

Paul-the Chief Exponent of Co-Crucifixion

by F.J. Huegel

F.J. Huegel explores Paul's profound understanding of co-crucifixion and its implications for Christian identity and life.

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46, John 15:19, Romans 6:6, Romans 7:4, Romans 8:2, 2 Corinthians 4:10-12, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 5:14, Ephesians 2:13-17, Colossians 3:3

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Co-Crucifixion"

Description

F.J. Huegel emphasizes the profound spiritual insight of the Apostle Paul, who, despite never knowing Christ 'after the flesh,' gained a deeper understanding of the faith through his solitary revelation in Arabia. Paul's three years of meditation allowed him to grasp the significance of co-crucifixion with Christ, leading to his unique contributions to Christian theology and the Church. He articulated that true Christian life involves dying to self, sin, and the world, and that believers are called to identify with Christ's suffering and resurrection. Huegel highlights that Paul's teachings on the Cross reveal a transformative participation in Christ's death, which liberates believers from the law and the flesh. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a complete surrender to Christ, emphasizing that true freedom and life come from being crucified with Him.

Transcript

THOUGH the Apostle Paul never knew Christ "after the flesh," he seems to have had a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Faith than the other Apostles. He was the dominant force in the shaping of the character and life of the nascent Church. After the Master, he is the outstanding personality of the New Testament, making the greatest contribution to the literature and the growth of the Church. Yet, he knew not Christ "after the flesh" as did the other Apostles; he had never come under the sway of the Saviour's teaching and ministry.

After the Damascene Road revelation, Paul went not to Jerusalem "to confer with flesh and blood." He went into Arabia. He wanted to be alone. Such an experience as he had had-the vision of that blinding light, the sudden apprehension of that ineffable glory, the discovery that the Jesus of the accursed tree was none other than the Christ of God-such an overwhelming revelation of the power and beauty of Him, who is none other than the King of kings, made a period of silence and rapt meditation absolutely imperative. Paul spent three years in profound meditation (Gal. i. 16-18) . It would seem as though he made a great mistake. What! not go to Jerusalem to confer with Peter, James, and John? Think of it, he (Paul) who had never known Jesus could have sat at the feet of the Apostles. He could have talked it all over with Peter.

He could have obtained first-hand information from John. Some of us would have travelled around the world for such a privilege. Did Paul make a mistake? We will let Paul speak for himself:

When it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me . . . immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me; but I went into Arabia" (Gal. i. 15-16).

For Paul, in that sublime hour, the supreme need was solitude, so that unmolested and undisturbed, he might give himself to an undivided contemplation of the vision. Christ filled and flooded the horizon. The glory of Christ so absorbed him that for three years he could not detach himself from the Heavenly magnet. What! go to the Apostles for light when the Lord Christ Himself had- come with blinding glory to his spirit; go to men for truth when He who is the truth had constituted Himself his teacher?

Fourteen years later he went up to Jerusalem (Gal. ii. 1), but he makes the significant confession that those who seemed to be somewhat. . . added nothing to him. The Apostles could give him no light. The contrary was the case. He, Paul, understood better. He had superior light. He knew Christ (the Christ of God) better. His insight into such questions as the relation of the Gentiles to the Church, the relation of Christianity to Judaism, the doctrine of the indwelling Christ, the doctrine of the mystical body, the universality of Christianity-his insight into the mysteries of the faith was deeper. His judgment was sounder. The three years in the Arabian desert at the feet of the glorified Christ had done infinitely more for this once proud Pharisee, than the three years with the Man-Jesus -had done for the fishermen Apostles. Paul was always ahead of them-as a missionary, as a theologian, as a preacher, as an organizer, as a saint. After our Lord, it is to Paul that the Church owes the greatest debt.

Now, how do we account for this? Paul, who had never known Jesus after the flesh, knew Him better after the Spirit. He, as none other was hid with Christ in God. He had been caught up to the third Heaven where he heard things unspeakable, unlawful to utter. He it was who prayed for his Ephesian brethren, that the Lord would grant to strengthen them with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that they, rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know' the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and that they might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now what was the central doctrine upon which Paul focused his genius? Was it justification by faith? Many would say that it was. However, a study of Paul's Epistles brings one to the conviction that the great Apostle's glorying was not simply in the fact that Christ had died for him. With that, there was always associated another aspect of the Cross, namely: the fact that he (Paul) had died in Christ.

"God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world" (Gal. v. 14) .

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

"Our old man is crucified with Him (Christ) that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom. vi. 6) .

"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. vi. 1-2).

"For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3) .

This seems to be the sublime lesson which the Saviour there in the Arabian desert where Paul listened in rapt wonderment, burned into the fibre of his being. It was the deep meaning of Calvary which the Master unfolded to the now broken Pharisee-to him who was to become the greatest of the Apostles. The veil was drawn aside and Paul saw into the hidden mystery of the Cross. He saw himself there with Jesus-in the purpose of God potentially crucified. For Paul, the Christian life was never to be a mere imitation, but a glorious participation in the Saviour's death and resurrection. For him, the believer was a member of Christ's body-bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh. For him, to live was Christ. He would not have some of self and some of Christ, or even a little of self and much of Christ. He simply would have none of self, and all of Christ. He saw that God had laid not only sins upon the Son, but also the Sinner, and that in Him he (Paul) had actually, if potentially, died. He never wavered. He committed the "self-life" to death and stood forth before the world free in Christ.

So utterly does the great Apostle identify himself with Christ, realizing as he does that this identification of all believers with the Federal Head of the New Race, Christ the Lord, was something which in the mind of God had been conceived as man's way out of sin and the thralldom of the corrupted "flesh-life," and which springs, as it were, from the very nature of redemption (Christ identifying Himself with man, taking the form of a man in the Incarnation and suffering for man upon the Cross that man might identify himself with the One who had died for him and in Him die to sin)-so utterly, I repeat, does the Apostle identify himself with his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that he sees in his own sufferings as a follower of Christ what we may call a prolongation of Calvary. Paul speaks of it as a filling up that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ. In a word, the Apostle interprets his own suffering in the light of the Cross.

We see this in the second Corinthian letter where he dwells upon the persecutions and trials which he bore. "We are troubled on every side," he says, "perplexed . . . persecuted . . . cast down." Then follows the amazing utterance which gives us the key for the interpretation of the deepest secret of Paul's innermost soul: "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus . . ." It is Christ suffering, it is Christ receiving fresh wounds, it is Christ being crucified afresh in, and through, his servant. It is Calvary being reinacted. Not that Paul looked upon his sufferings as in any sense a sharing of Christ's sufferings in His capacity as Sin-Bearer when He bore the sin of the world, or as a completing of the great work of expiation. That was consummated once and for all upon Calvary. In this sublime giving of Himself as a ransom for all, the sinner had nothing to do.

What I wish to emphasize is the fact that for Paul, identification with Christ is something so real that he sees in the Cross not only the death of the Saviour, but also the potential death of all those who constitute His body; something so complete that he (Paul) sees in his own sufferings as a Christian, and in the afflictions of all Christians, a constant dying of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

But we must not think of this death to which Paul says we are always delivered for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. iv. 11) as something purely negative. Out of it Paul asserts springs life-eternal life. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body . . . So then death worketh in us but life in you" (2 Cor. iv. 10, 12). It is when we die in Christ to the "old life" that the barriers are all removed and the living streams break forth from our innermost beings bearing life-the life of God-to others.

Before we leave this phase of our participation let us briefly summarize its implications, as Paul saw them

First, in Christ we are dead to sin (Rom. vi. 11). Sin is not overcome simply by struggling against it. If it was something which always met us from without, that might not be so difficult. But our very being is soaked with it. A drop of ink in a glass of water will taint the entire glass. Self is such an insidious thing. Our very thinking is poisoned with the leprosy of self-love. Our spirit is so twisted, torn, because of self, out of its right center, God, and rooted in the flesh; the old life is so foul in the sight of God that no patchwork, no mere polishing up, no amount of varnish will do. Jesus says we must be born again. In Christ we are taken into the tomb to be undone.

Christ cannot be to us the life of God without being to us the death of self. "I came not to bring peace but a sword." Now the knife must cut if we would be free. There is no other way out of selfhood.

Second, in Christ we are dead to the world. That does not mean, of course, that some medieval cloister, or a desert retreat, or the cell of a monastery, or some St. Stylites pillar would be more conducive to Christian living. No man ever stood nearer the heart of this world's affairs than Christ: whether in the market-place, in the temple, in the home, with the poor, the maimed, the halt, or with those who rejoiced at a bridal feast, He was ever in the stream of life where the current was swiftest and deepest. No indeed, He was not an ascetic. Yet He could say: "I am not of the world." "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world."

The world has taken on plenty of gloss since Christ's day, but the friendship of the world is still enmity with God; for the simple reason that the Spirit of the world with its shams and its lies, its greed, and its lust, springs from the monster self. Satan, working through man's pride, is still the god of this world. Be on intimate terms with this world which crucified Christ? It is unthinkable. The spirit that crucified Christ is still rampant in the world. Nothing more logical, nothing more inevitable, nothing more practicable than that the Christian should be cut off from the world. Until this world changes its attitude toward Christ, enthroning Him in its very institutions and life, we, as disciples of Christ, find ourselves compelled to stand out against selfishness and greed. We are dead to the world in Christ (Gal. vi. 14).

In the third place, in Christ we die to the party-spirit. Paul, speaking in his Ephesian letter of the middle wall between Jews and Gentiles, says, that Christ broke down this wall by His Cross, making of "twain one new man." Oh! that the Church might catch this vision; that she might see herself crucified with Christ. How the walls would break down. The wall for example, of Sectarianism. "In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew." Any intense holding of sectarian attitudes is positively un-Christian. All division is of the "flesh." Satan raises walls between spirit and spirit, group and group, sect and sect, nation and nation—Christ breaks them down. To be Christian one dare not adopt any exaggerated views of nationalism. One must die to jingoism. We are in Christ citizens of the world with vast responsibilities to the entire race. Only the Cross of Christ can do away with this welter of jingoism, and sectarianism, and nationalism. Not that a good Christian does not recognize his duties to his country. He does. Indeed, only a Christian can be all that a true patriot should be, and the truer the Christian, the truer the patriot. But over and above nationalism and sectarianism stands Christ, and as members of His . body, we are irrevocably committed to the glorious program of worldredemption. We have died in Christ to every divisive spirit. We cannot take Christ to our bosoms without embracing humanity, for Christ identifies Himself with the interests of every living soul (Matt. xxv. 31-46). We cannot have Christ if we will not have His Cross—and on that Cross was slain all racial enmity—in fact all that interferes with the perfect harmonization of the life of the world for the working out of the highest interests of humanity.

"Christ . . . is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity . . . for to make in Himself of twain (Jew and Gentile) one new man, that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. ii. 13-17).

Finally, in Christ we have died to the law: "my brethren ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom. vii. 4). Christ has lifted us not only out of the "flesh-life" and cut us off from the world by His death in which we participate, but has taken us clear out of the realm of law. We are not under the law, but under grace; it is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which governs us. In a sense, it is still law, "the perfect law of liberty" of which James speaks in his Epistle. But we must not confound this law with the Mosaic. The one liberates, the other binds. The one gives the power to be Christ-like, the other is dead legalism. The one is an expression of the new-nature, the other is an attempt to check and control the old.

How good it is to be free-free from the dominion of the "flesh-life," free from the tyranny of the world, free from the hideous monster which we call self; free from the legalism of a dead law which as Paul says worketh wrath; free from the bondage of fear and anxiety and worry. How good to have a liberated spirit surcharged with the life of God. It is the Cross of Christ that thus liberates. Only as we stand with Christ in His death, and appropriate by faith the liberating force of Calvary (i.e. believe that with Christ we died) can we hope to experience the true freedom for which our spirits pant.

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