

Gospel Rebirth

Galatians 2:17-21

A number of years ago, I received a letter from a young man who was about to be deployed by the US military into a war zone. This letter was written to family and friends as he was about to depart from the safe borders of these United States into harms way . . . potentially not returning home.

Family & Friends,

*It is with profound joy that I write to you today **because of** the challenging circumstances that lie ahead. I can say "with joy" because James tells me to consider it pure joy whenever I face trials of many kinds because the testing of my faith produces perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work so that I may be mature and complete lacking nothing (James 1:2-4). Additionally, when I realize the hardship of being separated from my loved ones, I also realize the true treasure that each of you have been in my life. . . . I can rejoice at all times (Philippians 4:4).*

The uncertain future at times can be crippling, but praise be to God for He is the mountain that props up my faith. If God chooses to take me - yes, God determines the length of our lives with His sovereign power (Job 14:5) - then I can rejoice in the full life that God has given to me through Jesus Christ. If He were to take me today, who am I to complain? Has he not so richly lavished blessing after blessing upon my life? Are not each of you a wonderful example of his grace? I have lived a full life and proclaim with Paul: to live is Christ, to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).

Family, friends, brother and sisters in Christ, I urge you to consider the beauty of the gospel message. The message that tells us we are separated from God because of our sins, and the only remedy for bridging that eternal separation is found in completely dedicating our lives to Christ not based on the merits of anything we could ever do but solely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins who completely absorbed God's wrath so that we do not have to bear that punishment any more. There is nothing more beautiful than what Christ has done for us.

I love you all and wish you well.

I can think of no sweeter illustration for the passage before us than the letter of this man of faith. He knows that the dangers to physical life are real, yet he rejoices. He writes as a man whose life has been united to the resurrected Lord Jesus . . . as a man who knows that Christ now lives in him. Clearly, the life he now lives in the flesh he lives by faith in the Son of God who loves him and gave

Himself for him.

Friends, how will the anemic church in the US needs of a legion of such men and women in order to be revived! Will you be one of them?

Main Idea: Christ Jesus dwells in us. We are forever united to Him in His death and resurrection. The life we now live in our physical body, we live by faith in the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Four Joyful Changes That We Experience Through Faith

Change #1: We do not stand condemned, but justified before God.

As we noted from our last study in Galatians 2, Paul is confronting Peter for caving in to the pressures of the circumcision party. Peter is withdrawing his fellowship away from Gentile believers in order to please these false brothers.

Paul confronts Peter not with social ethics, but with salvation theology. Paul unfolds the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus alone in order to bring Peter correction.

“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:16 ESV)

Justification: The legal act by which God declares the guilty sinner as innocent, indeed as righteous, in relationship to His holy Law. To be justified is to be accepted by God as though we have perfectly fulfilled His Law and have not broken it in even small ways.

The Puritans used to say, *“To be justified means to be just as if I’d never sinned.”*

God tells us plainly of a future day when we will stand before God as our Judge to give an account of every thought, word, action, motive and relationship. The LORD knows all, sees all. The Lord is infinite in righteousness and hates every sin that defies His holy Name.

“God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.” (Psalm 7:11 [ESV](#))

“And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:13 [ESV](#))

*“on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”
(Romans 2:16 [ESV](#))*

“So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12 [ESV](#))

For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:30-31 [ESV](#))

The day of our accounting is drawing near. It will come upon us more quickly than we can imagine. But that day is as sure as yesterday. **That day is not cloudy with a chance of meatballs. That day is set on God’s calendar and will not be moved or delayed. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!** Those who have no fear of standing before God in their sins are those who have no understanding of what that will be like! That day will be filled with terror of what is to come.

Yet praise God for His Gospel! Those who are justified through faith in Jesus need not fear. That day will be the best day we have ever had in our whole existence.

Those who are not justified will stand condemned before the LORD. That day will be the worst day one could ever have in their whole existence.

Friends, Jesus extends to you an invitation to come to Him in faith and be declared righteous through His accomplishment on the cross. He offers you forgiveness of your sin so that you will stand before Him as blameless. He offers to clothe you with His righteousness so that your garments are white without blemish. Will you receive Him?

Change #1: We do not stand condemned, but justified before God.

Change #2: We died to the Law and become alive to God.

Some people in Paul’s day did not like the message of the Gospel of grace. They are bothered that the Law of God is completely set aside as a means to gain points with God . . . points that could be cashed in with God on the Day of Judgment.

So they argued against justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, *“Hey, if God justifies bad sinners, why should anyone try to obey God at all? Your message encourages people to break the Law by stripping the Law of*

its threats of future judgment. This Gospel you preach is dangerous and only makes people sin more!"

Paul's first response is a very firm and likely incensed, "Certainly not!"

"But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!" (Galatians 2:17 [ESV](#))

Our justification by faith alone does not make us careless about sinning against the LORD. No accusation is farther from the truth!

Why not? Because our justification is always accompanied by our regeneration. When God declares us righteous through faith in Jesus, God also makes us alive in our soul. God unites us to His Son so that Jesus' life is INSIDE of US. When a person is UNITED for Jesus the Messiah, that person is forever changed . . . radically changed . . . gloriously changed.

When we believe in Jesus as our Messiah, our LEGAL STANDING before the Lord does change! Praise God for that! BUT our legal standing is not the ONLY THING that changes when we believe in Jesus. The change in our legal standing is accompanied by a change in our inner person.

"For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God." (Galatians 2:19 [ESV](#))

Through the Law's condemnation, Paul realized that the Law only condemned him and could never save him. The Law taught Paul that he could never be his own Savior. He needed Someone Else who fulfilled the Law's demands for him. The Law helped Paul look to Jesus as his Savior and Lord. *"For through the Law, I died to the Law."*

Why is dying to the Law so important? "So that I might live to God." Not "so that I might do whatever I want to do." But dying to the Law is necessary for us to live to God.

When we grasp Jesus by faith, we die to the Law and we live to God.

To be dead to the Law means that we . . .
do not look to the Law for our validation.
no longer look to the Law to enable us to live holy lives.
no longer look to the Law to free us from sin's guilt and power.
no longer look to the Law to draw us near to God.
no longer look to the Law to be the ground of our fellowship together.
no longer look to the Law to grant us acceptance into God's family.

no longer look to the Law for our freedom from future judgment.

To be alive to God means that we . . .

do look to Jesus for our validation.

do look to Jesus for the power to live holy lives.

do look to Jesus to free us from sin's guilt and power.

do look to Jesus to draw us near to God.

do look to Jesus to be the ground and center of our fellowship together.

do look to Jesus to grant us acceptance into God's family.

do look to Jesus for our freedom from future judgment.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves . . . but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory." (2 Corinthians 3:4-11 [ESV](#))

Too many believers today are still looking to the Law to provide what the Law never could provide.

We are looking for the next set of life principles from a self-help book. We are looking for the next spiritual discipline. We are looking for the next set of higher standards. We are looking for the next new worship song. We are looking for a better understanding of marriage, gender roles, political theory or parenting tips.

Friends, if we desire true flourishing in our soul, we need to abide in Jesus. If we desire power to overcome sin habits, we need for Jesus' Spirit to fill us and lead us. If we long for God's light to shine out of us, we need Jesus continually shining His light in us.

The Law cannot produce light. The Law can only expose the darkness. The Law cannot bring forth life. The Law can only convict us as dead in our sins.

Jesus alone produces light and life! The Good News is that Jesus offers Himself to us.

By in abiding in Him, we will bear much fruit! But apart from Him . . . disconnected from Him, we can do nothing!

Revival will not come into our church through the Law, but through Jesus. Renewal will not flow from stone tablets, but from the Spirit of the living God.

As we run the race that God sets before us today, we are right to fix our eyes upon Jesus. He is the One who gave us entrance into this race as we place our faith in Him. He is the One who will carry us all the way across the finish line. Jesus is not LESS concerned about active sin in our lives. But He is MORE powerful to help us overcome sin by His Spirit who dwells within us.

Friend, are you alive to God? If so, let us abide this morning in Jesus' presence and in His power. In this way, we will experience His fruit of loving Him and loving one another well. These two are the fulfillment of all the Law!

Change #1: We do not stand condemned, but justified before God.

Change #2: We died to the Law and become alive to God.

Change #3: We give up control of our lives and now Christ lives in us.

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20 [ESV](#))

When we place our faith in Jesus, **God joins us in union with Jesus.** This union is not imaginary, but real. **Yes, this union is spiritual and not physical.** Yet in reality, God joins the believer to Christ in a way that is mysterious and wonderful. The union is such that the believer will forever say, *"Christ is in me and I am in Christ."*

Because we are united to Jesus, we spiritually experience both Jesus' death and Jesus' life . . . we experience Jesus' crucifixion and Jesus' resurrection. That means that we no longer live the kind of lives we USED to live before we are united to Jesus. We live lives that are new . . . **new in regard to direction, values, priorities, investment of time and money, relationships, worship.** EVERYTHING becomes new because Jesus has taken up residence in our hearts. Jesus DWELLS within us.

When Paul says, "I have been crucified with Jesus. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who live IN ME." **He is saying something about the keys of ownership being transferred from our self to the LORD Jesus.**

Truth: When Jesus enters and takes residence within us, He does not come as a visitor. Part of the deal to having Jesus dwell within us is that Jesus comes as the owner. Jesus does not dwell in our hearts in a manner in which He abides by

our decisions. Jesus dwells in our hearts in a manner in which we voluntarily turn all of our decisions over to Him.

Someone responds, “Wow!?! That is A LOT of trust to give someone!” YES, it requires complete trust! Which is WHY Paul adds at the end of verse 20, “*And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (Galatians 2:20 [ESV](#)”).

Friends, when we give control of our lives over to Jesus, we are giving control over to One who is infinitely more wise, eternally more knowledgeable than we are. He is the Son of God! He knows much better HOW to lead our lives than we do! He knows the future. He understands everything about us. He sovereignly works all things to the eternal good of those who love Him.

BUT MORE, we give control of our lives over to someone who loves us perfectly, unconditionally, eternally. We never need to fear that Jesus will get upset with us and in frustration, do us harm. How much does Jesus love us? “He gave Himself for me.”

Question: Can every believer say, “*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” Is that the experience of every follower of Jesus?

Answer: Yes! And no.

Yes, every follower of Jesus comes to Him in faith and is joined by the Spirit to Jesus. Every follower becomes a new creation . . . the old has passed away and everything becomes new . . . the self-life dies and the Holy Spirit life awakens in us. That transformation is the work of God that happens at the beginning of our faith story. YES. Every follower of Jesus resonates with Galatians 2:20 because we have experienced its truth.

But no. Many believers live BELOW their standing before the Lord. They have experienced this transformation AND YET they do not daily walk by faith. Many are still allowing their old self to sit in the driver seat and steer the car of their life. Many move Jesus from being behind the wheel over to sitting in the passenger seat. This terrible condition is expressed by the old timey bumper sticker, “Jesus is my co-pilot.” How fatal is that idea! **If Jesus is only my co-pilot, then I can still crash my plane!**

Paul urges us away from Jesus being co-pilot in Ephesians 4:

*assuming that you have heard about him (the Messiah) and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **to put off your old self**, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, . . . **and to put on the new self**, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:21-24 **ESV**)*

If we are to realize the joy of Galatians 2:20, we must actively and consciously PUT OFF our old self and PUT ON the new self. Our old self keeps trying to get back in the driver’s seat. And we must say, “No, Jesus has the keys to the home of my heart now. He is in charge.”

I love how Paul wrestles with explaining this part of our new life. “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I live.” Yes, I am still me. “And yet not I, but Christ lives in me.” While I am still me, I am a changed me. My life is really not my own any more. Christ has entered and now dwells in me and He is the One who is governing my life. So if you meet me, you might say, “You are a different person.” Yes. I am really the same person, yet I am a new person too. Jesus makes me a different person.”

Illustration: My mom encouraged me to read a little booklet when I was in 6th or 7th grade. My Heart Christ’s Home by Robert Munger. I commend the whole booklet to you! But allow me to read an excerpt.

One evening, I invited Jesus Christ into my heart. What an entrance He made! It was not a spectacular, emotional thing, but very real. Something happened at the very center of my life. He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire on the hearth and banished the chill. He started music where there had been stillness, and He filled the emptiness with His own loving, wonderful fellowship. I have never regretted opening the door to Christ and I never will.

In the joy of this new relationship, I said to Jesus Christ, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be Yours. I want to have You settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to You. Let me show You around."

The Study

The first room was the study—the library. In my home, this room of the mind is a very small room with very thick walls. But it is a very important room. In a sense, it is the control room of the house. He entered with me and looked around at the books in the bookcase, the magazines upon the table, the pictures on the walls.

As I followed His gaze, I became uncomfortable. Strangely, I had not felt self-conscious about this before, but now that He was there looking at these things, I was embarrassed. Some books were there that His eyes were too pure to behold. On the table were a few magazines that

a Christian had no business reading. As for the pictures on the walls— the imaginations and thoughts of the mind—some of these were shameful. Red-faced, I turned to Him and said, "Master, I know that this room needs to be cleaned up and made over. Will You help me make it what it ought to be?"

"Certainly!" He said. "I'm glad to help you. First of all, take all the things that you are reading and looking at which are not helpful, pure, good and true, and throw them out! Now, put on the empty shelves the books of the Bible. Fill the library with Scripture and meditate on it day and night. As for the pictures on the walls, you will have difficulty controlling these images, but I have something that will help."

He gave me a full-size portrait of Himself. "Hang this centrally, . . . on the wall of the mind." I did, and I have discovered through the years that when my thoughts are centered upon Christ Himself, His purity and power cause impure thoughts to back away. So He has helped me to bring my thoughts under His control.

In the rest of the booklet, Jesus then enters the dining room where the appetites are satisfied . . . the living room where relationships grow . . . the workroom where energies are spent . . . the rec room where fun and joy is pursued . . . and finally the hall closet where secret things are kept.

Friends, we are right to ask Jesus to enter every part of our lives and to ask Him to tell us what we need to be done for Him to be at home in our hearts! After all, Jesus is now the OWNER!

Would you take some time and pray over each room of your heart?

Would you ask Jesus to speak truth so that you will live your new life by faith and that He would be at home in every room? We will experience change as we open our hearts each day to Jesus . . . as we make some time for Him to lead us through each room of our soul and show us where He is going to make some big changes.

I believe Jesus Himself is the path to life transformation. Our own flesh has no power to make the necessary changes to make our lives beautiful and fit for God's presence. But this is precisely the work that Jesus loves to perform in us!

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Change #4: We live by faith in Jesus and no longer by faith in the Law.

"And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20b [ESV](#))

To live by faith in Jesus means that we have stopped believing that our own efforts to obey God's Law will accomplish the results we long to experience.

To live by faith in Jesus means that we have become desperate for His gracious work.

To live by faith in Jesus means that we give our energy to abiding in Him and communing with Him.

To live by faith in Jesus means that we grow to know more and more of His love and care over our lives.

To live by faith in Jesus means that we labor less to change ourselves and we labor more to nourish our love for Jesus.

To live by faith in Jesus means that we confront our prideful notion that we know what is best for our lives . . . and we yield to whatever Jesus says is best for our lives.

To live by faith in Jesus means that we listen to Him and obey Him.

To live by faith in Jesus means that every day for us is different because Jesus is present in us and with us.

In Galatians, Paul contrasts living by faith in Jesus with living by faith in God's Law. Paul instructs us that living by faith in God's Law may FEEL spiritual and righteous, but that it is VERY DIFFERENT from living life by faith in Jesus. AND that living by faith in God's Law leads us into spiritual disaster.

Why is living by faith in God's law such a soul draining way to live?

"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." (Galatians 2:21 [ESV](#))

Living by faith in God's law nullifies God's grace. That kind of life revels in our own accomplishment and NOT in God's accomplishment for us. That kind of life keeps us from experiencing the power of Jesus' resurrection . . . from the supernatural transformation of becoming like Jesus. God urges us, "Do not nullify my grace!"

Paul then explains more, *"for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."*

Jesus died because we are miserable in our sin and we have no ability to solve our own problem! What love Jesus demonstrated for us by dying in our place. Jesus'

death is the MAIN THING. Do not nullify Jesus' sacrifice for you by elevating the Law in your life!

We do not die to the Law because we are unconcerned about practical righteousness. We die to the Law because we ARE concerned about practical righteousness. We KNOW that practical righteousness is possible only as the cross of Jesus remains in the center of our life.

Another name for living by faith in God's law is legalism. The book of Galatians will confront this deadly error over and over again.

I believe that legalism is choking the life out of the evangelical church. It is a different form of legalism than the kind that Paul confronted here. But it is the same virus . . . just a different variant.

We need a fresh vision of Jesus' love, Jesus' sufficiency, Jesus' sacrifice and Jesus' majesty. And the Law will not give us such a vision. Only the Gospel will! Let us

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Conclusion:

Friends, let us consider for a moment how our life will change if we simply experience Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20 [ESV](#))

As that happens, -the bitterness we have for a person who hurt us will melt into peace.

- The selfish way we think and speak will be replaced by love for God and others.
- The sensuality we indulge will become a hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- The despair that casts a dark cloud over us will break forth into the bright sun of hope.
- The anger that grows within us over people and events will fade into calm joy.
- The desire to have what others have will give way to generosity.

-The love of money that drives so much of our hearts will become contentment in God.

-The anxious thoughts that awaken us at night will experience the protecting power of God's peace.

Jesus came to offer you and me this kind of life. Let us receive Him daily and live in the power of His resurrection.

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