

# A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Galatians 2:20

Congregation of the Lord,

The Christian religion is an intensely personal religion.

The Book of Psalms is witness to it, as I could show you for instance from Psalm 18, the first two verses already ... *“I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.”*

That’s intensely personal, isn’t it?

It proves, doesn’t it, that the Christian religion is an intensely personal religion.

I know that we meet as a congregation collectively, and that we are bound together in a covenant community collectively ... all of them wonderful blessings of the Christian religion that we would not want to do without.

And I know that the Church collectively – all the believers together – are called the Body of Christ, and as bodily members they cannot be separated from each other, and that some day, the believers collectively shall enjoy Christ as the Bride of Christ.

Nevertheless, the Christian religion is still an intensely personal religion.

Which means that if you practice the Christian religion sincerely, you will know what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you want to enjoy the benefits of the Covenant, and be a living member of the Body of Christ, and be part of the Bride of Christ, you must personally know Christ as your personal Saviour.

In our text, the Apostle Paul sets this personal dimension of the Christian religion front and centre.

If you look at it carefully, you will find no less than 8 personal pronouns in it – 5 times “I” and 3 times “me.”

Spurgeon says of this text that it “swarms with I and me.”

This is not selfish of Paul – we know Paul well enough; this is just Paul’s Biblical way of expressing that the Christian religion is indeed an intensely personal religion.

And so, as a theme for this message ...

## **PAUL'S CHRISTIAN RELIGION: AN INTENSELY PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST**

1. Crucified with Christ
2. Indwelled by Christ
3. Lived in Christ
4. Loved by Christ

Congregation,

Paul says in our text, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live."*

Obviously, he does not mean this in a physical sense; Paul never physically hung on the cross alongside or next to Christ.

At no time did Paul die a crucifixion-death physically prior to writing the words of our text.

This is why he adds right away: *"nevertheless I live."*

Therefore, being crucified with Christ cannot be taken in a literal sense, but rather, in a spiritual sense.

As you know, Paul was once known as Saul, the self-righteous Pharisee, with a zealous twist for persecuting the followers of Christ, stalking them, pursuing them, hunting them down, throwing them in prison, and if he could, even putting them to death.

Paul speaks of this clearly in Galatians 1 ... *"Beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."*

This was Paul's former life, all for the hope of earning some points with God, coming into favour with God, and eventually getting to heaven.

This life was once his ambition, as his name was then still Saul.

But this life came to an end when Saul met up with Christ on the road to Damascus.

Then and there, Christ overpowered Saul with His Word and Spirit, subdued him, broke his resistance, and transformed him into a pliable, penitent sinner.

Then and there, Saul's spiritual eyes were opened, and he saw what every believer gets to see ... Christ, the sacrifice for sinners; Christ, the crucified One.

And then and there, Saul surrendered himself, in faith, not only to the overpowering Christ, but to the crucified Christ.

Well then, as Saul surrendered himself in faith to the crucified Christ, his former life was crucified with Christ.

This is why he can say in our text, “I am crucified with Christ,” literally: “With Christ I have been crucified,” meaning: it’s a “done-deal”; my former life, my Saul-life, my Pharisaic-persecuting life has been crucified with Christ.

I live, but my former life is history; the crucifying sacrifice of Christ has absorbed and put to death my former life.

*“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live.”*

Dear people, this is a personal dimension of the Christian religion, which not one of us can pass by or skip over.

You too must be crucified with Christ.

As Christ overpowers you with His Word and Spirit, and as you learn to surrender yourself, in faith, to Christ, your former life will not survive, and cannot survive; ... it will be crucified with Christ.

You may have been a sinner of deep stripes ... a drunkard, a thief, an immoral person, a murderer perhaps, but as your spiritual eyes were opened, and you looked in faith to Christ, the crucified One, your former life was crucified with Christ.

You may have been a sinner of a different stripe ... perhaps of the Pharisaic sort, in that you considered yourself capable, by law-keeping, to earn a so-called “works-righteousness” with God, thinking to earn a good spot with God.

And by the way, this particular matter of so-called “works-righteousness” is a big contention with Paul here in this letter to the Galatians.

Just before our text, Paul had a showdown with no one less than the Apostle Peter, who, in a weak moment, began to promote obedience to the law and “works-righteousness” again among the Jewish Christians, leaving the gentile Christians out in the cold, so to speak.

When Paul got wind of that, he went up to Peter, and so he says *“I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.”* (v.11)

Paul is very sensitive to the evil of “works-righteousness” because, as I mentioned already, he too had lived that sort of life once.

And that sort of life too, needed to be crucified; and it was, so that Paul can say ... *“I am crucified with Christ.”*

Perhaps your former life was never that of a drunkard, or of a thief, or of an immoral person, but rather of that same Pharisaic sort, possessed by the sinful notion that you were entirely capable of earning

righteousness on your own, but as your spiritual eyes were opened, and you looked in faith to Christ, the crucified One, also that sort of former life was crucified with Christ.

Also that sort of former life is now history with you, and you can say with Paul *“I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live.”*

My friend, can you say this with Paul -*“I am crucified with Christ”*?

Is your former life of sin, whether it was engaged in works of evil, or in works-righteousness, ... is that former life history with you, past, done away with, crucified with Christ?

You might be a Covenant member of this church; you might be part of this fellowship, which may be addressed as “Congregation of the Lord” ... and that is wonderful indeed, and not to be despised!

But at the same time, do you have that personal relationship with Christ, of having been crucified with Christ?

That is crucial!

*“I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live.”*

In other words, ... are you born-again?

Have you surrendered to the Word and Spirit of Christ?

Have you seen your former life, repented of it, and turned in faith to Christ for the crucifixion of your former life?

Do you have this sort of personal relationship with Christ, as Paul writes of in our text?

Boys and girls, young people!

Most of you have been born into a Christian family; as members of the church you have been baptized; you are part of this covenant community.

Perhaps your parents are genuine, dyed-in-the-wool believers ... beautiful!

You live in a rich Christian tradition in which you are taught to pray and read your Bible and worship; you may enjoy the fellowship of the saints and have the riches of the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached and explained to you; you have the supervision of responsible Christians over you, who look after your spiritual well-being.

I have talked to youths of your age who envy you for your rich Christian traditions.

But hear me out for a moment!

Do not rely solely on your rich Christian tradition to gain you entry into heaven.

With all the Covenant blessings and privileges you are enjoying, you still need a personal relationship with Christ.

For you too, it has to be Christ and I, Christ and me; *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live.”*

But let Paul push this personal relationship a bit further, when he speaks not only of being crucified with Christ, but, secondly, Indwelled by Christ.

*“Nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me.”*

A Christian is one who is indwelled, or lived-in, by Christ.

In fact, the presence of Christ is so strong in a Christian that Paul says, “It’s not me who is living, but Christ living in me!”

Theologians sometimes call this “The believer’s mystical union with Christ.” (See Matthew Henry, for instance)

When you turn in faith to Christ, Christ, in turn, is pleased to dwell in you.

This is why you have such words of Christ as in John 15:5 ... *“He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.”*

Or such words of Christ, as He prayed to His Father in John 17:23 ... *“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one”*

A believer is one who has the indwelling Christ.

Christ has made His abode in the believer, as owning and possessing the believer.

This is also why our Catechism Christian can say “I, with body and soul, belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ!”

And then, Christ does not merely own from a distance, as a man might own a piece of property in a far country, no, but as Christ owns, He inhabits what He owns, He dwells in what He owns!

My friend! Do you know that Christ lives in you?

Paul says this of himself; and he was no extra-ordinary, higher level or higher-life Christian ... but he says: *“I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”*

Now, as Christ lives in you, it should have implications as to how people see you.

Christ living in you warrants responsibilities on your part.

When others meet you, they should get a sense that they are actually meeting Christ in you.

As someone said: “You should be a living photograph of Christ!”

Your words then, should be Christ-like; your actions Christ-like; your conduct Christ-like.

There should then be something of Christ about you in your compassion for those who are in difficulties, and in your pity for those who are down.

Christ living in you should make you more loving, more patient, more forgiving than you were ever before.

Christ living in you should make you more careful about sin and temptation, in fact, Christ living in you will give you the necessary strength to resist sin and temptation!

Again, this is all very personal, isn't it?

And this is how it should be, because the personal dimension of your religion is the most effective and affecting.

Then you are kind and compassionate and patient and forgiving, not merely because you are a church-going person, but because you have Christ living in you!

Then you are careful about sin and temptation, not merely because you are member of a church somewhere, but because Christ lives in you.

It's a personal relationship with Christ that makes you a genuinely different person.

Merely being a church-member, baptized and in the covenant, will not cut it ... Christ must live in you!

My friend, can you say with Paul ... *"I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"*?

Do you have this personal Christ-indwelling relationship?

Well, this personal relationship with Christ implies being Crucified with Christ, being Indwelled by Christ, and now in the third place also Lived in Christ.

Paul says in our text ... *"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."*

Paul lived a different life before once; as Saul, outside of Christ, he once lived by sight, by sinful inclinations, and by legalistic motivations.

And this is how any unbeliever lives, naturally.

One who has no personal relationship with Christ lives by what he sees, by what he feels; he lives by the compulsions of his sinful flesh.

If an unbeliever sees that it is bleak and gloomy around him, he will generally live a bleak and gloomy life as well; if an unbeliever sees that it is hopeless, he will easily despair.

If an unbeliever feels pain, he'll feel compelled to complain; and if he feels the compulsions of his sinful flesh, he'll seek to satisfy those compulsions.

And this is only natural.

This is why the Bible says that those without Christ are servants of sin and slaves of the flesh ... they live by sight and by touch.

My friend, is this perhaps, a picture, still, of your life?

Do you still live only by the impulse of what you see, and only by the compulsion of what you feel?

Do you still go by the so called “lower appetites”, that is, “*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*”, as the Bible calls it? (1 John 2:16)

Does sin still rule in your life; does it still have control of your life?

This means that you are still without Christ; and the Bible says in Ephesians 2:12 that without Christ, you are without a hope!

Consider seriously this message about the necessity of having a personal relationship with Christ.

Call out to Christ to have mercy on you, and to visit you with His Word and Spirit.

He did so to Saul whom we now know as Paul, and since that time Paul could say “*I live by the faith of the Son of God.*”

Not by sight, not by feel, but by faith!

Having a personal relationship with Christ, dear people, means living in Christ, living by faith.

And Paul calls Christ here the “*Son of God*”, for this is indeed who He is ... Christ, the Son of God, the One fully worthy of faith and trust; the Son of God, the Almighty One, the Eternal, ever-present God.

And when your life is in Christ, dear people, you learn not to live by sight any more but by faith, ... by faith in Christ.

Then things might get bleak and gloomy around you; people might conclude then that things look rather hopeless in this world, but your faith looks up to Christ.

Then your life might not be the easiest on the earth; perhaps you have to bear the burden of poor health, or of some other physical challenge; perhaps you will have to settle for a life fraught with hardships of one sort or another, but you may place your life’s faith in Christ, the Son of God, with Whom you have a personal relationship, and of Whom you know that He’ll take care of you through thick or thin.

And how do you know this?

Because through your personal relationship with Christ, you know that you are Loved by Christ, as I may show yet, in the last place.

Paul is so wonderfully positive in our text, and so powerfully encouraging ... “*I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*”

Dear people, anyone having a personal relationship with Christ, may be assured of the love of Christ.

Every believer may say it of Christ, the Son of God ... “*Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*”

And isn’t it wonderful to be loved – to be loved by Christ!

How much more personal could this get ... Christ loves me!

And then this too yet ... this love of Christ is unique in that it was there already, and in operation already, while I was yet a sinner.

This love of Christ, says Paul in Ephesians 3, is a love that passes knowledge, or, that surpasses our understanding ... because I have to admit, I had nothing to show as a reason for Christ to love me. Even now, I must confess that I am unworthy of the love of Christ, yet Christ has loved me freely.

And how fervent and strong is Christ's love for me?

So fervent and so strong that He once gave Himself for me.

Can you think of a greater sacrifice of love than the giving of oneself for the object of love?

Believer! Christ loved you enough to lay down His life for you, and He Himself has said it "*greater love has no man than this ...*"

I know this is personal, but let me ask you ... Have you ever been overwhelmed by the love of Christ?

Look around you ... Is there anything more precious than to be loved by Christ?

My friend, if there is any way I might persuade you to take the Christian religion seriously, it is, to persuade you, if I could, of the wonder of the love of Christ.

Once experienced, you will never be free of it, nor would you ever want to be free of it.

Loved by Christ ... here the song is most fitting ...

“O Perfect Love, all human thought transcending,  
Lowly we kneel in prayer before thy throne.”

That's personal, isn't it?

And so be it!

Paul would agree from what he says in our text, for a personal relationship with Christ, it means ...

Crucified with Christ; Indwelled by Christ; Lived in Christ; and Loved by Christ.

May the Holy Spirit, who is powerful to work by the Word, apply the word of our text to the hearts and lives of young and old, for an intensely personal relationship with Christ.

Amen