

Gal. 2:17-21; Rom. 6:1-14; Union with Christ I. United in Death II. United in Life III. Called to Live

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you been crucified? That might seem like a strange way to start our sermon- but as we are going to see today- all those who are united to Christ are all united with Christ in His crucifixion. Being joined and united to Him means that what He endured we also will experience. We follow in His footsteps if you will. We share in both His humiliation and exaltation! In His death and in His life! Notice this reversal- normally we speak of belonging to Jesus in life and in death. But in our union with Christ we find that death comes first and then life! As we build upon what we learned last week, we remember that we are justified by faith in Christ. We defined faith as being united to Christ. We believe in Jesus and are declared righteous in Him. But we must not be content with an academic understanding of faith. Faith unifies- it joins us to Christ so that we share in His works- and as we see today- we even share in His life! What happened to Him now is seen as happening to us. So today we are going to further consider our union with Christ by faith. Those who are joined to Christ by faith are so much in Him- they share with Him in all things! John Owen said that union with Christ is the “principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations.” So we consider this theme: those who are united to Christ by faith share in His death and life.

I. United in Death

In our first point we find that being united to Jesus means that we are united to Him in death. I have been crucified with Christ, Paul says in v. 20. Now this crucifixion is not a reference to an actual event that took away his physical life- as we will see in v. 20- Paul still lives in the flesh. Paul had been whipped and stoned- but never crucified. So in what way was Paul crucified with Christ? Well, as I said in the introduction, by faith we are joined to Christ. It is by this faith union that the follower of Christ shares in the actions of Christ. In other words- not only was Christ crucified for us and instead of us- it is also true that we are crucified in Him and with Him! So close is the union with Christ- that His death is seen as ours and experienced by us! So we die

in and with Jesus. Specifically, it is the old man or our sinful nature that is put to death. Now the Bible does say in Col. 3:5 that we are to consider the members of our earthly body as dead; but here Paul says more than that. We are not only to consider- to view our sins as dead. No, Paul says in our passage that we are crucified! I no longer live! Notice that Paul is not dealing with our consideration and view of things- he is not speaking about our minds and what we are to think or how to view our lives. No, the point of v. 20 is that something has already happened! An event has already taken place- I have been crucified with Christ! His death on the cross was an event that I shared in! Now this is quite graphic and profound! By faith, we are joined to Christ and we have been put to death. The old man is dead, our sinful nature has no power. We have died to sin- and it no longer reigns over our body! The old, carnal flesh has no authority over us. Yes, this will lead to a development in our understanding and a pursuit of putting to death the sins that remains- to be sure we still need to struggle against the old man as we come to see the reality of this death. But Paul is focussing and highlighting this fact- those in Christ have already died! Your life is not your own- when Jesus died your old man died with Him! Remember that we are still in the realm of justification here- not sanctification! We will see calling to live a new life later on in this verse- but Paul starts by laying this foundation. You are dead- I am dead. A part of you died on the cross. An aspect of your life was laid in the tomb- never to come out again. You will also remember that Paul has been speaking about the Law and the proper use of the Law. Look back at v. 19- through the Law I died to the Law. The Law exposed my sin and misery- the law shows me my need as well as my inability. In this way, the Law revealed what part of me needed to die! Not only does the Law reveal what I need to stop doing- it also reveals what aspect of my life is now dead! To state this point another way, the only reason we are able to stop sinning is because that sin in me has already been put to death by the death of Jesus! Through the Law I died to the Law- the Law not only showed me what needs to die- it was the very means by which I died! We could say that the Law is the cross- the nails by which death is secured. Jesus died because of the Law- to satisfy the requirements of

the law! Jesus died as a lawbreaker- but his death was also demanded by the Law. So to put this in the context of Paul's argument, the Law does not comfort. The Law can only point to our need- the Law can only put to death. The Law cannot be used as a way for us to gain righteousness- the Law does not justify as we saw last week. So why did Jesus need to be crucified- because death by crucifixion was a sign of being cursed as the Law saws. The law's requirement was being satisfied. So now Paul says- I died in Him- the Father sees the death of Jesus as my death! Jesus died for His sheep to secure their release. But He also died to bring about death in them! Jesus' death was not to set an example but first of all He needed to die so that we would die! His death is our death. Not only to satisfy the just requirements of the Law- but He died to actually kill a part of us! Your former self comes to a decisive end! You are dead! You no longer live. So our sin and our sinful nature is now dead- by faith our old man is dead and in the grave! I have been crucified with Christ! So when you are joined to Christ by faith you are saying- the Law is dead to me as a way to earn righteousness. You are also saying- I am dead to myself- my former desires and pursuits are now off the table! I no longer live like and follow after the world because that part of my heart is dead! The offense of the cross is that you were nailed to it in Christ! This is an objective truth- we are crucified with Christ.

II. United in Life

But praise God- we do not stop at the cross and the tomb! No, being joined to Christ means that we are also raised as He was raised! If we died with Him, we will also live with Him as II Tim. 2 puts it. So Paul continues in v. 20- it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life we now live is not one we do in and by ourselves. There is no merit or effort that secures our new life. No, we live in Him! Any strength, all holiness and obedience, all spiritual growth- these are all in Christ! We have a resurrected life- in Christ we come out of the grave and live! By faith we are born again- raised to new life by the Spirit! Put in the context of justification, we are now new people! Righteous and holy and the sight of the Father. I am

living and I can only live in Him! I am spiritually alive because Christ lives in me! Any life that I have is foreign to me- it is His life within and not my own! Christ by His Spirit gives us a new identity- where we are truly alive for the first time. Although we don't tend to talk like this, justification is really about death and life. Our old selves are in the grave- we died with Christ as we were crucified with Him. Our new self is really not ours at all- it is a new life that we receive from Jesus! Christ lives in me! By the Spirit, God makes His dwelling within so that we are now spiritually alive! We can catch this imagery in Baptism- the old man dies in the water and the one who comes out is now washed- a new man indeed! As Owen put it- "union with Christ is the ground of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers." In other words- our justification is based on our union with Christ!

III. Called to Live

But there is one more aspect we have to consider. Thus far we have looked at the decisive, conclusive and past events of both death and life. We were crucified with Christ- we are now alive as Christ is in us. This is the blessing of regeneration- being justified by faith means we are united to Christ in His death and in His life. But the blessings of justification do not end in the past death and life. No, having been justified by faith in Christ leads to a new life of obedience. The Puritans call this the "applicatory union" with Christ. Look again at v. 20- the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God! Justified by faith leads to our being sanctified by faith! And again in v. 19- I died so that I might live to God! To illustrate this point, remember that our salvation is often compared to a marriage in the Scriptures. With this union, Christ and the church become one flesh. He in us and we in Him. This wedding day is the day we are justified. This union, however, leads the church to live like they belong to Christ! Sanctification is the life that the married couple now shares together! Now this order needs to be kept clear in our minds- we are not saved by our good works- but we are saved unto good works! Our obedience does not secure our justification- but we do obey because we have been justified! The good fruit of obedience is a necessary response- crucified with Christ and having

Christ live in us leads to a life of following Him. Or I could put it- new life is not just a past principal; it is also a present reality! We also note that this new life is a life we live in the flesh- we live this new life in the body here below. In other words- we will live and act a certain way because Christ lives in us! By faith in Christ, we will now walk in holiness and obedience. Having been justified, we now have amazing freedom to live a life devoted to God! Living for His glory and pleasure! Note that this same connection is made in Rom. 6. Consider yourselves dead to sin and live to God in Christ Jesus. And then in the next verse- let not sin reign in your body, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. So the fact that we have died and are raised again- leads to a life of obedience. How could we let sin reign in us if that sin has been crucified with Christ? How can we fail to obey if we have been raised and Christ lives in us? Note this glorious truth- not only are we in Christ; He is also in us! This is such a sweet union! Whatever can be said of Christ is now said of you! Whatever Christ has gained is now yours! The power to live a new life as we are called is within as the Spirit of Christ enlightens and enables.

Before we close, note the personal and intimate way that Paul speaks. I died, I live, I have died and I now live by the Spirit. I am crucified and I am raised! Jesus loved me and gave Himself up for me as v. 20 concludes. The Christian life of faith must be a personal walk. Divine love is not some abstract thing! Justification and sanctification must be applied personally- individually! In other words- you must be crucified with Christ! Young or old- this truth must be said by your lips and rooted in your heart! I no longer live, but Christ lives in me! He loved me and gave Himself up for me- that I might live! The crucifixion and death of Jesus was an act of love- the love of Jesus is the basis for our new identity and lives. Thomas Goodwin put it like this: "being in Christ, and united to him, is the fundamental constitution of a Christian." So as we continue to see the meaning and benefit of our union with Christ, let us all trust in Him- His death and resurrection- for our every benefit. As our theme states: those who are united to Christ by faith share in His death and life.