

Galatians 2:20—What does it mean to live upon Christ? (part one)

By Jay Wegter

Countless Christians see justification ONLY as how we get into the Christian life and not as the essential foundation and motive for all of our efforts in service, sanctification, and mortification of sin.

Justification is the ‘staging area’—for all of our working, walking, warring, and witnessing. Justification brought into the present (into daily living by faith) gives us ‘grace motives’ for all we do. Without justification central (Christ’s imputed righteousness), our flesh teams up with the law in a coup against the glory and honor of Christ. In this concluding article of our two part series, we will examine for a moment what this fleshly opposite or carnal ‘mirror image’ of Galatians 2:20 looks like. If we do not reckon our co-crucifixion with Christ, the self (the old “I”) will imagine that a massive renovation or overhaul of self will do the trick—as opposed to what God has done in Christ: *judicially condemned the Adamic man to be slain with Christ*. So, when we fail to reckon co-crucifixion, we will continue to be stunned at the impotence of self. These bouts of self-disillusionment are not negative if they point us to Christ! All of our resolutions to do better (apart from ongoing faith in the gospel) will only lead to dejection and failure). Next, if we do not define ourselves by union with Christ (“I am alive in Christ—I have His imputed righteousness”) we will define ourselves by our sin and by our efforts at active righteousness. This trajectory always is filled with preoccupation with self and its performances or lack thereof. With the law ruling the conscience instead of justification in the gospel, efforts at service, obedience, and mortification of sin will be contaminated with a legal motivation (the enhancement of self and my acceptance with God). As a consequence, rather than Christ’s honor being the motive for every Christian endeavor, the advancement, promotion, and glory of self will be our covert incentive. When things go well; self will get the ‘honor’—when things go poorly, self becomes the whipping boy in a painful string of recriminations. This legal/performance orientation produces self-reliance rather than Christ-reliance.

If we are not animated by His love, we will be animated by our goals as they rotate in orbit around self. Our ‘mission’ will drift off of the center of Christ expressing His purpose and personality through me. Depressing isn’t it! A little news of these consequences goes a long way. Let’s focus instead upon God’s glory in our salvation. That Christ is our covenant; our status; our right-standing with God. All that God is toward us in Christ is our ‘meat and drink’—the fountain of life; the constant nourishment of soul we need. Only the Person and work of Christ can bring our conscience to a full stop—to a place rest, refreshment and peace. No other means of conscience ‘book keeping’ will avail. What are you preaching to your conscience today? Is the inner conversation you are having in your mind driven by faith in Christ’s perfect atonement, OR, is the dialog about your performance? Galatians 2:20 bids us to live upon Christ instead of upon an ‘arm of flesh’ (Jer 17:5). The legal pronouncement of justification is what has reconciled us to God and made us His friends forever (2 Cor 5:18-21). The Apostle Paul shows us that by union with Christ, we are alive in the Son of God—and all that He is, what He has done, and what He is doing belong to us. Through ongoing faith in the gospel, we can learn to live upon Christ and be controlled and transformed by His redeeming love for us.