

Are We Preaching “Another” Gospel: A 31-Day Journey toward Rediscovering the Gospel of the Grace of God

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Day 25

DEAD OR ALIVE

This brings us to what I believe is an errant emphasis in many churches today—that of our supposed need to “die” as believers. The same scriptures on this topic that used to come to my mind, I’m supposing will also come to yours. In my case, I admit that for many years I never “proved all things” on this subject but just went along with the flow. In the back of my mind, though, the idea of needing to put myself to death seemed odd. Hadn’t I died with Jesus on the cross?

Then again, I would recall the verses speaking of dying, and tell myself, “Well, Jesus *did* tell His disciples to pick up their cross “daily” and Paul wrote that he “died daily”. Yet something about the whole concept of daily dying to self continued to trouble me—the thought of all these believers focusing on trying to die to this, and die to that, and die to the other thing, as if what Jesus did on the cross wasn’t quite sufficient a death to cover it all.

When I finally began to study this matter more closely, it became clear that Paul did not instruct believers to die. He reminded them that they had already died. Even though he said that he “died daily” due to the hardships and persecutions he endured (1 Cor. 15:30-32), he saw himself as *already* crucified. This happens when we are born again. Paul wrote:

Galatians 2:20

*“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who **live**, but Christ **lives** in me; and the **life** which I now **live** in the flesh I **live** by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

Now, I ask you to consider this question: Was Paul dead or alive? My first reaction used to be that he was both dead and alive. I was able to come to this conclusion because I was trained to simply accept such “paradoxes”. This helped me believe things that were not true alongside believing what was true; things such as the fact that His presence now abides permanently within each believer on the one hand, and the teaching that we need to “enter His presence” when we pray on the other. That is completely illogical, but most Christians today just “accept” that both are true when it is utterly impossible. Similarly, it does not make sense to say that someone is both alive and dead. **Did God send His only Son to give**

us everlasting life or everlasting death?

Consider a natural example. Lazarus died. Jesus raised him from the dead. So, after he was raised, was he dead or alive? Obviously, he was alive. It's the same for us. We died with Christ, but now we live.

Notice that Paul's emphasis in Galatians 2:20 was on the life he **lived**. He states that he *had been* crucified, making no mention of needing to die again—that had already happened when he was born again.

We died and were buried with Jesus (Col.2:12). We were resurrected with Him and even ascended with Him (Col. 2:12-13, Eph. 2:5-6). We are no longer dead. We are alive. Just as Jesus is no longer dead and buried, neither are we.

Romans 6:5-11

*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be **done away with**, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who **has** died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we **died** with Christ, we believe that we shall also **live** with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, **dies no more**. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin **once for all**; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ **Likewise (in the same way—just as Jesus died one time but is now alive) you also, reckon yourselves to be dead** indeed to sin, but **alive** to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Our **old** man—the person we **were**—the person who **was** both a sinner and controlled by sinful passions—that person DIED. In the same way that Jesus died **one time** but now lives to God, we also died one time with Him and now LIVE to God—as new creations.

Here is a scripture that gets taken out of context and is used to show that we need to die.

Colossians 3:5-6

*Therefore **put to death** your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves **once** walked when you lived in them.*

Of course, you know the little expression, “When you see the word ‘therefore’, find out what it’s there for”. So, let’s take a look at the verses right before the above passage.

Colossians 3:1-4

*If then **you were raised** with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ **For you died**, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ **who is our life** appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. ⁵ **Therefore** (because you already died with Christ) put to death...*

Paul is not telling the Colossians to die. He's telling them that *because* they already died and rose with Christ, they were to now put to death the sin in their lives. We can see ourselves as warriors with total authority, vanquishing our foes. We stand victorious and overcome any temptation we might face. In Romans 6, Paul continues:

Romans 6:11-14

*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be **dead indeed to sin**, but **alive** to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² **Therefore** (because you were already crucified with Him and are now alive to God and free from sin) do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God **as being alive from the dead**, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

The sinners we *were* died, and now we live as the righteous. Because of this, we now have the authority to refuse to allow sin to rule us. This is His doing, and we simply walk in it.

So, what did Jesus mean when He told those following Him to pick up their crosses daily and follow Him? It would seem on the surface that this would negate what Paul taught.

One thing we have learned since understanding the gospel of grace is that if something doesn't seem to make sense when reading Scripture, dig a little deeper. Find out if others have asked the same question. Sometimes, the answer is the commentary of the Bible you are reading. Look up cross-references of the same account. Do they concur? If not, dig a little deeper again. There are so many online resources now. Take the time to "prove all things and hold fast to that which is good."

Luke 9:20-26

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God."

*21 And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”***

*23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow Me.*

*24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. 25 For what profit is it to a man **if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?** 26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.*

We see that when Jesus told them to take up their crosses daily and follow Him, He was speaking of His own upcoming death. We know that they were not at that time going to be physically crucified with Jesus and that instead of picking up their crosses, they fled in fear; so of course, He was referring to the fact that they would soon be “crucified with Christ” just as Paul would later declare that he had been crucified (Gal. 2:20). The “whoever” of whom Jesus is speaking in this passage are those who have not yet been born again (no one had at this time).

If someone refuses to die with Christ, he will end up losing his life. If we die with Him, we will live. If someone is ashamed to confess Jesus as the Lord, that person will be lost.

That’s easy enough to show, but then why does Jesus tell them to pick their cross “daily”?

The account in Luke, in which it records Jesus as saying "pick up your cross *daily*, is also recorded in Matthew 26:24 and Mark 8:34. Interestingly, their accounts do not include the word “daily”. This agrees more with what Paul wrote that we were (past tense) crucified with Christ, but now live.

The one word "daily" in Luke 9:23 changes the whole meaning of the passage from a one-time crucifixion with Christ to a series of crucifixions. Dig a little deeper.

Interestingly enough, according to the Nelson study Bible, the word “daily” does not appear in the Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text¹. Isn't that interesting"? This might lead us to the fair speculation that the word “daily” might have been added later by a well-

¹ The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text is a version of the New Testament in Greek that is put together by comparing many ancient manuscripts and choosing the wording that appears in most of them.

meaning translator. When we add this to the fact that no New Testament writer instructs the believers to pick up their crosses daily, we can safely conclude that Jesus said what Matthew and Mark recorded.

We were crucified with Jesus and buried with Him in baptism. This is what Jesus meant when He said to pick up our crosses—that those who followed Him would be crucified with Him once and for all time, just as Jesus only died one time and was once buried but rose again. This happens at salvation and is symbolised by water baptism. We are no longer dead. We were raised with Him, and now we live.

Then, what did Paul, who, we just read, wrote that we were crucified and now live, mean when he said, "I die daily"? The most obvious way to answer this question is by using context.²

1 Corinthians 15:30-32

*And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? ³¹ I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, **I die daily.** ³² If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*

Obviously, Paul is referring to the hardships and persecutions he suffered *daily* for Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-28). All believers in Jesus, and especially those in ministry, die "daily" in that sense. This explanation of what Paul meant by dying daily makes even more sense because it doesn't negate what Jesus taught: Jesus came to give us life!

Life! Everlasting life! It seems to me that this is something that is rarely talked about in church; certainly not as much as "dying", but life—**everlasting life** is what Jesus died and rose again to give us! When we begin to focus on what Jesus died to give us, we begin to see that living in this everlasting life, not dying, is the point.

John 3:16

*For God so **LOVED** the world that He **GAVE** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have **everlasting LIFE.***

John 4:14

*"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into **everlasting LIFE.**"*

² Context is the friend of those who seek truth. Immediate context are the verses surrounding the text, but we must also interpret Scripture in light of the New Covenant of grace through faith.

John 10:10

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have **LIFE**, and that they may have it more **abundantly**.*

Titus 3:4-7

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the **hope of eternal LIFE**.*

1 John 5:11-13

*And the testimony is this, that God **has given us eternal LIFE**, and this **LIFE** is in **His Son**. ¹² He who has the Son has the **LIFE**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. ¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have **eternal LIFE**.*

The gospel, the good news, is that Jesus didn't come to give us everlasting death. He came to give us everlasting life! So, yes, if you do not yet know Jesus, pick up your cross, but get ready for a resurrection! If you already picked up your cross, enjoy the rivers of living water flowing from within you. This life has been *given* to us by grace through faith. So, let us celebrate and proclaim life! In doing so, we will be preaching the true gospel.