hears the law of God, an innate response in his soul causes him to delight in it (emotions, 7:22), agree with the good law (mind, vv. 16, 25), and decide with the will to keep it (vv. 18-19). However, a "different law," an evil "law of sin" (v. 23), wars against his good intentions and causes evil to be present instead (vv. 21, 25). This is the basis upon which Paul testifies, "I did not know sin except through the law" (v. 7). The law reminds man that he has become corrupted flesh (cf. Gen. 6:12) and that in the flesh he is in bondage to indwelling sin. Hence, the

law is related to the flesh (cf. Gal. 2:16; 3:3). Notwithstanding its exposing and protecting functions, the law has a fatal flaw: it is unable “to give life” (v. 21). Therefore, another source—faith—is needed for man to fulfill God’s original purpose.

The term *faith* appears repeatedly in Galatians. First, Paul equates the faith with the gospel (1:23). Faith has both an objective aspect—the contents of what is believed—and a subjective aspect—the believing action and ability. The theological defense of justification by faith relies on verses such as 2:16, which, along with Romans 3:28 and 5:1, contrast faith with the works of the law. A deeper consideration of these two aspects of faith opens many avenues of further prayerful study and consideration beyond the scope of this article. The main point of emphasis here is that the law and the flesh are versus faith.

As in many of his other Epistles, Paul introduces and concludes Galatians with grace (1:3; 6:18). This grace proceeds from God and is of God (1:3; 2:21), who is our Father, implying an organic relationship. It is God’s pleasure to call us “through His grace” (1:15). Grace is also “of Christ” (v. 6) and “from the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3; 6:18). That this grace is “with your spirit” (v. 18) implies the Spirit of grace, the Holy Spirit who witnesses with our human spirit (cf. Heb. 6:4; Rom. 8:16). Hence, grace involves the process of the Triune God to reach us and become our enjoyment. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul testifies of his abundant labors while simultaneously acknowledging that it is “not I but the grace of God.” In Galatians 2:20 he says, “It is no longer I...but it is Christ.” Together, these verses indicate that the laboring grace is actually the indwelling Christ Himself enjoyed by and lived out of us.

Furthermore, grace operates throughout the process of God’s setting apart, calling, and saving His chosen and redeemed vessels (1:6, 15). Similarly, Ephesians 2:5 emphasizes grace as the saving agent: “By grace you have been saved.” Verse 8, “By grace you have been saved through faith,” connects grace to faith as the course, or substantiating agent, through which we have been saved. Grace is also the operating factor in the believers’ service and work (Gal. 2:8-9).

Galatians in particular contrasts grace with the law. Paul indicates that the grace of God would be nullified if righteousness were through the law instead of through Christ’s death (2:21). In chapter 5 Paul draws an even sharper contrast between law and grace by arguing that making an element of the law, such as circumcision, a condition for salvation and justification separates the law-adherents from Christ and causes them to be “fallen from grace” (v. 4).

When the Galatians—Gentiles from the nations—heard the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, there was a response in them, faith (3:1-2), which caused them to believe what was first spoken to Abraham. As a result, they received the Spirit “through faith” (v. 14). They heard about Jesus Christ “openly portrayed crucified” (v. 1), who is the seed of Abraham (cf. v. 16), but they received “the promise of the Spirit” (v. 14), further indicating that Christ is the Spirit.

In chapter 5 Paul says, “Walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (vv. 16-17). Lee points out that in our experience “the Spirit is Christ and the flesh is the ‘I.’” (*Recovery Version*, 3:3, note 2). According to 5:24, those “who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts.” Lee’s note on *crucified* in this verse says, “God does not want us to keep the law by the flesh; He wants us to live Christ by the Spirit” (note 3).

Chapter 2 contrasts Christ, who lives in me, with the “I” who is crucified and no longer lives (v. 20). Chapter 3 then contrasts the Spirit with the flesh (v. 3). In chapter 4 the first son—born of the flesh—corresponds to the “I” in 2:20 who is crucified and no longer lives; the second son—born according to the Spirit—corresponds to the “I” who

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now lives in faith. In chapter 5 those who “live by the Spirit” and “walk by the Spirit” (5:25; cf. v. 16) have a living that expresses Christ as the fruit of the Spirit.

The Dispensing Triune God— the Regenerating Father and the Indwelling Son as the Spirit

The introduction of Galatians unambiguously states that God the Father is *our* God and *our* Father (1:1, 3-4). This Epistle confirms the fact that the believers are sons of God (3:26; 4:6-7). As redeemed and regenerated persons, we are not merely sons in law but sons in life. Therefore, the implication is that the believers in Christ are born of the Father and thereby possess His divine life and nature. In 4:6 Paul goes on to say that since we are sons, God (the Father) “sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” The parallel verse to this passage, Romans 8:15, says that we “have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!” Our sonship has an organic basis—the Spirit of God being one with our regenerated human spirit, the hidden man in our heart (cf. John 3:6; 1 Pet. 3:4). The outward tender and sweet invocation to address and call upon God as our Father has an innermost source, that is, the witness of “the Spirit Himself...with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). The Son of God living in us as the Spirit makes us the sons of God the Father, the duplication and the “many brothers” of the firstborn Son (v. 29).

The Experience of the Two “I”s

In declaring, “I am crucified with Christ,” Galatians 2:20 delineates the pattern of the normal Christian experience. It is an incontrovertible fact of history that Christ was crucified. Certain aspects of His death, such as His offering Himself as the Lamb of God who shed His blood on the cross to take away the sin of the world, are exclusively and uniquely His. Only He was qualified to be such an unblemished sin offering. We are the beneficiaries, but not the participants, of such an offering.

However, we were included in other aspects of His death. He accomplished the crucifixion of the old man, the old “I,” and the world (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 6:14). It is an accomplished fact that we were crucified with Christ. However, we need to apply these facts in our practical experience and living. For example, 5:24 says that “they who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts.” Colossians 3:5 charges us to “put to death” our “members which are on the earth” and then lists such things as “fornication,...evil desire, and greediness, which is idolatry.” According to Romans 8:13, we “put to death the practices of the body” by the Spirit. Such a putting to death is different from asceticism. We must take the initiative based on the accomplished fact, but we do this not by relying on self effort but by the power of the Spirit. It is a cooperative effort between us and the indwelling Christ as the Spirit.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul unambiguously declares, “Christ lives in me” (NIV); he then follows with, “The life I now live” (NIV), thereby highlighting two great new testament realities—the indwelling Christ as life and the regenerated believer’s living in oneness with Him. The Epistles repeatedly refer to Christ indwelling the believers (Rom. 8:10; Col. 1:27). According to 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Jesus Christ...in you” is qualified proof of our faith. Paul goes even further to state that Christ was speaking in him (v. 3). The Lord Jesus foretold, prior to His death, that He would be in the believers (John 14:20; 17:23). Other verses speak of God the Father being in the believers by operating in them (Phil. 2:13; 1 Cor. 12:6) and of the church of the living God being the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), thereby indicating that God lives and dwells in His corporate people. Furthermore, the Spirit of God, the One who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in the believers (Rom. 8:9, 11). Thus, the entire Triune God lives, dwells, abides, and makes His home in the believers (cf. John 14:17, 23).

Seeking believers have struggled both to understand and experientially apply the sequence

that Paul presents in Galatians 2:20—"I have been crucified with Christ...I no longer live...Christ lives in me...The life I now live" (NIV). The term *exchanged life* has often been used to convey and interpret this sequence. Although the term *exchanged life* "is attributed to J. Hudson Taylor, [it] was apparently coined by Howard and Geraldine Taylor" (Pyne and Blackmon 132)⁶ in their biographical account of the well regarded missionary to China.

Lee, however, asserts that "Galatians 2:20 does not speak of an exchanged life" (*Galatians* 85) but is instead best illustrated by grafting (88). In *Life-study of Romans*, Lee refers to three illustrations that Paul used, which show "that the Christian life is not an exchanged life" (659). In the first illustration God's called people are likened to vessels of mercy "unto honor" and "unto glory" (Rom. 9:21, 23). These clay and earthen vessels are not honorable and glorious in themselves; they are made so by the treasure that they contain (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7). Nevertheless, the vessels are not replaced by or exchanged with the content. Paul's second illustration in Romans is that of married life. We have "been made dead to the law" so that we "might be joined...to Him who has been raised from the dead" (7:4). There is no exchange of life between a husband and a wife; instead, the husband and wife are identified with one another. Lee states that with respect to the "wonderful union" of the believers and Christ, "we are one with Him in person, in name, in life, and in existence" (659-660). The third illustration in Romans is that of the grafting of wild olive tree branches into a cultivated olive tree (11:17-24). Lee notes that "the illustration of grafting shows that two lives are joined and then grow together organically" (660).

Grafting is perhaps the best illustration to understand the normal Christian's experience described in Galatians 2:20, which Lee describes as "one life and one living" (*Life-study of Galatians* 88). It is helpful to consider this from the perspective of the grafted branch and from the perspective of the root, or base, tree receiving the grafted branch. Of itself, a branch has no life; a detached branch soon withers and dies. Prior to being grafted, the "wild" branch derived its life and sustenance from the base wild olive tree and, in turn, expressed and lived out the "wild" life of that tree. However, once it has been severed, or broken off, it has no life to live or express (cf. Rom. 11:17). Once it is "crucified," it no longer lives by its original source, that is, the life of the wild olive tree.

The root, or base, "cultivated olive tree" has life and is essentially the source and supply of the life. However, for expression and fruit, the root needs the branches. The life of the tree is lived out through the branches of the tree. Hence, its life is in the rooted tree, and its living out is through the grafted branches. This is not an exchange of one life for another. Instead, the tree as in Romans 11 or the vine as in John 15:4-5 and its branches have one life and one living.

In the process of this grafting, the rich life of the cultivated olive tree swallows up the defects of the poor life of the wild olive tree, thereby transforming the grafted branch into the image of the cultivated olive tree. It is in this same way that God's divine attributes are expressed through our human virtues. These virtues are uplifted but not replaced or eradicated. Furthermore, such things as our thoughts, decisions, and feelings are transformed and conformed to His mind, will, and emotions.

Jesus in His humanity was the prototype of sharing the same life and having the same living with the Father. In John 6:57 He said, "As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me." Two persons, the Father and the Son, lived one life and had one living. In the same way, by eating Him, we can receive His life and live out His life in our living. Each day we can confidently pray, "Lord, I have Your one life, and You have my one living. Live Yourself through me today."

A practical illustration of this one life and one living can be seen in Paul's imprisonment journey to Rome in Acts 27 and 28. During that storm-tossed voyage, Paul received assurance from God that not only he but also all those with him would survive the trip

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(27:22, 24). Prior to the shipwreck, he was essentially in command of those with him, encouraging them to take food, causing them to be cheerful, and making crucial decisions regarding the ship and the personnel. The ship captain and the commanding centurion both worked on his behalf to preserve life, and as a result, all two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship survived and were brought to an island (cf. v. 42—28:1). The people there saw Paul remain unharmed after shaking off into the fire a poisonous viper fastened onto his hand (28:3-6). Paul then proceeded to heal a relative of the leading man of the island and many other sick persons on the island (vv. 8-9). In the context of such a long and unfortunate journey, the imprisoned Paul resembled the Lord Jesus. In note 1 on 28:9 in the *Recovery Version of the Bible*, Lee says, “This was Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity! This was the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continuing to live in the Acts through one of His many members!” Having the one life of the indwelling Jesus, we can express Him in our one living of Him: I am crucified (cut off), and I no longer live (the old tree is no longer my source); the life I now live (not my life but the life of the fatness of the root that I am now one with), I live in faith (in an organic union with Him by expressing the virtues of the new life).

To the phrase *the life which I now live* Paul appends *in the flesh* (Gal. 2:20). The repeated references to *flesh* in every chapter of Galatians provide a contextual definition of this word. Generally speaking, it is not a positive term. Paul received a gospel that was not according to man or from man, neither did he receive it in consultation with flesh and blood (1:11-12, 16), indicating that flesh is related to man and, particularly, to the natural, created, and fallen man. Flesh, fallen man, cannot be justified out of works of law (2:16). The flesh is versus the Spirit (3:3) and begets children of slavery to the law who persecute those who are born according to the Spirit (4:23, 29). The flesh takes the opportunity for unrestricted freedom (5:13). The flesh is opposed to the Spirit (vv. 16-17) and expresses itself in the lusts and evil passions of the corrupted body, in the works and evil moods of the fallen soul, and in the demonic worship of the deadened spirit (vv. 19-21). He who sows unto the flesh will reap a crop of corruption, whereas he who sows unto the Spirit will reap eternal life (6:8).

In 2:20 there is a spiritual and divine life that I now live. This life is neither fleshly nor soulish. However, the qualifier *in the flesh* is a strong counterpoint to the teaching of the “eradication of the flesh” or “sinless perfection” after regeneration. This phrase alerts us that the fallen sinful nature, and thus, the capacity to sin, still remains with us. Properly understood, the remaining presence of the flesh is both for training and protection. “The life which I now live” must be one of a constant and unbroken organic union with the Lord. However, we may unconsciously drift away. The lack of the sense of life and peace may alert us that we are no longer practicing to be “one spirit” with the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 6:17). In our common routines and ordinary daily life, we may remain somewhat oblivious to this almost imperceptible downward trend away from God, Christ, and the Spirit; however, a fleshly manifestation will immediately and incontrovertibly prove that we are no longer practicing being one spirit with the Lord. This exposure thereby provides additional incentive for us to repent and return to Him. Thus, the flesh trains us to not be self-sufficient or self-complacent, but to instead be aggressively exercised to live and walk by the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16, 25).

Furthermore, acknowledging that we do not in this age graduate from the sinful flesh and that the capacity to sin remains while we are in the body of sin and death (cf. Rom. 6:6; 7:24) causes us to be sober and to not excuse sin. Recognizing that we have this weakness—to will to do good but not have the strength to do it (v. 18)—incentivizes us to avoid putting ourselves in situations where we will be tempted. This healthy fear will drive us to constantly seek the Lord, call on His name, and exercise to develop and practice healthy spiritual habits (such as reading the Bible, praying, confessing our faith, and meeting with other believers in an atmosphere of love).

The phrase *I live in faith* in Galatians 2:20 indicates that spiritual realities are appropriated

and made real not by sight or feeling but by faith. The life that we live is in and by the infused faith of the Son of God. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of our “having the same spirit of faith” (2 Cor. 4:13), indicating that this faith originates in the mingled spirit, that is, the indwelling Holy Spirit in our human spirit.⁷ We exercise such faith to apprehend that the independent “I,” the “I” without God and divinity, has been terminated. By faith we now live in a grafted organic union with the Son of God, sharing His life and expressing Him in our living.


Galatians 2:20 concludes, “The Son of God, who loved me gave Himself up for me.” The Father’s life is in the indwelling Son as the Spirit. This divine life in humanity is in an atmosphere of love. In this ambience we have a personal and intimate love relationship with the indwelling Christ, the Son of God. As a result, the love of the one Son is reproduced in the many sons, who, in turn, express the Father’s love.

A Corporate Goal—the Churches, the Church of God, the Household of the Faith, the Israel of God, and a New Creation

This Epistle, affirming a gospel with a personal, intimate, and subjective Christ, was directed neither to an individual person nor even to a single church in a city but to the collective ekklesias in a province: “To the churches of Galatia” (1:2). In this Epistle Paul also refers to the churches of Judea (v. 22), another region. The only reference to *church*, although singular—“the church of God” (v. 13), may have a universal sense, since Paul is alluding to his role in “a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem,” a persecution that caused the believers to scatter “throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). During that persecution “Saul was devastating the church” (v. 3), which for the most part comprised all the Christians at that time. In the Epistle to the Galatians Paul inoculates the saints concerning “a different gospel” (1:6) that was affecting not just one church but a whole region with multiple local churches.

In 6:10 Paul encourages the recipients of his letter to take the opportunity to “do what is good toward all, but especially toward those of the household of the faith.” The people of faith are the true sons of Abraham (3:7), and those who “are of Christ” are “Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (v. 29; cf. 4:28). Since Christ is the unique seed who inherits the promises spoken to Abraham “and to his seed” (3:16), these verses imply a corporate seed, a corporate Christ. The gospel that Paul preached produced believers in Christ who were collectively one corporate household; through faith in Christ, they became children of promise (4:28), sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (3:26). In this organic family all are “one in Christ Jesus” regardless of race or social status (v. 28).

Paul’s gospel produced not just a family but an entire nation, the real “Israel of God” (6:16). This spiritual nation includes both Jewish and Gentile believers. These two peoples have not merely agreed to tolerate each other based on an outward truce or treaty. The citizens and constituents of this real Israel are the true sons and seed of Abraham (3:7, 29). They have undergone an organic transformation as typified by Jacob, who became Israel, a prince of God. Hence, they express God in image and represent Him in authority.

The ultimate corporate issue of the gospel that Paul announced to the Galatians is “a new creation” (6:15). The old creation, the old man, comprises all the old “I”s, the empty “I”s, who were created by God to be filled with Him as the tree of life and who were instead corrupted with an unintended content (cf. Eph. 4:22). The new creation is new in that it has Christ as its content (cf. Col. 3:11). This new man comprises all the new “I”s in whom Christ lives (cf. Gal. 2:20). The many sons of God (3:26), who have received God’s life and nature (John 3:36; 2 Pet. 1:4), are the constituents of this corporate new man. The empty “I”s have become “I”s full of Christ. They are a new creation! 

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Notes

¹At the time I had not heard of “pray-reading the Word,” a practice of mingling prayer with the reading of the Bible. I later found out that many faithful servants of the Lord derived “their usefulness, their vitality, and their insight...from personal, consecrated times of handling God’s Word by prayer” (Graver 11).

²All italics in Scripture quotations from this point forward indicate emphasis added.

³Adam’s choice to eat of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil instead of the tree of life not only invoked a judicial judgment but, more importantly, changed him organically and constitutionally because he received the element, the poison, of death (cf. Psalms 140:3; Romans 3:13; James 3:8).

⁴NIV and NASV translate this phrase, “I have been crucified.”

⁵These two trees not only represent two outcomes (death or life) but also two sources (God or Satan) with two characteristics (dependence or independence). God is the source of life, and Satan is the source of death. The fruit, or issue, of the “life fruit” is dependence on God. The issue of the “knowledge fruit” is independence from God (but slavery to sin). Hence, man’s choice between the fruit of the two trees was actually a choice between two sources and, more explicitly, a choice between two persons—God or Satan.

⁶Pyne and Blackmon acknowledge that “Exchanged Life theology defies strict definition” (132), noting the diversity “of persons and ministries” who claim the label (133). Nevertheless, they attempt a definition: “At the risk of oversimplification the distinctive teaching of Exchanged Life theology is that *believers will experience victory and happiness in the Christian life only by recognizing and living out the reality of the inherent change already produced in them at conversion*” (133). They go on to name various other theological labels and proponents that they consider would fit their definition:

Versions of Exchanged Life theology have been labeled the Abiding Life (Andrew Murray), the Victorious Christian Life (Ian Thomas), the Interior Life (Hannah Whitall Smith), the Normal Christian Life (Watchman Nee), the Miracle Life (David Needham), Life on the Highest Plane (Ruth Paxon), the Grace Walk (Steve McVey), and other more generic terms such as Victorious Living, the Christ Life, the Christ-Exchanged Life, the Rest of the Gospel, Christ in You, the Grace Life, and others. (133)

⁷Note 2 by Lee on *spirit of faith* in 2 Corinthians 4:13 in the *Recovery Version of the Bible* states,

Not distinctly the Holy Spirit,—but still not merely a human disposition: the indwelling Holy Spirit penetrates and characterizes the whole renewed man” (Alford). “Spirit of faith: not distinctly the Holy Spirit, nor, on the other hand, a human faculty or disposition, but blending both” (Vincent). The spirit of faith is the Holy Spirit mingled with our human spirit. We must exercise such a spirit to believe and to speak, like the psalmist, the things we have experienced of the Lord, especially His death and resurrection. Faith is in our spirit, which is mingled with the Holy Spirit, not in our mind. Doubts are in our mind. Here *spirit* indicates that it is by the mingled spirit that the apostles lived a crucified life in resurrection for the carrying out of their ministry.

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