

Live the New Life (1): Christ the Center

2 Corinthians 5:17 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Galatians 2:19-20 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Introduction

Let me begin my sermon with a definition of Christian: Christ's follower, *a follower of Christ*. This definition comes from Christ's own words in Matthew 10:38: He said, "and whoever does not take up the cross and **follow me** is not worthy of me" (New Revised Standard Version). In Mark 8:34, Christ said to the crowd and His disciples, "If anyone **wishes to come after Me**, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (New American Standard Bible).

You are not a Christian if you don't follow Jesus. You are not a believer in Christ unless you come after Jesus. Furthermore, you can't be a true follower of Jesus until you deny yourself, take up your cross, and live a life where your old self is dead. Neither can you claim that you are a new creation until your old self is dead and gone. Without the old self passing away, there's no new creation.

Content

Irony: the other day, I read a survey on faith in America. It says, in 2024, a vast majority of Americans claim that they believe in Christ (63% of Americans). Why then do we see so many crosses abandoned by so-called "believers" and strewn along the path to heaven? Am I exaggerating if I say that there are so many "church goers" who never deny themselves and their self is still well alive and kicking, yet they all claim that they are Christians? Are we not kidding ourselves?

Listen to the Bible truth: it says that your old self is already '**dead**,' because you too were crucified with Christ. "Wait a minute," you might say, "I have never died, let alone

being crucified!” Yes, you heard me right. Let me say it again: *your old self is dead, because you have been crucified with Christ*. Yes, you too died when Christ had died two thousand years ago at the cross. Hard to understand? Let me explain to you what I mean by that. I must go back to today’s verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Listen again what it says: *if anyone is in Christ, s/he is a new creation, behold the old has passed away* (like people passing away) *and the new has come*. It is absolutely crucial for you to understand this verse so that you may realize what makes you a new creation in Christ. It is not what you do and say, but what happened to you in Christ that makes you a new creation.

The Bible doesn’t say: if anyone prays, s/he is a new creation. Neither does it say: if anyone goes to church, s/he is a new creation. It doesn’t say: if anyone reads the Bible or prays, s/he is a new creation. It, rather, says: **If anyone is in Christ, s/he is a new creation. The old has passed away and, behold, the new has come.** What’s that supposed to mean?

The key phrase here is “in Christ.” Let me explain the meaning of being “in Christ”—a bookmark (I owe this understanding to Watchman Nee, the late Christian leader in China). Consider that Christ is the book and that we are the bookmark in the book. We know that whatever happens to the book also happens to the bookmark: if it goes in the water, the bookmark too gets wet. If the book goes through fire, so does the bookmark. Everything that happens to the book also happens to the bookmark. Same way with Christ and you: since you are in Christ, whatever happened to Christ, it too already happened to you in God’s eyes. Therefore, when Christ died to pay the wages of your sin, since you were in Him, you too died and paid the wages of your sin. When Christ resurrected three days later, since you were hidden in Christ, you too were resurrected as a new creation. That’s what it means to become a new creation in Christ.

Now, with that understanding, let’s go to Galatians 2:20 that confirms what I just said. Paul says here that he has been crucified with Christ. Do you understand now what he’s saying here? He’s in Christ, therefore, when Christ was crucified, so was he. When Christ resurrected from the dead, so did Paul. No longer is it I who lives, he declares, but Christ who lives in me. He recognizes the very important spiritual truth here that his old self is dead. His old self, his flesh, and his old master, is dead and gone forever. And, behold, the new master, Christ, has arrived. The old master has passed away and the new has come.

Let me reiterate what it means that your old self is dead. It means it is dead. It means it’s gone forever. It means you are no longer in charge of your life. You no longer serve the selfish desires of your old self. Your old self no longer calls the shots. Instead, you now listen to Christ your new boss who’s **in you** (remember Christ came into your heart

when you invited Him through prayer. Read Revelation 3:20: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me*). Who's in you now? Christ. The Messiah. The Son of God. The Lord of lords. The King of kings. He calls the shots in your life: in all you do and say. Not you. But He. By the way, don't worry. He is not a cruel dictator who takes advantage of you and serves His own needs at your expenses. Some of us have that kind of misunderstanding of Jesus (E.g. my high school friend).

Listen to me again. You never meet such a wonderful person as Jesus. He, the new boss, is the Savior who loves you so much that He died for you. He laid down His life for you. He always means nothing but the best for you: both in this life and in the life to come. That's what Paul means when he says **he lives for Christ** who lives in him. Do you hear him here? He says, he was so touched with Christ's unconditional love that he wants to serve his new boss voluntarily and willingly, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

Etch this spiritual truth in your heart: your selfish old master is out and the benevolent new master is in. You'd better celebrate this change of ownership in your life. E.g. A certain prison inmate hated himself all his life. His trouble began as soon as he was born. His mother was involved in adulterous relationship and gave birth to him. Discovering that the boy wasn't his own, the husband always hated the boy, although he never divorced his wife. As the boy was growing up, his stepfather would abuse him both verbally and emotionally every day by calling him "You carry the dirty blood in you, you son of a bitch!" All his life, the man desired to replace his "dirty" blood if possible. He actually did when he met the Lord Jesus. He replaced his dirty blood with Christ's blood and replaced his old master with the new one. He had a complete transformation and became a new creation in Christ. E.g. 2. Imagine at the center of your heart, there's a throne: whoever sits on it calls the shots in your life. When Christ sits on the throne, and you listen to Him, everything is in order. When your old self sits on the throne, and Christ serves as a "Genie in a bottle," everything in your life is in chaos.

Conclusion

Who makes you a new creation? Christ. Who is that new creation? You, because you are in Christ. There's no other way for you to become a new creation but being in Christ. You must deny yourself. Your old self must be crucified. If your old self is still alive and kicking, you are not "in Christ," then Galatians 2:20 doesn't mean anything to you. 2 Corinthians 5:17 doesn't apply to you, either. If your old self is still alive and kicking, you still serve the old master, your self.

If you want a new life, listen to what Jesus is saying: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me. Your old self, your old master, must die so that a new master may arrive. New life is only possible in Christ. There's no other way. Amen.