

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past few years, most of us have been at least a little bit concerned about losing our identity.

- With the widespread use of credit cards, and the internet, and online banking, we certainly keep our eyes on the news, and we are at least aware of the danger of living in a digital age.
- Perhaps, some of you have experienced this for yourselves, and you (of all people) know the feeling of being violated and you know how frustrating and how difficult it is to get your finances back in order.

This crime is especially exasperating because it goes far beyond the theft of a car radio or a lawn ornament, because what has been stolen is literally our identity.

- In this country, one of the most common proofs of our identity is our drivers' license.
- We are also identified by our Social Security number.
- Most of us have that number memorized, because it is used so often.
- But if it falls into the wrong hands, so many bad things can happen.

This morning, I would like for us to study the concept of identity—not with the idea of it being stolen, but with the idea of it being given up voluntarily.

- According to the dictionary, identity is *“the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.”*
- With that in mind, it is interesting that the Bible refers to our identity, our distinguishing character, our personality...being changed.
- This morning, I'd like for us to consider a powerful verse in **Galatians 2**.

Early in **Galatians 2**, Paul explains how he had to correct the Apostle Peter.

- Peter knew that Jews and Gentiles were equal in the sight of God.
- In fact, Peter was the one who had preached to the first non-Jewish convert.
- However, we find out here in **Galatians 2**, several years later, that Peter was giving in to the opinion of his friends and was separating himself from the Gentile Christians—even to the point where he only ate with the Christians who were Jews.
- Paul was extremely upset about that, and **Galatians 2:11** even says, *“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”*
- Paul went on to very strongly describe Peter's actions as *“hypocrisy.”*
- The situation was so bad that even Barnabas (a very faithful man) was also caught up the hypocrisy.

Certainly at this point we might expect Paul to set out with an explanation about the sin of discrimination.

- We might expect a more detailed explanation of hypocrisy.
- We might expect a condemnation of hate or pride.
- But instead, in the middle of this controversy, we find an amazing statement concerning the change of identity that Paul experienced in his own life.
- We read about the crucifixion and what that sacrifice meant to the Apostle Paul.

This morning, let's look together at **Galatians 2:20**—*“I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me.”*

As we look back over this amazing statement, I'd like to point out just a few things that will hopefully have a very direct impact on the way we live today.

I. First of all, we find that **PAUL WAS CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST**.

In other words, Paul's old way of life had died with Jesus on the cross.

- We know that when a person was crucified in the First Century, that person died.
- The Romans knew how to kill people. They were experts at putting people to death.
- Jesus died on the cross. There is no question about that. He was killed by crucifixion.
- However, Paul had not yet died.
- Paul had never been crucified, and yet he starts **verse 20** with some very powerful words—***"I have been crucified with Christ."***
- So what did Paul mean here?

Paul meant that he had completely died to his old way of living.

- Paul meant that he had obeyed the gospel.
- He was baptized by Ananias in the city of Damascus.
- At that point, he died to the old way of living.
- His old, sinful, worldly lifestyle had been put to death completely.
- His old life of ambition and selfishness had died.

He had been a great Jewish leader.

- He was one of the most brilliant men in his generation.
- He was obviously a great writer.
- He was constantly being praised by his fellow Jews.
- He was devout in his persecution of Christians.

But when Paul obeyed the gospel, all of this died.

- The old way of life was over, and as far as Paul was concerned, there was no turning back, because his old life had come completely to an end.

He refers to it again in **Romans 6**, as he says that we have been ***"baptized into Christ,"*** we have been ***"baptized into His death...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with , so that we would no longer be slaves to sin."***

- When we are baptized, we are buried with Christ, because the old life of sin has died completely.
- We are no longer slaves to sin.

In **Colossians 3:9-10**, Paul said, ***"Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him."***

- And so the ***"old self"*** has been ***"laid aside."***
- Paul is saying that he had ***lost his identity***, because the old self is gone.
- Jesus referred to this massive change in **Matthew 16:24-26**.
- Jesus said, ***"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"***

When we become Christians, we put aside the old life of slavery to sin.

- When we are buried with the Lord in baptism, those sins are washed away.
- As Paul said in **Galatians 5:24**, *“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*
- We have put those things behind us.

What caused Paul to make such a huge change in his life?

- Paul knew that Jesus had died as a substitute—that Jesus had died in his place!
- We know that the sign above the cross said, *“Jesus the Nazarene—the King of the Jews.”*
- But it should have read, **“Saul of Tarsus—For Sins Committed.”**
- All of our names should have been above the cross that day.
- All of us deserved to die, but Jesus took our place.
- And because of that, we allow ourselves to be *“crucified with Christ,”* and we put aside the sins from the past.
- No sacrifice is too great—because the Lord has taken our place on the cross.

First of all, then, Paul had been crucified with the Lord.

- There was nothing Paul could do to escape the impact of the cross in his life.
- We do the same thing today when we change our lives and set aside a life of sin.

II. As we keep our focus on **Galatians 2:20**, we also find that **CHRIST WAS LIVING IN PAUL.**

In so many ways, this seems so strange. Paul had just said that he had been crucified with Christ.

- In other words, at the point of baptism, Paul died—Paul became a dead man.
- He had taken the influence of the world out of his life. But what would take its place?
- How can someone be crucified and alive at the same time?
- ...When the old life ended, what stepped in?
- What took its place was the influence of Jesus Christ in his life.
- When Paul died with the Lord, there was a gaping hole in his heart—but that hole was immediately filled by the Lord.

We remember what Jesus said in **John 12:24**, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

- In other words, for us to grow as Christians, a death must take place, but a death alone is not enough—that death must be followed by a Christian life.

I know a fellow preacher who was once given a coffee mug that someone must have really thought applied to preaching.

- On one side is a drawing of a huge oak tree, and on the other side there is a saying, **“Every mighty oak was once a nut that stood its ground.”**
- And that is so true of the Christian life.
- That nut basically loses its life, but if it stands firm it is replaced by a magnificent tree.

And in a similar way, Christ was living in the Apostle Paul.

- In fact, he says, *“...and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God....”*
- In the next book, in **Ephesians 3:17**, Paul also refers to Christ dwelling in our hearts *“through faith.”*
- What does it mean to *“live by faith”*?

- We know from **Romans 10:17** that “...*faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*”
- Living by faith is living by God’s word!
- And so, when we live by the word of God, the Bible tells us that Christ is living through us.

When we obey the gospel and live according to the Scriptures, an incredible transformation has taken place.

- We are no longer the same people—*our identities have been changed.*
- As Paul wrote earlier in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*”
- Again, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*”
- And as he said in **Ephesians 4:24**, we are to “...*put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*”

And so in Paul’s life, we see him go from murdering Christians to building up the church.

- He went from persecuting God’s people to being persecuted for preaching the gospel.
- He went from hate to love, from no to yes, from wrong to right...because the Lord was ruling in his life!

As Paul wrote in **Romans 8:10-11**, “*If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*”

- Paul is saying here, as he did in **Galatians 2:20**, that, “...*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....*”

How did Paul know what kind of life God wanted him to live?

- He was to live it (just as we are today), “...*by faith in the Son of God*”—he was to live according to the Scriptures.
- As Jesus Himself said in **John 14:15**, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*”
- Paul lived his life by the gospel, just as we can also do today—whatever it takes to do whatever it is that God wants us to do.

III. As we keep ourselves focused on **Galatians 2:20**, there is something else that should have an impact on us this morning as we see Paul **ABSOLUTELY OVERWHELMED WITH THE LOVE THAT GOD HAD FOR HIM—PERSONALLY.**

Paul refers to, “...*the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*”

- We can almost imagine Paul being overcome with emotion here.
- In **1 Timothy 1:15**, Paul described himself as the “*foremost*” of all sinners.
- He was a persecutor of the Lord’s people. He was the worst.
- But Christ still loved Paul personally—even as a sinner.

Paul refers to the Lord, “...*who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*”

- We look very carefully at that, and we notice that Paul does not refer to Jesus, “...*who died on the cross for the sins of all people.*”
- He does not refer to Jesus, “...*who made salvation possible for all of those who believe and are baptized, etc....*”
- But Paul refers to the Lord, “...*who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*”

As Jesus was suffering, as He was being ridiculed, as He was bleeding, as He was suffocating on the cross—He did it for me.

- In fact, I think we can safely say that if any one of us had been the only person on earth, Jesus would have died for us personally. He loves us that much.

Paul is saying here, then (as we can also say today), **“For once in my life, I found someone who cared enough about me to know me and my problems and do something about it.”**

- And so for Paul, to think that the Son of God would die for him...was almost too much for him to comprehend.
- To think that Christ suffered death for him...so that he could be forgiven, so that he could be saved eternally—it was almost beyond Paul’s understanding.
- We do not deserve it, we cannot really even understand it...but Jesus did it anyway.
- He died on the cross for me.

The Christian faith only becomes real when we can apply it in our own lives.

- It gets personal when I can say, **“I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I was buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, so I too might walk in newness of life. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”**
- When we can say this truthfully and with an honest and open heart, only then will the Christian faith have any real impact in our lives.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION:

As we close the lesson this morning, and as we try to change our lives based on what we’ve studied...

- We understand that when we obey the gospel, we actually die to the old life of sin.
- We then allow the Lord to live through our lives.
- And once we start thinking about the love of God, we are amazed at what the Lord has done.

The way I see it, life is about a series of choices, and ultimately we can choose to follow the Lord, or we can wander off on our own, doing our own thing.

- But we ultimately choose to go in one of two very different directions.
- With that in mind, I’d like to close with a question:
- Whose identity do you have this morning? Are we living for Jesus? Or are we living for ourselves?

INVITATION:

Jesus loves us so much that He came to earth to show us how to live.

- The Bible tells us to believe in Jesus, to turn away from our sins, and to allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.
- Salvation is something that we neither earn nor deserve, but the Lord has promised forgiveness and a home in heaven to anyone who will accept His Son’s sacrifice in faithful obedience.
- You can let us know about your decision by coming to the front as we sing the next song.
- Let’s stand and sing...