

“You No Longer Live, And Now You’re Really Alive!”
(Galatians 2:20 & Galatians 3:13)
Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. According to the Word of God -- *you* Christian -- no longer live! Well that’s an interesting assertion right? After all, you *are* currently sitting there and breathing (for which we are all thankful for) at this very moment. The Scriptures then must mean something else here. They do.

When I was growing up one of my best friends in high school lived with a pall of anxiety and concern: his mother had been diagnosed with inoperable cancer and her status was essentially, “it’s just a matter of time.” There was a dark cloud over the family and household.

But then something happened one day. My friend’s mother was informed that she had been misdiagnosed. Yes, this had to be incredibly frustrating and they had a right to be angry. But on the other hand, there was a tremendous sense of relief and joy.

The whole episode reminds me of how it is more than possible to go through life in a misdirected way. To miss something vital or to have a completely inadequate understanding of what’s going on and therefore really miss out. This happens on smaller scales all of the time. How often do we have those “ah hah” moments when we finally “get” something that for whatever reason had just eluded us for years...indeed sometimes for our entire life, until that moment when there is clarification and insight.

When my dad was already in his 70’s we had a chance to go through the Vatican tour at a Houston museum. On that tour we encountered Michael Angelo’s The Last Judgement. My dad was fascinated by the picture. While we looked at it I offered an explanation as to how the painting was a depiction of the biblical judgment scene as revealed in Matthew chapter 25. My dad looked perplexed and disturbed. “What’s wrong dad?” To which he replied, “But...I thought everyone went to heaven.” This was a watershed moment for my dad. A belief he had held onto for decades had suddenly been replaced with the truth. That same day we got back to my place and he went into my room to rest. A few hours later he came out of my room quoting the Word of God (something I had never heard him do): Do you know that the Good Book says, “Greater love has no man than this, that He lay down His life for His friends?!” The Gospel had seeped into his heart!

What is most important in our lives are matters of faith and our relationship with God. We can’t afford to live with major gaps, or misunderstandings, or misdiagnoses when it comes to faith! If we do, then our entire lives will be negatively affected; *everything* will be like living with the wrong prescription.

When Saint Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, he was concerned about their living in true faith and not in a misunderstood and false “faith.” He wanted to make sure that the Galatians were not living under a dark cloud or a pall of confusion that was being brought on by false teachers who wanted to mix the true Gospel with other stuff (in this case, the Mosaic Law).

In contemporary terms, whether or not a person even knows what the Law of Moses is, people have a natural, built-in version of what religion should look like to the extent that so-called “faith” is something very different from *true* faith.

Don’t live with a misdiagnosis dear Christian. But know about true faith! Saint Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20: “*And the life I now live...I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” *We are called to live by faith.*

Make sure you don’t miss what this is. And if you have an “ah-hah” moment for the first time about faith, don’t let your pride mess with you. The important thing is to be clear *today*. Here’s an explanatory summary from Alister McGrath in which he breaks down three distinct aspects of faith:

- a. Faith is about believing that certain things are true (49).
- b. Faith is trust (49).
- c. Faith is entry into the promises of God, receiving what they have to offer (50).

He goes on to provide an illustration:

“Consider a bottle of penicillin, the antibiotic responsible for saving the lives of countless individuals who would otherwise have died from various forms of blood poisoning. Imagine that

- a. this bottle is sitting on my bedside table and that
- b. I am suffering from blood poisoning.

What are my options?

- a. I may *accept* that this bottle of penicillin exists.
- b. I may *trust* that it is capable of curing my illness, which otherwise will probably kill me. ***But I shall never cure my blood poisoning, unless [emphasis mine]***
- c. ***I act upon that trust and take the penicillin.*** If I do not, I shall die, accepting and trusting, but having failed to benefit at all from the resource which could have saved me (50).”

“Faith, then, is not just assent to an abstract set of doctrines. Rather, it is a ‘wedding ring’ [to borrow language from Luther] pointing to mutual commitment and union between Christ and the believer (ibid, 51).”

It is one thing to accept that Jesus is real. It is to go further and trust that He is the Savior of sinners. But it is most important that our lives actually enter into His life and that His life actually enters into our lives. Our terrible sin is that we compromise what faith is. We placate ourselves into treating faith like checking off boxes on a form: “Yeah, I believe in Jesus,” as if faith were simply an intellectual exercise. Like playing a game and you come up to the

clubhouse and you're asked the "secret pass word," and you say, "Jesus" and they let you in. That's not faith. That's a game! Faith impacts your life. It changes you. It makes you – by the grace of God – into a different person. Yes, one who still struggles against sin (grant it), but also one who now follows Jesus.

Luther elaborated on such a living faith that does not simply accept and trust, but *lives out its relationship with God*:

Thus faith is a divine work in us, that changes us and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men in heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it [confers] the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing (Triglotta, 941, F.C., Sol. Decl., IV).

Listen to this beautiful commentary from Luther:

“[faith] unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh [Eph. 5:31-32]. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage...it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his (LW 31:351).”

And it's here that we finally really begin to understand what makes faith powerful. Note how simply Luther himself put it:

“Note the wonderful exchange: One man sins, another pays the penalty; one deserves peace, the other has it. The one who should have peace has chastisement, while the one who should have chastisement has peace (LW 17:225).”

God says in Galatians 3:13 that His Son became a curse for you by taking the law's curse (the law that condemns your sin) upon Himself for you; in your place. In this exchange, Jesus got your curse; Jesus got your sin. But what did Jesus give you in this exchange? Galatians 2:20 tells us: He loved you and gave himself for you! You got Jesus' purity. You got His holiness. You got His righteousness. You got His standing without any sin and without any curse. So Jesus got your sin. You got His innocence. Faith lives out a different “I,” a different life!

Augustine said, “For where I am not I, I am more happily I (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII*, 32).”

There is an old “I” and a new “I”. When Christ took the guilt of your old I, that old I died, and Christ has given you a new I...and that is the one you live out through faith in Christ who loved you and gave Himself for you! The new I is the one who accepts Christ, who trusts Christ, and who lives out the life of Christ here and now!

In Galatians 2:20 Saint Paul says that he has been crucified with Christ. The verb is in the perfect tense which means the focus of the verb is on a current condition, the present result of a past action. Luther therefore preferred to take these words as “I am crucified with Christ” rather than “I have been crucified with Christ (Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 214).” Frankly, this shows the Reformer’s brilliance because Galatians 2:20 is really saying two things:

1) When Christ was crucified, you received His work that saved you from sin (this is reinforced by Galatians 3:13).

AND

2) This saving work of Christ has power to produce in you and me a real ethical righteousness of life; that is, what Christ did also changes your life (see Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol II, 410-411).

“Dying with Christ is not an event which takes place only once (Althaus, 214).” You live in Christ and Christ lives in you every, single day dear Christian. You are called to live in a faith that walks into this reality of “in Christ” constantly, and it is a faith that crucifies the flesh and lives in a new life, a new I, the result of God’s gift to you called “the wonderful exchange.”

This is faith.

So when you in accord with your sinful nature and the accusations of the Devil, want to limit yourself to your old life, then take heed: God is calling you to live in faith!

Your old I says: “This is just the way I am. I have to go along with my pessimism, I have to go along with my hardness and with my self-imposed limitations, I cannot love, I cannot serve, I cannot forget, I am a slave to my habits and my addictions, I cannot pray, I cannot, I cannot, I cannot.” And in this respect – in accord with the old I that is crushed by the law of God – you’re right. But thank God that God does not call you to resuscitate the old I, but He calls you back to Christ! “And all the prophets saw this, that Christ was to become the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world...In short, He has and bears all the sins of all men in His body... (LW 26, 277).”

And in exchange Christian, Jesus has given you a new life, a new I...He calls you now to live in a real faith!

And faith accepts the new I...the new I and “[i]t is the experience of all Christians that the more certain they are of God’s grace and of their heavenly inheritance, the more ready are they to serve God and to set their affection on things above (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol III, 10).”

Which leads me to the reminder as to why we come to church. It is not to look good, it is not to check the box of good deeds for the week, it is not to perpetuate a club of mutual admiration...it is to receive the strengthening of faith so that your old I may remain dead and buried and so that you may be strengthened and empowered in accord with the new I. You come to church to

receive Christ. In and through His Word; in and through His body and blood. This Word, this Sacrament is testimony not to the hypothesis, not to the theory, but to the *fact that Jesus Christ is for you and in you...receive His body, receive His blood, receive once again His forgiveness and grace and be strengthened so that you will understand the power of faith – even through all struggles and tribulations – you no longer live and now you're really alive!*