

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Secure in our Surety

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4)

Scripture frequently uses "life and death" to teach us about our spiritual relationship and standing with God in Christ. (It also uses this analogy to remind us of our former state in sin, as in Ephesians 2:1) Paul builds on the life-death analogy with more detail in Galatians 2:20.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

In this verse, Paul not only indicates that he is dead, but that he is crucified with Christ. Notice that Paul uses the present tense verb, "I **am** crucified with Christ..." not "I **was** crucified with Christ..." His words emphatically direct us to consider the amazing Bible truth that every heir of eternal promise was legally and vitally identified with and in the Lord Jesus Christ in His atoning, substitutionary death and in His resurrection. First century crucifixion delivered death; it was a favorite Roman method of executing non-citizen criminals. "...nevertheless I live..." contradicts every idea a first century reader could imagine when associated the term with "I am crucified."

In both passages, death and life come together as integral dimensions of our present standing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We appear as dead **before** we live. The appearance of unusual order in Scripture should always prompt closer examination. Our study passage and Galatians 2:20 demonstrate exceptional order that commands our study. In one sentence in two quite different contexts, Paul starts with us being dead, but immediately deals with us as being permanently and securely alive in Christ.

In the inner workings of God's grace, God begins His work while we are dead in our sins and dead to any desire toward God or toward God's moral character. In the new birth, the Holy Spirit imparts eternal, spiritual life to us, transforming us from dead to God to alive in Christ to God. It seems in our present context Paul begins at that point. We are now alive in Christ, securely and eternally so, through the work of the Lord Jesus

Christ, our Surety. Whereas we were alive to sin and to this world's allurements, we are now alive to God and dead to those base elements. The life-death compass has reversed fields. Whereas it formerly pointed consistently in the direction of sin, it now consistently points us in the direction of God and of righteousness.

Paul deals with both a present and a future reality in these verses. Our present dead-alive situation explains our convictions and our hunger for God and for His goodness. We now live in keen sensitivity to God and to His ways and commandments. The permanently residing Holy Spirit has altered our conscience by the impact of His law written in our heart and mind. Sometimes well meaning believers diminish or wholly dismiss the permanent impact of the Holy Spirit on a regenerated child of God. They teach a shallow, if not wholly superficial, impact on us in the new birth. According to this teaching, God effectually, irresistibly moves us in every act of faith and obedience that we ever perform. However, on occasions, mysterious and never explained by advocates of this idea, God withdraws from us, leaving us to ourselves. Since in their minds, the new birth made no permanent impact on us, and since they believe that we are as fully and totally depraved after regeneration as before, they allege that, in the absence of the Holy Spirit, we revert to our totally depraved state and cannot possibly do anything other than sin. In other words, they teach that the Holy Spirit comes and goes, occasionally residing in us and, during that time, controlling our behavior for good. However, not unlike a rabbit seeking nightly shelter inside an old hollow log, when the Holy Spirit departs from us, we remain as unaltered by Him as the log does by the rabbit's overnight stay. This abominable teaching ignores the profound and consistent teaching of Scripture that the Holy Spirit resides in us permanently from the new birth until our death, when we go to glory with Him. If we remained totally depraved after the new birth, there would be no churches, no preachers, and no righteous people in the world. This world would be a dreadfully frightening place to live.

Scripture, this context included, consistently teaches that the Holy Spirit in the new birth effects a profound and permanent change in us. His permanent residence within transforms us from total depravity in the family of fallen man into the glorious light and liberty of the children of God. We now belong to--and live in--the family of God. We are indeed "A Child of the King." Scripture never teaches that God on mysterious occasions temporarily withdraws the Holy Spirit from us, and thereby reverses us to our former depraved state where we can--and desire--only to sin. Such teaching clearly contradicts Paul's emphatic exhortation in our study verses and context to "set" and to "seek," to put off our "grave clothes" and to put on our "grace clothes."

While we live, we are both dead and alive; and our life remains securely hidden and protected from danger or loss "...with Christ in God." We enjoy a present and permanent standing and transformation in Christ. In teaching a similar lesson, John will challenge the absurd notion of sinless perfection in our present conduct. (1 John 1:8-10) John will further acknowledge our present struggle by reminding us of the one and only appropriate reaction when we do sin--as we surely shall. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous..." (1 John 2:1) In this way, Scripture consistently teaches us to strive against sin, never to rationalize it or try to justify it. At the same time, Scripture equally reminds us that when we realize that we have sinned, as we surely shall, we should immediately run to the shelter and defense of our Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. In all our struggles with sin in this life, the Holy Spirit resides and urges us to resist sin and to pursue righteousness, to flee Satan's alluring enticements, and to run to the shadow of our Great Rock. (Isaiah 32:2)

The allegation that a person who is "really born of God" does not practice "habitual sin" finds questionable support in John's writings, or anywhere else in Scripture for that matter. In the first chapter of First John, John challenges any claim of sinless perfection. In the first verses of the second chapter, he tells us how to deal with those occasions of sin in our life. Consider this dilemma. What constitutes "habitual sin"? If we sin once a week, living in near sinless perfection for the remainder of the week, would you consider weekly lapses, weekly sins, to be "habitual"? How about daily sins? You make it for twenty three hours and thirty minutes, but then you slip and for thirty minutes a day you fall into sin. Is that thirty minutes sufficient to constitute "habitual" sin? Slippery slope theology that relies on human behavior assures slippery slope outcomes. No thank you, please.

At the same time that Paul explains the powerful and present impact of our securely hidden and protected life, he also reminds us that the blessings of our life in Christ are not confined to this life or to the present time.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Paul leaves no doubt as to His future appearing. Nor does he leave any doubt that we shall appear "**with him.**" Further Paul reminds us that our appearance with Him at that time shall not be a time of uncertainty or doubt. Because He hid our life securely "...with Christ in God," God assures us that our future appearance "with him" shall also be an appearance "**in glory.**" As He appears in glory, we shall share in that glory.

We cannot fully grasp what heaven shall be. Admittedly, the details of that wondrous place and state transcend our minds' comprehension. However, that limitation fully acknowledged, we should never plead total ignorance regarding what awaits us. Job rejoices that, despite death's ravages on his mortal body, that same body shall be raised; he rejoices that "...**in my flesh** shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and **mine eyes shall behold,** and not another..." (Job 19:25-27) David rejoices in prophecy of Jesus' bodily resurrection that "...in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more." (Psalm 16:11) David also rejoices that "...I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

Paul consistently teaches that God's predestination sets this singular goal as its object; "...to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Romans 8:29) Not a one of us shall ever arrive at that goal in this life, so it is a practical reality that Paul does not have such an impossible task in mind with these words. If our present sanctification, our growth in spiritual maturity or discipleship, is the object of predestination that Paul here teaches, we must acknowledge that God failed to accomplish what He predestinated. Simply stated, all of those whom God loved eternally, justified in His Son, and whom He shall glorify at the Second Coming, do not manifest this discipleship fully or equally in time. Paul leaves no such idea in his teachings in Romans 8:29 or in any other passage where he teaches on God's predestination. However, he writes in the strong conviction of the Holy Spirit that our Lord Jesus has risen from the dead and thereby has "...become the firstfruits of them that slept." (1 Corinthians 15:20) Firstfruits of them that slept--firstborn among many brethren--the point is the same. On Resurrection Day, we shall witness the

perfect success of God's predestination in His Son.

We then must confront a demanding challenge. If God predestinated that we become like Christ in our behavior in this life, but we never realize that likeness, we must acknowledge that God's predestination has failed. Although He predestinated us to be presently and behaviorally like Christ, we never arrive at that image, so God's predestination failed. Or else God predestinated that we merely become a little like Christ, but not fully so. On Resurrection Day, will we be raised and made "a little" like Jesus? Partially like Him? When Jesus died for our justification, did He die for just a few of our sins, but not all of them? If God's predestination in Romans 8:29 has failed, how can we make any kind of convincing case that His justification, calling, or glorification haven't also failed? I suggest that Paul in Romans 8:29 has our eternal conformation in mind, how we shall arise literally and physically from the grave at the last day, not our behavioral image in this life.

Paul acknowledges that natural intellect and abilities cannot possibly grasp "...the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9) However, in the next verse Paul turns his focus onto **what we can now know** about our future glory, "But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit...." (1 Corinthians 2:10) The very things that our natural intellect cannot grasp, God through the permanently residing Holy Spirit in us reveals. We now live securely in our Surety. Our eternal future is sealed and preserved in the Lord Jesus Christ. Consistent with our eternal joy, Paul urges us to "Seek" and to "Set" in the here and now, to live our Christian life in harmony with our eternal standing. We joyfully anticipate His resurrecting us to see Him in glory. Let's walk with Him now.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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