

## The Life of Christ

*“For to me, to live is Christ”* (Philippians 1:21).

Perhaps the most appalling observation I make as I survey modern American Christianity is the near-total absence of a desire on the part of professing believers to want to live in a way that pleases God. Probably that’s because we don’t know how to do it, or even *that* we’re to do it. I suspect that we all simply suppose that our two hours in Church on Sunday mornings suffices to please God. Or that because we don’t murder, steal, tell lies or commit adultery that God is pleased with us. Or—perish the thought!—it may even be that we deny any need to please God with how we live because we’ve satisfied the one requirement of Christianity, viz, we believe in Christ, so we’re on our way to heaven regardless of anything else. Let’s discuss this, because it’s a serious issue in the Church.

In Scripture, and therefore in the real world we live in, like it or not, there are two – and *only* two – stark options: love God, or not. Trust Christ, or not. Serve God, or not. Obey God’s Word, or not. Be faithful to God, or not. Be holy, or not. We’re either wise, or we’re fools. We’re in heaven with the living and good God for an eternity, or in hell totally remote from His presence in the company of the wicked devil. We either express in our lives good, or we express evil; there’s nothing neutral or in between. In God’s eyes, we’re either alive, ie, walking in His ways, or we’re dead, ie, walking according to our own values (see Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

This isn’t an Old Testament matter, it’s also Jesus’ teaching: **“Enter thru the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter thru it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”** (Matthew 7:13-14). We either bear good fruit, or bad fruit. We either build on a solid rock, or on sand. Jesus is teaching His followers – *and that’s us!* – that there are two, and only two options for how we live today. Jesus is confirming the dichotomous choices of Deuteronomy 30 *for the Church*. Because the issue is so stark, so absolute, we need to think carefully, very carefully, about this.

The entire Bible exists to declare the beauty and perfection of the Son. All of reality exists to express the perfections of the Son and to glorify Him. The Son, and only the Son, honors God, obeys God, trusts God, serves God, teaches God’s ways and reveals God’s holy and loving nature. The Son is the ideal human. He’s the ideal Servant. He’s the ideal of all life. Twice in the Bible (at Jesus’ baptism and at the Transfiguration), the Father spoke from heaven saying, “This is my Son, whom I love.” At the end of history as we know it, Jesus is the only one in all existence who is worthy (Revelation 5).

What this means is, there’s only one way to please God, and that’s by expressing the life of the Son. Let’s get this! The purpose of the Gospel is not merely to have forgiveness of sins and so to be in heaven when we die. That’s only the beginning, the entry into the life that God has set before us, the life that God intends for us to live. Forgiveness of sins—as absolutely essential as it is—is simply what’s necessary so that we can be indwelt by the Spirit of the risen, living Son. The Gospel message climaxes with the gift of the Spirit of Christ to all believers (Acts 2:33). The goal of the Gospel is for us to live out our lives expressing the beauty and perfections of the indwelling, living Son. It’s Christ in us living out His life that pleases God, and *that* is the reason we’re saved.

It’s the Holy Spirit in us who enables us to love, to serve, to trust, to be loyal and faithful, to obey the Word, to be self-disciplined, to be holy, to give thanks, to . . . in short, to live the life that pleases God. But if we choose to love and serve idols, or to indulge the self, or to love what the world places on offer, that quenches the Spirit. It grieves and offends the indwelling Spirit. So we then cannot help but live out the life of the “natural” man, that is, the unsaved person, the fool, the life of “death.” It’s the one option or the other. We’re either yielded to the Spirit to live the life that expresses Christ, or not. We either please God or we offend Him.

The “fruit” of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Hey! That’s the character of the Son! That’s (in part) what the Christian’s life should be like. There’s more of course. But we can only live the life of the Son by expressing the indwelling Spirit. There’s no other way.

So, how do we express the life of the indwelling Spirit of Christ? It’s *not* by being passive!!! It doesn’t happen automatically. The key to living the Christian life is first understanding how to live it. And we know what the Christian life should be because it’s there in the Word of God. We must learn, by reflecting on the Word, what Christ is like, then we imitate Him. We have to actively put into practice what we see Christ is like and what He has taught us we’re to do. That includes, of course, all the apostolic teachings, i.e., the New Testament. And not just the things we do but the thoughts

we have, the values we hold and even our motives. The change that it involves is radical. But we have to want to do it, or it doesn't happen. Sadly, as I look around at the modern Church, it mostly doesn't happen. The lives of most professing Christians, as I see them, are just the life of the "natural" man. Satan long ago corrupted the Church by making Christianity into something we can be passive about. "Let the professionals live more spiritually if they want to or think they need to. I don't have to. I'm 'saved'."

I shouldn't have to argue this, it's so obviously there in Scripture. But I will. First, the New Covenant is "new" in that it includes the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable obedience, to enable the new life on offer in Christ. That's in the prophets (Ezekiel 36, for example, and others). Apart from the Spirit's enablement, the natural man cannot obey God, cannot even know God or His will; he can only sin and fail. Paul's exposition of Christianity climaxes with Romans 8, where he builds on the prophets' promise of a Spirit-led life. It's a favorite passage, but what does it actually say? In chapter 7, he acknowledges that the sin nature still works in him; we still have in us the Adamic nature of sin and death. But then, **"The Spirit of life [that is, the life of the Spirit of the resurrected Christ] set me free from the law of sin and death"** (8:2). And, **"in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, [we] do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit"** (v. 4). But we don't have to live according to the Spirit. That's the point of this passage. Paul is writing this to the Church, to us. To NOT live according to the Spirit is sin and death. **"The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace"** (v. 6b); but **"those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God"** (v. 8). We aren't controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit **"if the Spirit of God lives in you"** (v. 9). **"Therefore brothers we have an obligation . . . if by the Spirit [we] put to death the misdeeds of the body, [we] will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"** (vv. 12-14).

Here's that dichotomy of choices: Two ways to live, (a) according to the Adamic nature, as the natural man *must* live for he has no other option. Or (b) according to the Spirit, which the believer can and should live by—if we yield to the Spirit and not quench or grieve Him. It's not automatic that every believer lives according to the Spirit because Paul says in verse 12, "we are under obligation . . ." That means we must choose to do it. And notice all the times Paul says "you" in verses 9 to 17. This isn't abstract theology; it's a real and personal choice. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul again sets forth this same choice: **"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise . . . be filled by the Spirit"** (5:15-18). We have a grave responsibility to live continually in the control and power of the Spirit.

In Titus 2:11-12, Paul writes that the grace of God **"teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age . . ."** When Paul writes of the self-controlled godly life, he's of course referring to life in and by the Spirit. This is nearly explicit a bit further in Titus (3:4-8); all the ways Paul advises we're to live are only possible because of the **"rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior"** (v.7). (Paul's use of "poured out" in this verse, by the way, comes from the prophecies of Isaiah and Joel anticipating the New Covenant era.) We have the liberty of exercising our will to obey, to live controlled by the indwelling Spirit, or not. If we're truly born again and gripped by God's grace, we'll choose wisely and yield to the Spirit, applying the Word of God to our life. *That's why all those exhortations are there!*

To quote Charles Ryrie, "What our Lord has done [redemption] makes it possible to live the Christian life; putting the possibility into practice involves a number of other factors, many of which include the exercise of the human will. . . we may choose whether or not to enjoy its [referring to our union with Christ and the gift of the Spirit] benefits" (Balancing the Christian Life, p.56). Ryrie wisely points out that God has not nullified a believer's individual freedom. We may choose to live pleasing to God, or not.

Count on it. God will bring trouble, problems and conflict into our lives. Also all manner of opportunities, and people, and moral issues. How do we respond to these challenges? If we draw upon what we've learned in God's Word, and if we love Christ as He's presented in the Gospels and seek to be like Him, empowered by the Spirit we will respond in a way that pleases God. As these experiences accumulate, we become more spiritual, more mature. And God is glorified by our lives. The burden of the author of Hebrews was that his readers (and we today) may refuse to move on to such maturity and so suffer God's discipline.

Moreover, as we faithfully express in our lives the indwelling Christ, God's great purposes are fulfilled. Evil, for example, is defeated. Christ, living in His followers, extends His mission of bringing the promised Kingdom to all the world as they proclaim the Gospel. And the Son is exalted, to the delight of the Father.

If we're *in Christ*, for us to live is for Christ to live out His resurrected life in us. That is Christianity.