

The Way of Wisdom #3

Scripture Memory: Gal 2:20

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It's been a long time since I've preached here; what a joy this is! Let's pray...

Sue said last week that **anyone** could memorize **anything** and that made me mad because she's right but it's really hard work for some of us. I do not always do well with memorization although I memorize a lot of Scripture. I just don't know where the verses are found. When I was ordained, I had to be examined and they asked me if I had a life verse. "For I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to protect what I have entrusted to Him until that day." And when they asked where that was found, I didn't know. It's somewhere in the Timothys (It's **2 Timothy 1:12**).

I was excited to take on Sue's challenge and put my verse card in my jeep; today, I have "I have been crucified with Christ" memorized so far.

Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

I was speaking with a server at a restaurant a couple weeks ago that Kathy and I were celebrating our 52nd wedding anniversary and she said, "Did you get her a nice present?" I told her I had purchased flowers for her and a nice card and taken her out to a nice dinner. She was horrified. "That's it? You didn't buy her something special? If my husband failed to get me an anniversary present he would be a dead man walking."

I think that phrase is fascinating. Dead man walking. Apparently when someone receives the death penalty and faces their execution, as they are being escorted from their cell past the cells of other prisoners to the place of execution, the guards call out, "Dead man walking!" and all the prisoners can come and say good bye. It's a kind of morbid reminder of what the person being executed faces.

Galatians 2:20 suggests that if we are followers of Jesus, we are all dead men walking. We all lose our sinful identity since it has been crucified with Christ. Do you want to be stripped of your identity as a sinner and get crucified? If so, welcome to Christianity 101. This is who you are and what is going to happen.

Crucifixion is a horrific way to die. It is insanely **brutal**. It was the preferred method of the Roman government to execute prisoners. If you stood against the government you could face serious repercussions. The Romans ruled the known world. They grew their empire by

conquering other nations and subjugating them to Roman law. Caesar ruled over all with an iron hand and he had hordes of soldiers to do his bidding effectively and noisily.

One of the reasons crucifixion was effective was that it was extremely **violent**. People feared the torture. The brutality served as a deterrent. Don't run afoul of Caesar or you won't just lose your life, you will be tortured to death. You'll be flogged and stabbed and beaten and cursed and spat on and tortured until death becomes a blessing.

Another thing about crucifixion is that it's **public**. The Romans crucified people on hills and along roadsides in very public places. Again, this would act as a **deterrent**. And if you were being crucified you had the additional shame or experience of having everyone know what you had done. There was no hiding.

Of course, it was also **permanent**. You wouldn't be a little bit crucified. Crucifixion ended in death. You weren't crucified for a little while and then taken down from the cross and sent on your way with a warning to not do wrong again. You were crucified to death.

In **Galatians 2:20** Paul deliberately says that he has been crucified with Christ. Note that he says he "has been" crucified. **It is in the past**. It is a deed that has been accomplished and was something that was **done to him, not done by him**. He has been crucified and is clearly not physically dead since he is walking around. So how is it that he has been crucified and no longer lives?

Paul's sin nature has been crucified with Christ. His sin nature no longer animates him because Christ now lives in him. It is Christ who **animates** him. Christ who gives him life. Christ's Spirit that **guides** him. The Spirit **teaches** and **directs** and **comforts** him. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter.

Why do we need a comforter? Why would that be? Is it because the crucifixion of the old nature is both done and ongoing? We are constantly putting our old nature to death and it is a brutal, painful process. We are still tempted to do what is wrong and to defend our sinful actions. To resist temptation is not something we do easily.

I confess that I love to gamble. Fifty-two years ago my buddies asked me what I wanted to do at my bachelor party and I suggested we play poker. We played all night and I took their money like I was shearing sheep. Kathy and I had a little extra cash to spend on our honeymoon. It was great. I was good at poker.

Years later Kathy won a free trip to Las Vegas and while she was resting from our trip, I took \$20 and started putting quarters in a slot machine. On the second-to-the-last quarter I won \$750. It was great! I took the money to Kathy and she took \$650 and put it in her purse and told me I could go gamble with the other \$100. Which I did. And won several more big pots totaling \$1600 and had extra for a show. And I started thinking, "Wow, I am really good at this." Good at this. Good at playing slot machines. Good at putting quarters in slot machines and pulling

levers. That's how stupid my sin nature is. It allows me to deceive myself. It allows me to think I'm good at gambling because I can win twenty bucks from my friends in a penny ante poker game and am an "expert" slot machine player. So crazy how our sin nature works. I hope I'm not the only one like this!

The Spirit is tearing that false narrative out of me. It's not always been easy but I can't stay away from Vegas and avoid lottery tickets. However, the deeper sins that still entwine me are much more difficult to overcome. I've noticed that when I'm on the hot seat in Pilgrim Group the same sin keeps rearing its ugly head. It's gotten to the point over the years where I will start sharing an event and about three sentences in I think, "Oh, shoot, never mind. I know what I am choosing. Let's just move on to the repentance and prayer part."

The power of the life that I now live in Christ is that the distance between the sin recognition and repentance begins to shorten. I realize I'm a sinner more quickly.

I was going through some old papers a few weeks ago and ran across a song I wrote when I turned forty. I'm jealous of good musicians and singers because I have not been able to play the guitar or the piano or any instrument at all and, while my siblings and mother could all read music and sing harmony parts, I could not. Neither could my Dad so that was a small consolation. We would just sing something that resembled the melody and let others fill in the parts.

Anyway, for my fortieth birthday I gave myself the present of voice lessons. My teacher was a woman who advertised that she was a musical healer and voice teacher and could teach anyone to sing. After hearing me, she said I would be the test case of her tagline. After we got to know each other a bit she discovered I was a poet so she said we should collaborate on a song. I wrote the lyrics and she wrote the music. The title of the song was "One More Time." It was about sinning the same old sin over and over again. She was confused about why that mattered to me and that what I considered sin wasn't really anything bad, just lousy karma. She thought I could overcome these negative thoughts if I hummed certain notes in a certain order each day for five minutes. When we completed the song she told me I would be singing it as a solo at the student recital and that she would accompany me on the piano since it might be difficult for other musicians to follow me.

Now, 30+ years later I am still dealing with what I call "one-more-time sins." I keep repeating it and yet I do it again...and again. They don't go away just because I hum a few musical tones.

This is because we are in a process called **sanctification** and **justification**. When Christ died for me, in God's eyes I am perfect (despite your doubts). It's just "just as if I had never sinned." But this is also true: I am being sanctified and have both **been made right** and **am being made right**. It's a beautiful gift from God.

Paul talks about his new identity. Jesus changes your identity. We talk a lot about identity at the Village. We talk a lot about where you get your identity from. I have all kinds of beliefs about my

identity such as “I can’t sing parts, I’m a really good slot machine player, I’m a retired pastor, I’m a writer; I’m a dad; I’m a really good husband to an awesome wife.” Some are truths from Christ and some are lies from Satan.

Paul has a certain identity as well. He is smart. He’s a good writer. He is a minister to the Gentiles. He sounds tougher in his letters than he does in person, but he’s not afraid to confront people. Earlier in this chapter he goes after Peter because Peter was living like a Gentile but then pretended he was living as a Jew when a certain Jewish sect showed up. Paul tells Peter to his face in front of others to knock it off and stop pretending he was something he wasn’t.

Who are you pretending to be? Who do I want people to think I am? When you go down this road, you identity veers from being a child of the King.

When we started the Village, Eric and I sat down and worked on our core values, a process I really liked. Core values are those that are bedrock to who you are. They are values that I would leave the church over if they are violated. One of my deepest held values is **Authenticity**. **Authenticity is hugely important to me.** I grew up hearing that if people just gave their lives to Christ all their problems would disappear. Right? Not even close. For most of us, giving ourselves over to Christ is devastatingly hard and the start to our problems. After all, **we are being crucified, a public spectacle**. Our identity as a sinner is being ripped away. We are being fitted with a new identity. That’s a brutal process. You can’t pretend to be a Christian for long: You simply can’t fake it for long. **Your identity will always be revealed.** Instead, be authentic.

You are probably rethinking Christianity at this point....But don’t be depressed.

This story isn’t a story of crucifixion; this is not the point!. This is a story of life: **Life in Christ: Real Life. Meaningful Life. Fulfilling Life. A life of Joy and Peace.** But wait, you ask, didn’t Paul go through a lot of suffering, being both beaten and shipwrecked? But Paul says he is happy and content. He says that the life he now lives in Christ is a life of faith in Christ. Not just faith that things will work out okay. Not just faith that if I act like a good person I will make it through. Not just faith that if I can just manage or hide my sin I’ll look good and people will like me. No, Paul’s faith is in the Son of God. A faith given to him. It’s a gift.

Ephesians 2:8-10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

We can walk in good works because we’ve been crucified with Christ: his old nature is gone and his new nature can listen to divine guidance and say NO to sin. And it’s not just a faith in Christ’s work. It’s a faith in the life given **by the Christ who loves him**. Do you know how loved you are? Do you have any idea how deeply and dearly loved you are? No one can love you like Jesus loves you and knows you. And not only that, this is the Christ who gave himself for Paul.

The Christ who was crucified for Paul. Christ laid down his life because he loved Paul the murderer, Paul the accessory to murder. He loved Paul not because of he Paul was but because of who He is. He was crucified for Paul... And you. And you. He loves you and was crucified **for** you, which means he took your sin nature: your sin nature didn't just go away; he owned it and stood before the Father convicted of all the crap you've done. He does this because he loves you and then he lays down his life and gives it freely for you.