

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, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians ii.20).

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The words which dropped upon my mind yesterday were: "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me"; but I shall take the whole verse as a text. The grace of God was never more conspicuously displayed than in the conversion of the apostle Paul. Speaking of this, he says, "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love" (I Tim. i.14). He felt most deeply what mighty and superabounding grace it was, and he felt what an abundance was needed to save so great a sinner as he saw himself to be - yea, as he says, the "Chief" of sinners. The change which divine and sovereign grace wrought in him was so sudden and unexpected, and in every way so remarkable, that the disciples of Christ at Damascus were all greatly afraid, when they heard of his conversion, that it could not possibly be a real and thorough work. But the Lord appears and speaks to them and, as it were, says: "You need not be afraid of that, and you need not be afraid of Saul. He has been, it is true, a very bad man; but by My grace he is now a changed man. He has hitherto been a desperate enemy to Me, breathing out nothing but threatenings and slaughter against My saints. Now, behold, he prayeth. He is breathing out nothing now but prayers and supplications unto Me."

I shall therefore, with the Lord's help, make a few remarks:

- I. In reference to the apostle as a natural man.
- II. On his conversion.
- III. Upon his experience as set forth in the text.

I. Paul as a natural man. He was, as you know, the son of Jewish parents. Being born in the city of Tarsus, he was entitled to all the privileges of a Roman citizen. He was brought up to the business of a tent maker, as he tells us in another part of the word. It was a standing custom with the Jews, no matter how wealthy they might be, to bring up all their sons to some business. Saul, as his name originally was, had a good education. He evidently belonged to parents in a good position of life, so that he was sent to Jerusalem to learn the Jewish religion; and placed under the care of Gamaliel, a very learned doctor of the law. He joined the strictest sect of the Pharisees - a people in those days held in great

esteem, not disdained as we now disdain the name of Pharisee; they were held in great esteem for their zeal in religion. Therefore young Saul imbibed their self-righteous notions; their bigotry, and their bitter hatred of Christ and His disciples. Possibly the apostle had heard some of Christ's discourses and seen some of His miracles. If so, the only effect which all this had upon him was to stir up his prejudice all the more against Christ, and to make him a more implacable enemy to His disciples and followers. The first account we have of him is in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that he assisted the cruel murderers of Stephen, the first Christian martyr; after which we read that "he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts viii.3), in order to put them to death. Not content with this, he applied for authority from the high priest to extend his persecutions to Damascus, which was probably about a hundred and sixty miles away; and on this bloodthirsty expedition he started, breathing out vengeance against the people of God.

II. But now the time is come for him to be converted, for the Lord to take him in hand. And so we read that suddenly, as he himself tells us, there was a great light in the firmament, with dazzling brightness far greater than that of the meridian sun. And that light was not, as some have thought, a flash of lightning, but it was a glory composed of bright beams which darted forth from the glorified body of the risen Christ, who now condescended to appear personally unto this great sinner. The effect of this supernatural appearance was that it struck Saul to the earth. Here, again, you must understand that he was not struck to the ground as by the violence of a blow, but in the way of being overcome in his spirit. He thus fell to the ground; and a voice full of terrible majesty, as the roaring of thunder, addressed him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And Saul was evidently impressed that it was the Son of God Who spake to him; for he said: "Who art Thou, Lord?" And Christ, with a solemnity and endearment peculiar to Himself, said: "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." What an awful moment Saul of Tarsus must have felt that to be! And what could he expect just at that moment but eternal destruction? And what else would there have been for him had he not been a vessel of mercy? But a vessel of mercy he was; and sovereign, almighty grace it was which changed his heart. Therefore the cursed hatred he had formerly manifested was subdued. The power of the Spirit of God accompanied the conversion; the arrow of God pierced his conscience; and now this bloodthirsty enemy of Christ and

of His people casts down his weapons, gives himself up to Christ, and cries to Christ to have mercy upon him. For three days the Lord saw fit to put him in an agony of mind, and also in a state of blindness. No doubt during these three days he was crying to the Lord; after which the Lord revealed Himself to him; the Spirit formed Christ in his heart; and the Lord, knowing what His purpose was concerning him, made him an apostle to the Gentiles. Knowing that he would be immediately required for His work, the Lord taught him rapidly; taught him more in a day than, perhaps I might say, He teaches His people now in a course of years. He brought him into blessed liberty; revealed to him the glorious gospel, the riches of His grace; opened up to him His deep counsels and purposes; unfolded the mystery which had been kept secret since the world began - namely, that Jew and Gentile were no longer to be separated, but were to be brought within the fold of Christ, and so to be one new man (Eph.ii.16). And God brings the apostle into a deep experience of His truth; leads him deeper and deeper into a knowledge of himself as a sinner by nature, utterly condemned by God's holy law, and instructs him specially in the mystery of a crucified Christ; shows him that he stands in an indissoluble union with Christ. He raises him into such a blessed confidence about his acceptance that he could say: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom.viii.38,39). And now, as an apostle writing to the churches of Galatia, he lays down, in a most masterly way, the work of Christ as being the only ground of the sinner's justification before God, and denounces the false teachers who had infected these Galatian churches with many pernicious heresies, telling them that, if they were not circumcised, Christ would not profit them. After endeavouring to bring them back to the simplicity of the truth in Christ, he puts to them a very sharp question: "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal.iii.3). He tells them there was no other way of salvation but through a crucified Christ; and now he says, speaking personally: "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."

Let me first say this: Soul conversion is, exclusively and absolutely, the work of God. Friends, it is the basis of all true religion. Go into any church or chapel this morning throughout London, throughout the nation - yea, throughout the world - and find me any truly godly men and women, and let me

be satisfied that those you bring are really godly men and women that know a great deal of themselves and of Christ; and I would say that true conversion is the basis of the religion of those people. Had they not been converted to God, they would not have had the religion they now have. Any other religion they might have had would not be worth a straw. It is real conversion, real conversion alone, that brings the sinner from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Nothing but real conversion changes the character and effects a spiritual change in a man's heart. A man by natural effort and by moral restraint may keep himself, as a professor of religion, from outward inconsistency, and may deceive even the ministers of Christ and the people of God; but, if the man has not been truly converted to God, through having been born again of the Spirit, there is nothing in his religion - no reality in it at all. Let him say what he may; let him attend to what he may; let him deceive people as much as he may - there is nothing in it.

Then, again, mark this particularly. Real conversion is certain to bring a man to see Christ to be the one thing needful, the chief object in a man's heart when he has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. I would not bring young believers into bondage or hurt their minds by anything I might say from this text. Therefore you who here as young believers - you that have not long been under real concern about your soul (and I hope there are some) - remember, it is not to be expected that you, at the present time, should have that distinct knowledge of Christ for which I am about to contend.

With regard to those that have been under a profession of religion for a great many years (though I would not speak dogmatically), it seems very stumbling to me that such persons should not know Christ more than, in some instances, they appear to do. One thing is perfectly safe to say - that all who are led by the Holy Spirit will, in the course of time, know Christ. I do not say that they stand in that knowledge all day long - that is another thing. I have not been able, in the course of the forty years that I have been making a profession of religion, to stand always where God has sometimes put me. We must distinguish between what we are in our experience when we are more immediately under the leadings and blessed influence of the Holy Ghost (in other words, when we are more particularly favoured of God in our soul) and the time when the flesh is more prevalent. Therefore, those who are led by the Spirit of God will certainly be brought to see that all they need is Christ, and He will be the supreme object of their admiration and of their affections. They will most feelingly say: "This is my

Beloved, and this is my Friend" (Song v.16). Though there will be times when the members of the family will be loved with proper natural love, and there will be thanksgiving to God for the position in which His kind providence has placed them, yet they will at other times regard their own families and all domestic concerns as nothing, and will say: "These things are dung and dross to me - nothing to me like Jesus Christ; and they will live in hope of seeing Him. That will be their great ambition. I hope I can say, as before God, that I know that experience, what those blessed times are - to look forward to a heaven of rest, joy, glory, and blessedness. O to feel this! That one thing will make heaven to be a heaven of joy and blessedness to me - that is, the Lord Jesus Christ; and to feel that, if God were to take me to heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ should not be there, it would be no heaven to my soul!

III. Now let me go on. "I am crucified with Christ," says Paul; as though he had said to these Galatians: "You have heard of me; you have heard what an implacable enemy I was to the Lord Jesus Christ - how I treated Him; how determined I was to get rid of His religion. Now that same Jesus Christ overtook me; He arrested me in my mad career; drove His dreadful arrow into my conscience and smote me down, and I saw that I was wrong. I became convinced that He was the Son of God, and that if ever I, a miserable sinner, should be saved, He alone could be my Saviour. And that same Lord Jesus Christ has done with me what it was my determination to do with Him. I was determined to crucify Him; now He has crucified me. He has taken me and put me to death; He has nailed me to the cross." Here, of course, his words must be taken mystically, not literally. Paul was crucified with Him; the whole church was crucified with Christ. You know that beautiful verse: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John xii.24). Therefore, in His eternal purpose, God the Father always saw Christ and the church as standing in inseparable union. When Christ went down into death, the church mystically went down into death. When He arose, the church mystically arose with Him. When He ascended and went back to God, the church mystically ascended and went back to God with Him (Eph. iv.8-10); (Isa. xxvi.19). When Christ hung upon the cross, God looked upon His church as standing in the old Adam nature, where there is nothing but death, damnation, and the curse of the law wreaking itself upon the head of every offender and transgressor. God treated the old Adam nature just as a criminal is dealt with in our Courts of Justice, as a murderer is treated at the Old Bailey. He is put upon his trial, and God put the old Adam nature of His church

upon its trial when Christ was hanging upon the cross. So the old Adam nature of the church was judged when Christ died, and God pronounced him guilty and sentenced him to die. Therefore Christ died for His people, and thus put away their old Adam nature. "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (I Pet.ii.24). He delivered them, as they stood in the purpose of God, out of that condition altogether, never to stand in that condition as before God any more at all. Therefore what condemnation can there be to a real believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Now Paul enters profoundly into this; by the Spirit he was plunged into this experience. Speaking for myself, through the grace of God I have been able to enter just a little into what Paul was plunged into, and God has often made it very precious to me. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." Paul meant, mystically crucified with Christ. My old nature was nailed to the cross with the Lord Jesus Christ; my sins were dealt with by God when His Son hung upon the cross. Then I went down into death with Him. "Nevertheless I live." Now I live by the grace of God, as a believer; now I live as feeling myself to be a poor sinner, with nothing to be proud of. Now I live as renouncing that righteousness of my own which I once accounted something and wholly relied upon for salvation. Now I know that nothing but the substitutionary and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffice. "I live; yet not I." I am not the source of my own life. No thanks to me! I do not cause it. "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Here's true religion! Here's what we call the root of the matter (Job xix.28). Here, you see, is a spring which never fails; here is something which will stand the fire. Christ! Do you think it possible for Christ to live in a man and a man not to live in Christ? Do you think it possible for Christ thus to live in a man and for that man not to feel something of it? Utterly impossible! "Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh." Paul was still a man. He had a body, the same body which he had before, and therefore he was living in the flesh. He was not living a supernatural life. God had not changed him from being a man so as to make him an angel. I am still a man. According to nature, I am the same man as I ever was, and so with you. Therefore we live in the flesh, and we know it. We have wicked hearts. The old man is in us. The son of the bondwoman is still in the house. You have to say, and I have to say: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." You are not a very tried Christian if you do not know what it is, in the bitterness of your soul, to cry: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom.vii.23, 24). True religion is not all joy, not always walking upon

a bed of roses. It does not consist in that blessed tranquility of mind for which the Plymouth Brethren contend, and who take the text just in the letter of it. The man who has true religion knows, in his favoured moments, what this is: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Do you know what it is to say, in the words of Paul? - "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (II Cor.iv.11). The man who is brought in any measure now and then into this experience, will sometimes feel as if all hell were sending out its furious blasts upon him. There will be such risings of blasphemies within, the old man will be such a plague to him, that he will cry: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom.vii.24). Then the well-taught believer, like the apostle, will know who it is that will deliver him. He will not continue to say: "Who shall deliver me? I am afraid I shall never be delivered," but he will say: "I thank God" - all this horrible working of sin in me has been judged and has received notice to quit this body of sin and death. My sins were crucified eighteen hundred years ago. I am myself a man, a sinner, an enemy to God, antagonistic to Christ, and sentenced to die, and I died in my Head. This old Adam is still in me, but will never be the cause of my damnation. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh" - though it be here a very thorny path of tribulation, and day by day things try me and press me down - yet "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." My faith mounts, it rises up; it rises above nature, above the valley, above the world; my faith soars aloft to the risen Christ. He died for the sins of His people, He "was raised again for their justification" (Rom.iv.25). It is Christ in me, says Paul, the hope of glory (Col.i.27). "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me." It is as though he had said: Whoever would have thought such a thing as that, considering what an enemy I was, what my former blasphemies were, how hot my blood was to fight against the Saviour? And let me tell you that in my heart I said, over and over again, that I would hunt all His people to death if I could. I hated the name of Christ; I hated His religion; but - "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." I had been set apart from all eternity. God was determined to magnify His grace in my conversion. God permitted me in my unregeneracy to be a pattern to others - not an example for them to follow, but "that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (I Tim.i.16). It was a pattern to

His people in this sense - that they might look into His word and see what monstrous sinners Christ has saved. Therefore Paul says: "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." I do not know any sweeter experience than this. I do not know anything like this to support the child of God in great afflictions - to be brought here even in a small measure, to feel our souls so knit to the precious Lord Jesus Christ, so led into His wonderful work, and into the secret of the Lord in His everlasting love to us in Christ, as to be able to say: "He loved me." Martin Luther, in his great work on Galatians, expatiates on these words grandly - "He loved me." He goes on rising higher and higher, as it were, in a most divine way upon that word "me." He says: "Who is this me? Even I, wretched and damnable sinner, so dearly beloved of the Son of God that He gave Himself for me. For me, I say, a miserable and wretched sinner." Luther continues to this effect, that it was a marvel to himself that he was not in hell, and yet "He loved me."

Now there is another point, which is most important. I have found it at times to be unspeakably blessed to my own soul. I refer to what the apostle says, when he is dwelling upon the believer's oneness with Christ - in death and resurrection: "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him" (Rom. vi. 5, 6). How very few of the dear children of God seem to know this! I have often longed to see more of them brought here. It would help them so much, because we all are apt to judge ourselves by what our feelings and experiences are. Unless, then, there is some proper understanding by faith of God's truth in this particular matter, I can scarcely imagine what some dear children of God can do. Therefore I would to God that we might be brought here: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him." Where does all your trouble and darkness come from? Your old man. What causes you to have so many doubts and fears? What makes you so desperately hard? What makes you sometimes feel as if you almost hated Him and almost hated religion? Your old man. As I told my people only on Friday evening, referring to one's conflicts in the ministry. I said: "I pity the minister, particularly on a Saturday evening." O the Saturdays which have passed over my poor head, when I have sat down over the word of God and could not get at anything! I have said to myself with a sigh: "Ah! if I were to live my life over again, I would take care not to be a minister. To-morrow I should love to go to the Old Baptist Chapel and hear some good minister preach." I have at such times felt that I hated religion and the people of God altogether. You see the old man has got

desperate. Well, this old man is put down. Says Paul: "Knowing this" - that this old wretch and scoundrel must be crucified with Christ. God settled the matter with him then. He cannot drag you down to hell because he was crucified with Christ, that the whole "body of sin" (the whole of what emanates from indwelling sin) "might be destroyed" - not that it might simply be shut up in some corner, but that it might be put into oblivion - "that henceforth we should not serve sin." "Now," the apostle says, "if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin" (Rom.vi.6-11). You reckon yourselves to be dead; God reckons you to be dead. You reckon your old man to be dead and buried with Christ. You reckon as God reckons, not as you reckon yourself. You are often reckoning according to what the devil says to you, according to what your own feelings are. The devil says: "You may reckon, but you cannot help yourself; you will never get any comfort." "Nevertheless," says Paul, "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." Amen.