

Galatians 2:20 "Finding Our Identity in Christ" [**](#)

Main Idea: As we walk through the phrases of Galatians 2:20, we discover four affirmations that Paul made, that we need to make on a daily basis regarding our identity.

An Identity Crisis: So often what we *say* doesn't match how we *live*.

1. We're prone to find our identity in our connections.
2. We're prone to find our identity in our accomplishments.
3. We're prone to find our identity in our possessions.

I. Affirmation #1: I have been crucified with Christ.

- A. I did not become a Christian by adding Christ to my life.
- B. I did not become a Christian by giving my life to Christ.
- C. I became a Christian on the basis of what Christ did for me.
 1. On the cross, Christ died in my place.
 2. On the cross, I died with Christ.

II. Affirmation #2: I no longer live.

- A. That means I'm not depending on my accomplishments.
- B. That also means I'm not pursuing my agenda.

III. Affirmation #3: Christ lives in me.

- A. My Savior is personal.
- B. My Savior provides the power.

IV. Affirmation #4: I live by faith in the Son of God.

- A. To be saved I needed to put my trust in Christ.
- B. To live each day I need to do the same.
 1. I can face the day with confidence because my Savior loved me (and you too).
 2. I can face the day with confidence because my Savior gave Himself for me.

The Bottom Line: Simply put, as far as my identity goes, it's all about Christ!

I was a teenager when a counselor came to our church, and on a Sunday evening began his sermon by giving us an assignment. I'll never forget it. In fact, I'd like to give you the same assignment. He asked

us to answer the question, "Who am I?" Specifically, he told us to take a piece of paper and write down the first ten words that came to our minds as we finished the sentence, *I am _____*.

My list today could include things like... I am a husband. I am a dad. I am a pastor. I am a Browns fan. I am an Andy Griffith fan. I am an American. I am a chocoholic. I am an ice cream lover.

How about you? Go ahead, and make your own list. For the sake of time, pick the first five words or phrases that come into your mind to complete the sentence, *I am _____*.

Okay, do you have your list? Now look at it. Who are you? How do you view yourself? What's on your list? I wonder if this made it on to your page. *I am a Christian*.

I'm ashamed to say that word didn't make it on my list on that Sunday evening years ago. The word "Christian"? It just wasn't there, not because it wasn't true, for I'd become a Christian just three or four years earlier. But it wasn't on my list simply because that night I wasn't thinking in light of my identity as a Christian.

That's not the last time I've lost sight of my identity, either. And I've learned I'm not alone when it comes to spiritual amnesia. Which is why last week we began a new series called, *"It's All About Christ."* That's the kind of life that pleases our God, a life that's *all about Christ*. But that kind of life doesn't just happen. If we're not intentional, our lives won't be all about Christ, but cluttered with other things.

What's involved in living a life that's all about Christ? It starts with being in Christ. I hope that's true for you, that you've come to know the wonderful person of Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. And if it's not true, my prayer is that today you will come to know Him.

But being in Christ is just the beginning. For instance, back to your list. If the word "Christian" is on your list, where did you put it? Top of the list? Middle? Bottom? Think of it this way. When we say, "I am a Christian," we are affirming our professed identity. We are saying we are followers of Christ. We are saying we view ourselves as believing in Him and belonging to Him. But so often that profession isn't the primary influence in our self-assessment, not practically speaking. When it comes to our daily choices, there are other factors that hold more weight. And to the degree that's true, things need to change if we're going to live a life that's *all about Christ*.

Quite frankly, if we are in Christ and yet Christ isn't primary in our thinking, then we've got an identity problem, and if goes on for long it'll become an *identity crisis*. Too often what we *say* doesn't match how we *live*. We say, "I'm a Christian," but our actions say otherwise. We're so prone to find our identity in our places. For instance...

1. *We're prone to find our identity in our connections.* Like, our heritage (I'm important because I come from good stock), our friends (I'm important because I hang with the "in" crowd), our clubs or our neighborhood connections (I live in the parade of homes district). It's true. We tend to see ourselves in light of our connections.

2. *We're prone to find our identity in our accomplishments.* Our jobs, for instance (I've got fifty people working under me, so I'm important). Or the trophies on our mantle. Or our GPA. Or our kid's trophies or GPA. Quite frankly, we may say "I'm a Christian," but we're so prone to see ourselves through the lens of our accomplishments.

3. *We're prone to find our identity in our possessions.* The house we own, the car we drive, the diplomas that hang on our wall, the title in front of our name, and on it goes. Granted, there's nothing inherently wrong with houses or cars or diplomas, but God does not intend for them to be the basis of nor the driving force behind our identity.

Let me give you a biblical example of just how prone we are to have an identity crisis, even if we've known Christ for many years. The example is Peter, and the identity crisis is presented in the backdrop to today's text. The apostle Peter was a Christian, no doubt about it. And he had announced it publicly and

was even willing to go to prison for it, as we see the book of Acts. But then one day he went to church in Antioch and did something that proved he wasn't thinking like a Christian, not that day for sure, and the apostle Paul told him so, too.

According to Galatians 2:11, Paul actually opposed Peter to his face publicly. Why? In short, because what Peter said didn't match how Peter was living. Peter was spending some time in Antioch, fellowshiping with the believers there, Jew and Gentile alike. But according to verse 12, when some religious Jews from Jerusalem paid a visit, Peter's fear of man prompted him to separate himself from the Gentile Christians. He just picked up his food tray and moved to the other table, and some of the other Jewish believers followed his lead, including Barnabas. By his actions, Peter fractured the church into two camps.

Ponder that. Peter was a man who said he believed in Christ, and yet on this day in Antioch his actions weren't very Christlike. He wasn't living in light of his identity, not at the moment, for sure. Oh, he believed that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, the Savior tore down two barriers, first the barrier between the sinner and God, and also the barrier between the sinner and other sinners. And Peter even preached that message (remember his defense of going to the house of Cornelius following the conversion of the Gentiles? See Acts 11:17). Yes, Peter knew that Christ's death removed the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and he'd even taught that message himself.

But in Antioch he didn't act like he believed it. By disassociating himself from the Gentile brethren, Peter was acting as if the dividing wall was still in place. As John Stott observes, "The same Peter who had denied his Lord for fear of a maidservant now denied Him again for fear of the circumcision party. He still believed the gospel, but he failed to practice it."[1](#)

And that's exactly what Paul told him. Notice verse 14, "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

Paul saw the identity crisis and attacked it head on. He saw a brother who was thinking more about his Jewish connections than Christ, his kosher accomplishments than the cross, and his old covenant possessions rather than the new covenant implications. And what Paul saw promoted him to take immediate action.

What's ironic is that there was a time in his life when Paul was the man who avoided Gentiles, and worse. Until Christ entered his life and gave him a new identity!

And what was the new identity that Christ gave Paul? It's your identity, too, if you in Christ. Paul tells us in Galatians 2:20. In fact, Galatians 2:20 is sort of Paul's apologetic for defending his actions with Peter. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

If we're going to live lives that are all about Christ, then we need to find our identity in Christ. To help us, this morning we're going to walk through the phrases of Galatians 2:20, one by one. As we do so we will discover four affirmations that Paul made and that we need to make on a daily basis regarding our identity.

I. Affirmation #1: I have been crucified with Christ.

Paul is very autobiographical here and in this one verse uses the pronoun "I" four times and "me" three times. He begins by affirming something that happened to him in the past that has tremendous present tense implications (he uses a perfect tense verb), "I have been crucified with Christ."

That's strange. Crucified victims usually didn't live to talk about their experience. When you're crucified, you're killed. What does Paul mean when he says that he was crucified with Christ? Was he one

of the two thieves nailed to a tree next to Jesus? Is he saying that he literally died on a cross? No.

As the context indicates, Paul is talking about being crucified with Christ *to the law*. Remember, he just shared about his confrontation with Peter in Antioch (that's verses 11-14). When an apostle publicly rebukes another apostle, he'd better have some solid ground for his actions. Paul gives that solid theological ground in verses 15-19, as he discussed the believer's relationship to the old covenant law.

The question is, so is the believer free from the law or not? Can he eat unkosher foods with Gentile sinners or not? Certain men from James said *no, he is not and cannot*. But Paul said *yes*, and he rebuked Peter and the rest, insisting that to say *no* was to undermine the very essence of the gospel.

But that raises another question. Why don't we have to keep the ceremonial requirements of the law? God gave them, didn't He? Yes. So why aren't we still bound by them? The answer, says Paul, is that something has happened to the believer's relationship with the law. Look at verse 19, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God." Paul said I'm not bound by the old covenant law any longer because *I died to the law*.

He died? When did that happen? When did Paul die, and specifically, when did he die to the law which previously bound him? He tells us in verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ (literally, "With Christ I have been crucified")."

That's how Paul saw himself. *I'm a dead man*. That was his identity. What happened to Christ happened to me. *I've had nails driven through my hands, and I've hung on a cross until my heart stopped beating*. He doesn't mean literally, and he doesn't mean mystically, but he does mean in reality. *I have been crucified with Christ*.

Is that the way you view yourself? I must confess that far too often I don't think in those terms. I don't go through my day affirming, "I have been crucified with Christ," but I need to.

Answer this. Is it possible to be a Christian and not be crucified with Christ? Listen to these verses...

Galatians 5:24 "Those who belong to Christ Jesus *have crucified* the sinful nature with its passions and desires." If you've become a Christian, a crucifixion has occurred involving your sinful nature, your flesh. Those who belong to Christ have nailed to the cross their sinful nature.

Galatians 6:14 "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world *has been crucified* to me, and I to the world." I have been crucified to the world, says Paul. I have died, and I boast in the instrument that caused my death. When and how did that happen? Our next verse is critical...

Romans 6:6, "For we know that *our old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." When was my old self crucified? It was crucified *with him*, that is, with Christ.

So can a person be a Christian and not be crucified with Christ? No. And isn't that what Jesus said in Mark 8:34? "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself *and take up his cross* and follow me." He didn't say, *put a cross necklace around your neck*. He said, *take up your cross*. And every first century hearer knew what that meant. To take up your cross meant you had to die.

Friends, Jesus offers us life, eternal life. In fact, the life He offers is His life as we'll see momentarily in our text. But Jesus says that to experience His life we must be crucified, that is, we must *die*.

I read one survey that said that 76 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian—that's 159 million people.^[2] Do you think that the average self-professed Christian in America would agree that when he or she became a Christian, he or she died?

Think about the implications of Paul's first affirmation. If a Christian is a person who has been crucified with Christ, then...

A. I did not become a Christian by adding Christ to my life. Jesus didn't come to patch up MY life. But isn't that the expectation that many of the 159 million Americans had when they became a "Christian"?

Sally, for instance, was overwhelmed with life's problems. She wanted more peace and fulfillment in her life. "Ask Jesus to come into your heart," a friend told her. "He'll give you a new start." And so Sally asked Jesus to come in and added Jesus to her cluttered life. Is she now a Christian? We can't answer that question, not definitively, for we can't see the condition of Sally's heart. But here's a question we can answer. Is that how Paul became a Christian, by merely adding Jesus to his life? Remember the wheel illustration from a few months ago? Does Jesus intend to be a spoke in the wheel of our lives or the hub around which our lives revolve?

Here's another implication. If a Christian is someone who has been crucified with Christ, then...

B. I did not become a Christian by giving my life to Christ. And isn't that the way gospel invitations are often presented? "Walk this aisle. Pray this prayer. Give your life to Jesus, and you'll be a Christian heading for heaven." But wait. Is that what Paul said, let alone Jesus? Do I become a Christian by giving something to Jesus? Please don't misunderstand. Yes, Jesus deserves our all, and we ought to give our all to Him. But that's not how we become a Christian. How then? Listen to Paul. He says...

C. I became a Christian on the basis of what Christ did for me. "I have been crucified with Christ." According to Paul two things happened on that cross of Jesus two thousand years ago.

1. *On the cross, Christ died in my place.* He "loved me and gave himself for me," Paul says at the end of the verse. A substitution took place on the cross. The wages of my sin is death. And a death occurred. On the cross Christ died in my place, says Paul.

Paul loves to talk about the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Christ and we find the truth tucked away in all of his letters. **Romans 4:25** "He was delivered over to death for our sins." **Romans 5:8** "While we were still sinners, Christ died *for us*." **1 Corinthians 15:3** "Christ died for our sins." **2 Corinthians 5:21** "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us."

It's true, says Paul. A substitution took place. On the cross, Christ died in my place. But something else happened there, too.

2. *On the cross, I died with Christ.* Not only did Christ die on the cross, but "I have been crucified *with Christ*." In a very real sense, in the mind of God I was there in Christ and with Christ on the cross, says Paul. It's called the doctrine of our union with Christ, and it's explained more fully by Paul in Romans 6.

Romans 6:5-8 "If we have been *united with him like this in his death*, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that *our old self was crucified with him* so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if *we died with Christ*, we believe that we will also live with him."

My friend, if you are a Christian today and heading for heaven, here's why. It's not because you've given your life to Christ, and certainly not because you've merely added Him to your life. It's because you have put your trust in Him and in what He has done for you. On the basis of that trust, that faith, you have been united with Him and have received the merit of His death and resurrection. And so you can say along with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ."

II. Affirmation #2: I no longer live.

The second affirmation flows out of the first. *I have been crucified with Christ.* If that's true, if I have *been crucified*, if I have *died*, then obviously *I no longer live*.

But Paul wasn't dead, was he? He was still breathing and moving and writing letters like this one to the Galatians. What does it mean to say, "I no longer live"? He's *not* talking about no longer living physically (sorry for the double negative).

The fact is, Paul saw himself as a man who died on the road to Damascus. When Jesus broke into his life and brought him to his knees, a death occurred. The old Paul died. The Jesus he met that day didn't patch up his self-esteem. That Jesus gave him a new identity. That's how Paul saw it, how he saw *himself*. *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live.*

What are the implications of saying that *I no longer live*? I'll mention two.

A. That means I'm not depending on my accomplishments. Did you have your quiet time this morning? That's good, but it's not why you're going to heaven. Did you give a generous offering to your Savior today? Again, that's a good thing to do, but it doesn't add one bit of merit to your standing before a holy God. Remember, a Christian is a person who has put his trust in the merit of Christ's accomplishments, and Christ's *alone*, for his right standing with God.

Who do you like to talk about? I'm concerned when I meet a person who calls himself a Christian who talks about himself (his job, his family, his church work, etc) but never talks about Christ. How can that be? If I no longer live, it means I'm not enamored with my accomplishments, but my Savior's.

B. That also means I'm not pursuing my agenda. A dead man doesn't have an agenda. He's not working his five year plan. He's dead. To say that *I no longer live* is to affirm that my agenda went to the grave. I have a new agenda now, one given to me by the One who gave His life for me.

If we lived in light of this second affirmation, do you realize the effect it would have on our marriages? Why do husbands and wives squabble? So often it boils down to conflicting agendas. "I want to use the tax refund to buy a new boat," says the man. "No, I want new furniture," says his wife. I want. No, I want. That's a recipe for a fight, for sure.

Answer this. What is it that people who are *no longer living* want? They don't have an agenda, do they? Beloved, what a difference it would make if as husbands and wives we would die to our agendas and together pursue Christ's agenda! That brings us to our third affirmation. One, *I have been crucified with Christ*. Two, *I no longer live*. Three...

III. Affirmation #3: Christ lives in me.

I no longer live, but there is life within me, for *Christ lives in me*. Ponder what that statement reveals to us about our Savior.

A. My Savior is personal. *Christ lives in me*. The person of Jesus Christ, my Creator and Redeemer, lives in me, His redeemed creature. He lives in *me*, a tiny, insignificant, former rebel who is one of the nearly seven billion people who inhabits this planet. He lives in *me*.

That was a breathtaking thought to Paul. He, of course, used to be Christ's enemy (as did I, says the Bible), but Christ entered his life, *his* life. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," Paul wrote to Timothy, "Of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that *in me*, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life (1 Tim. 1:15-16)."

To say that Christ lives in me is to affirm that my Savior is *personal*. It also indicates that...

B. My Savior provides the power. If I've been crucified and no longer live, then who energizes my life? Who makes it possible for me to live the kind of life that pleases God? My Savior does. He provides the power. Christ *lives* in me.

You say, "I thought Christ returned to heaven." He did. "But I thought He was sitting on His Father's heavenly throne." He is. Yet right now the omnipresent Savior is living in you if you've been crucified with Him.

How can that be? Paul gives a fuller explanation in Romans 8:9-11, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, *if the Spirit of God lives in you*. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. *But if Christ is in you*, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And *if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you*, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, *who lives in you*."

Who lives in you? The Spirit does—verse 9. Who is in you? Christ is—verse 10. The Holy Spirit has come to represent Christ in His people. And if the Spirit of Christ is living in you, what follows? He gives life to our mortal bodies—verse 11. Yes, through His Spirit my Savior provides the power.

That's my identity, beloved, and yours too if you have trusted in Christ. And what's true, I must affirm. And what I affirm, I must appropriate in my daily life. And that brings us to the fourth affirmation. One, *I have been crucified with Christ*. Two, *I no longer live*. Three, *Christ lives in me*.

IV. Affirmation #4: I live by faith in the Son of God.

Notice how Paul finishes the verse, "The life I live in the body (the Greek is *en sarki*; ESV & KJV 'in the flesh'), I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

That's interesting. In his second affirmation Paul said, *I no longer live*. But he did live, for here he says, "The life I live." Is that a contradiction? No. Here are two truths that work in balance. To say that *I no longer live* could lead to passivity if taken out of context, as the "Let go and let God" approach tends to do. Paul did not live a passive life. He strategized. He made plans. He worked hard in carrying out those plans, as three missionary journeys in the book of Acts verify. He died, yes, but he also *lived*.

The question is, how did he live? Was it by his own ingenuity and strength and for his own agenda? No, if that was the case he might have separated from the Gentiles along with Peter. No, Paul died to that, he was *crucified* to that. How then did he live? Hear his answer: *The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God*. Because of what happened on the cross, Paul died to a works-based, merit-based life, and began living a faith-based life.

And who was the object of his faith? Did Paul face the challenges of his day by looking deep within his soul and believing in himself? "You can do it, Paul! You can solve that problem. You can fix that relationship. You can conquer that habit. You can accomplish that project. You just need to believe in yourself!" That's the kind of counsel you might hear in your company pep-talks, and you'll certainly read it in the self-help books, but it wasn't counsel that Paul heeded. The object of his faith was not himself. Who was it? *I live by faith in the Son of God*.

Paul says he put his faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He's not talking now about faith for salvation. He's talking about faith for living. Yes, it's true that...

A. To be saved I needed to put my trust in Christ. "For by grace are you saved *through faith*," says Ephesians 2:8. My Christian life began the day I put my faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That's faith past tense. But know this...

B. To live each day I need to do the same. I need to affirm with Paul, *I live by faith in the Son of God*. That's present tense faith. And that's what I need when I face that challenge at work, or go to work on that nasty habit that displeases my God. The solution isn't to believe in myself. It's to believe *in Him*.

"But isn't that kind of risky?" you say. And you say that because you've been burnt by trusting others

in the past. It's a valid question. Why should I stop trusting in myself and put my total faith in the person of Jesus Christ as I live each day? Let's let Paul answer the question. Why, Paul, why do you do it? What motivates you to believe wholeheartedly in Christ? His answer? I live by faith in the Son of God *who loved me and gave himself for me.*

There are the reasons, two of them. Paul says he entrusted his life to Christ every day because of what he knew about Christ. The first reason—He loved me. And the second—He gave Himself for me.

Beloved, there's the key to confident living. It's not looking within yourself. It's looking to Christ, and it's meditating on what He has done for you. Let's follow Paul's example here.

1. *I can face the day with confidence because my Savior loved me (and you too).* I say, "you too," because that's where Peter got off track. He forgot that Jesus loved the Gentiles too, which is why separating from them warranted Paul's rebuke. How can you refuse to eat with people who are loved by the Savior? But there's more...

2. *I can face the day with confidence because my Savior gave Himself for me.* Again, Paul has in mind the cross, where on that cross the Savior gave Himself up to die in my place, for my benefit, *for me.*

Brothers and sisters, who are we? If we're in Christ, this is our identity and we need to affirm it and live in light of every day. *I am crucified with Christ. I no longer live. Christ lives in me. I live by faith in the Son of God.*

Norman Clayton put this affirmation into music when he penned the following...

*My hope is in the Lord
Who gave Himself for me,
And paid the price of all my sin at Calvary.*

*No merit of my own
His anger to suppress.
My only hope is found in Jesus' righteousness.*

*And now for me He stands
Before the Father's throne.
He shows His wounded hands and names me as His own.*

*His grace has planned it all,
'Tis mine but to believe,
And recognize His work of love and Christ receive.*

Chorus

For me He died,

For me He lives,

And everlasting life and light He freely gives.

So here's the bottom line. *Simply put, as far as my identity goes, it's all about Christ!*

******Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 52.

[2] http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_prac2.htm