There are many ways to talk about the cross of Christ. Over the years I’ve not only preached the crucifixion passages, but I’ve also preached many other sermons relating to the effects and accomplishments of the cross. We’ve seen how the cross gives us access to Christ through confession and it is His covenant to us and is the foundation of ministry. For us the cross is the epitome of wisdom though it is foolishness to the world. The cross is our confident hope and our joy. It is our sole means of justification, sanctification, and glorification. On the cross Jesus fulfilled the image of the Passover lamb and propitiated the Father becoming our atonement. He is our power, by which we are reconciled to God and our sin is redeemed. He grants us new life by the power of His resurrection. He is our sacrifice, security, and substitute. And this morning I want to consider another accomplishment of the cross. It is a truth that we often allude to, but I suspect do not think adequately about it.

We who are believers in Christ are united to Christ and His cross.

When Christ died on the cross, we who are believers in Him also died. When He was buried, so were we; when He was resurrected, we were resurrected with Him. When He was made alive, so were we. Since He is an heir so are we. He is seated at the right hand of the Father and we are seated with Him.

This is the amazing work that Christ accomplished at the cross: He unified us to Him. As one writer has said, “the majority of Christians much more frequently think of Christ as a Savior outside of them, than as a Savior who dwells within.” [A. H. Strong, quoted by Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 313.] Yet the NT emphasis is on our identity with Christ and our union with Him.

Now the NT has many ways of referring to our union with Christ —

- We are in Him; He is in us — in fact phrases like “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” and “in Him” appear 216x in Paul’s letters and 26x in John’s writings (cf. 1 John 2:6; 4:13; 5:20).
- He is with us and we are with Him
- We abide in Him and He in us
- We have been placed into Him
- We have all things through Him

What we will focus on this morning is one verse that combines the ideas of being “with Christ” and “in Him” (Gal. 2:20).
As we begin, you’ve probably mentally asked, “But what does this mean? In what way are we ‘in Christ’ or ‘united to Christ?’” An initial and short answer is that it is very similar to the relationship between a man and woman when they marry — while maintaining distinctiveness, they also are joined together in a transcendent (even “mystical”) union that is indissolvable and from which immense benefits are derived.

In Galatians 2:20, the apostle Paul affirms our union with Christ by asserting three theological realities that Christ accomplished at the cross.

**Our Union with Christ means that His experience on the cross has become our experience.**

We are united to Christ so that our sin has been removed, we have been given Christ’s new life, and we have a new way to live.

**Context: Why Paul opposes Peter (vv. 11-14)**

1. **The Old Man is Dead (v. 20a)**
2. **The New Man is Alive (v. 21b)**
3. **The New Life is by Faith (v. 20c-21)**
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Context: Why Paul opposes Peter (vv. 11-14)

- The historical story of Peter and Paul in Antioch (this is only ref. in all NT to it)
  - v. 11 = summary of story — Paul opposed (directly) because Peter clearly in sin.
  - men from James = i.e., Jerusalem church, but not supported by James (Acts 15)
  - Peter used to eat = i.e., he ate regularly with Gentiles — no boundaries (3:26ff)
  - began to withdraw… = it was gradual (perhaps a meal at a time…)
  - fearing = his motive for withdrawal was fear
  - rest…Barnabas = great tragedy of Peter’s sin was it led others astray (1 Co. 11:1) Barnabas was not active leader in hypocrisy, but was “swept off balance…”
  - hypocrisy = like an actor playing a part, they weren’t who they really were.
  - Paul spoke… = this had already been taken care of in 2:4; Peter’s sin (perverting gospel) was public, so Paul rebuked him in public (1 Tim. 5:20).

- There are many practical applications of this section, but what Paul particularly was addressing was that while Peter believed grace (Mt. 16; Acts 2; Acts 15), his lack of care about the relationship between his beliefs and his actions that enticed the Galatians to believe the Law was more powerful to liberate them from sin than Christ.
  - So Paul reminds the readers that justification is only through faith in Christ (v. 16a)
  - And that the Law is incapable of justifying any man (v. 16b)
  - And then his summary is in vv. 20-21 — why Christ could do what the Law could not.
  - Specifically, Paul will emphasize that our union with Christ has accomplished what the Law could not accomplish — we are saved because we are united to Christ, not because we keep the Law. He emphasizes this in two phrases in this verse: crucified with Christ and Christ lives in me.
  - Here are three realities that uphold our union with Christ:

1. The Old Man is DEAD (v. 20a)

- The key phrase here is I have been crucified with Christ. The verb is a form that means that this crucifixion has happened in the past but it continues to have implications even now; and it also does not mean that Paul crucifies himself but that someone else has accomplished this crucifixion.
- Now the question of course is, “What does this mean — with Christ?”
✓ We know it doesn’t mean that Paul was physically crucified with Christ.
✓ And it seems pretty clear that it is more than just receiving benefits from the crucifixion.
✓ And it would seem that it is more than, “Jesus suffered and so will we.”
✓ To be unified to the death of Christ means that when Christ died on the cross there was a sense in which believers participated with Him in that event. See Rom. 6:4-8; Col. 2:12-14, 20; 3:1-4.
✓ What happened when Christ died?
   ➢ He physically died and was placed in a tomb.
   ➢ He actually absorbed the full wrath of God against sin.
   ➢ He died as a sin-bearer (substitute) — He did not die for His own sin.
✓ What happened when Paul died with Christ?
   ➢ He did not physically die.
   ➢ But Paul was liberated from the Law so that he no longer attempted to please God on the basis of his own achievements (e.g., Phil. 3:5-8). At the cross, “The self Righteous, self-centered Paul died.”
   ➢ vv. 6-7. N. B. (This is key!) And he was liberated from sin. He was freed not to sin (Rom. 6:9, 11-12 only make sense if something spiritual actually happened to us at the cross).
✓ So what does that all mean? One writer has summarized what happens in our union with Christ:

(1) Union with Christ is based on Christ’s being our covenant head and is established by his sharing our nature.
(2) Since he is our head and representative, who shares our humanity all that he did in his earthly ministry was done as a substitute and representative.
(3) Yet our union with Christ goes much further than this. Since he shares our nature, and since the Holy Spirit unites us to him, all that he did and does is in union with us. He took our place under the Wrath of God, while we take his place as sons of the Father. He is the captain of the team of which we are members. When the captain scores the winning goal in the final minute of stoppage time, the whole team participates in the captain’s actions.
(4) This union is the ground of our whole salvation, justification included. We receive a right status before God, since we are incorporated into the Son of God himself. All that he did is ours.

We were and are considered by God to be in Christ at the point he acted. [Robert Letham, Union with Christ, 83.]

✓ “He is substituted for us because He is one with us.” [Hugh Martin]
✓ This is another way of saying what Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17 — “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” The old man is dead. Sin is no longer our master. We no longer are dead men.
“…when Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, we are really and truly the ones who died and rose with him, as Paul says in Romans 6:1ff. Moreover, it also follows that when he died, our sin was utterly and definitively dealt with, since Christ died in union with us and we with him. Sin can no longer have dominion over us!” [Robert Letham, Union with Christ, 65.]

- So the first reality about our union with Christ is that the old man is dead. The second reality corresponds to that and it is that the new man is alive.

2. **The New Man is Alive (v. 21b)**

- Not only has Paul been crucified with Christ, but he also says, *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me…* Here is another reference to our unity with Christ. We are united to His death (that’s the first phrase) and we are also united to His resurrection. Cf. Col. 2:10-13, esp. v. 13.
  ✓ So as the first phrase means that our old man is dead, this phrase corresponds to that and means that there is a new man who has come alive.
  ✓ The old man was enslaved to sin — he could do nothing to please God (and he did not want to please God). But the new man is able to please God and wants to please God.

  “[Paul’s] death to the old way of life meant an entry into a new way of life...His conversion to Christianity meant a complete change in his way of life.” [L. Morris.]

- To say, *Christ lives in me* means that there is a new life in Paul. He has been regenerated and given a “new life” a “new man.” He is distinctly different from what he was before Christ, as a Jew who knew many laws but didn’t really know God. This is not a reformation of His old man, but it is the recreation of Paul into a new man (6:15; Col. 3:9-11).
  ✓ And with the emphasis that *Christ* is living in Him, Paul simply means that the power to live this way is not inherent in him — his ability to live to please God is based on the fact that Christ died, was resurrected and ascended and sent the Spirit to indwell believers so that the Spirit would produce His life and His fruit in the lives of believers.
  ➢ Paul does not mean, “I’m not working…”
  ➢ But he does mean, “I am not working *myself* — by my own efforts or by the Law.” (Phil. 2:12-13) With that statement he is directly addressing the hypocrisy of Peter whose actions were tempting Barnabas and others to go back under the Law.
• This is not just a theological truth that should thrill your heart (though it should thrill you). It is immensely practical — only through our union with Christ can sin be defeated. **Rom. 8:6-13.**

  ✓ All men are either in the flesh or in the Spirit and those who are fleshly cannot please God (v. 8).
  
  “In their battles with sin, the lost can only move from one form of not pleasing God to another.”
  [W. Johnston, “Union with Christ.”]

  ✓ But the believer, because he has been united to Christ, can put to death the deeds of the flesh and progressively grow in sanctification (v. 13). It is our union with Christ the ensures that we can live in victory over sin.

• So we’ve seen that because of our union with Christ, the old man is dead and the new man is alive. The third reality about our union with Christ is that our new life is lived by faith.

3. The New Life is by Faith (v. 20c-21)

• Now just because Paul is made a new creature in Christ (and all believers with him) doesn’t mean that Paul ceases to exist. No, he still has a **life which I now live in the flesh.** That is, he still has a fleshly human body and he hasn’t ceased to exist. But it’s a new Paul, nonetheless. The material form of his life is the same, but his spiritual nature has been transformed.

• What’s different about Paul is the way he lives. He no longer lives according to the flesh, supposing that he can do things that will please God (as Peter subtly did in v. 12), but now he lives by faith, trusting that what Christ — the Son of God — has done on his behalf to change him is enough. Notice the three things that Paul says about Christ —

  ✓ **who loved me** = This love is the supreme motive of God’s grace. It’s why Christ did what He did on the cross and the breadth and depth of this love surpasses our comprehension.

  ✓ **who gave Himself up for me** = Christ’s love is incomprehensible because of the extent of what He did — becoming a man and taking on our sin and absorbing God’s wrath…who has a mind to comprehend those realities? “He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

  ✓ **if righteousness comes through the Law then Christ died needlessly** = If we can justify ourselves before God then God’s grace is nullified and the cross was wasted and futile and it was the “biggest mistake in the universe.” And if Christ died needlessly, there was no real sacrifice, no real love, no real grace, no real atonement, Christ is not the first fruit of the resurrection and we have no real hope.
• So to live by faith means that Christ did not die needlessly; He died because He loved His own and gave Himself for them so they might be unified to Him. And now we live (by faith) for Him.

✓ And one way we live for Him is to submit to the authority of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to produce His fruit in us (Gal. 5:22ff).

✓ A natural consequence of unity is not just that we can bear fruit, but that we will bear fruit in keeping with the life that we now have. “Fruit-bearing is not a natural out-working of unaided, human nature. Rather, it is enabled by the infusion of supernatural life brought about by spiritual union with Christ, the source of new life….Healthy and God-honoring fruit-bearing…is foreign to the natural or fallen person. Good fruit is produced solely by the working of God’s Spirit in the core of the life (vv. 22-23; cf. Eph. 5:9)” [Demarest, 341.]

✓ And remember, this is all done by faith — believing in Christ’s work to obliterate both the penalty and power of sin in the believer’s life. This faith is initiated at the moment of his salvation and continues on through his life.

• This is union with Christ. Because we have been united with Christ, the old man is dead and the new man is alive, and we live our new life by faith.