

The Believer's Identification

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon emphasizes the believer's identification with Christ's death and resurrection as the foundation for living a victorious Christian life.

Scripture: Romans 5:20, Romans 6:1

Topics: "Identification with Christ", "Justification and Transformation"

Description

L.E. Maxwell illustrates the believer's identification with Christ through the story of George Wyatt and his substitute Richard Pratt during the Civil War. He emphasizes that just as Wyatt was exempted from service due to his identification with Pratt's death, believers are justified and united with Christ through His death and resurrection. This identification is not merely legal but involves a deep life-union with Christ, leading to a transformed life that is no longer bound by sin. Maxwell urges believers to recognize that true Christian living is not about imitation but participation in the life of Christ, which brings victory and sufficiency. The sermon concludes with the reminder that Christ lives in us, empowering us to live a life of faith and grace.

Transcript

During the Civil War a man by the name of George Wyatt was drawn by lot to go to the front. He had a wife and six children. A young man named Richard Pratt offered to go in his stead. He was accepted and joined the ranks, bearing the name and number of George Wyatt. Before long Pratt was killed in action. The authorities later sought again to draft George Wyatt into service. He protested, entering the plea that he had died in the person of Pratt. He insisted that the authorities consult their own records as to the fact of his having died in identification with Pratt, his substitute. Wyatt was thereby exempted as beyond the claims of law and further service. He had died in the person of his representative. There we have the truth of identification in a nutshell. God's way of deliverance is through death--through identification with our Substitute in His death and resurrection.

After setting forth the truth of our justification through faith in Christ's death for us (Romans 5), the apostle takes us forward at once into Romans 6, in which he sets forth the believer's identification with death. In chapter 5 it is Christ's death for us; in chapter 6 it is our death with Christ. Christ's death for us in chapter 5 is foundational and essential, but we should move on immediately into the next chapter. It is in chapter 6 we learn that our justification is no mere formal or legal transaction (although it is essentially a legal matter), but that it is also in essential union with Christ. When God declares the ungodly sinner just, He

makes no mere legal and lifeless imputation of righteousness apart from a real and deep life-union of the believer with Christ. God has indeed declared righteous "the ungodly," but not apart from Christ, not outside of Christ. We are justified only in Christ; that is, having come into vital life-union with Christ through faith in His atoning death. Those whom God declares righteous are "created in Christ Jesus." We are actually new creatures "in Christ."

After Paul's declaration in Romans 5:20 that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," the question naturally arises in Romans 6:1, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" The emphatic "God forbid" is based upon our identification with Christ in His death. Having been joined to Christ, it follows that we have been "baptized into his death." Since we have been united to Christ crucified (in our justification-Rom. 5), our position must be one of death "in Him." Paul says, "One died for all, then were all dead." The death of Christ for all inevitably involved the death of all. We therefore died in Christ to sin. Shall we continue in sin? Perish the thought! "In sin" and "in Christ"? What an ethical contradiction! Christ dying for me makes inevitable my death with Him. The very character of Christ's work on Calvary renders inseparable this double aspect of the once-for-all atonement. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The cause of Christ suffers greatly today through what has rightly been termed a "dissected Cross, a decapitated gospel."

In taking upon Himself my "likeness of sinful flesh," apart from which Christ could not have borne the penalty for my sin, He took me up into Himself--made me one with Himself. I am legally and ethically involved. I have been sentenced to death in Christ. It is my judicial position. Think a moment. Did I not accept death in order to be saved? When I realized I was death-doomed, I trusted the death of Another. Christ's death for sin is automatically my death to sin. God's way of victory and deliverance is to cut us right off from the old Adamic tree and to graft us into Christ, joining us to Him in death. Apart, then, from any choice of my own, as a believer "I am crucified with Christ". My being a Christian "makes inevitable a crucified life." It is the Christian life--not the deeper spiritual life. As an old theologian puts it, I have been "born crucified" (that is, when I was born again).

Has the reader labored and agonized to please God? You have resolved to read your Bible, to be more meditative and prayerful--all without effect. You are conscious of crushing failure and defeat. In spite of all your effort you are not like the Lord Jesus. The commands of Christ are grievous. They come with no glad welcome. They haunt you. You are conscious that your life is an utter contradiction of the standards erected by the Lord Jesus as the normal Christian life. You may actually have wondered why the Savior made such demands. They only tantalize and torture you. And no matter how deeply you are shamed, pained, and repentant, your struggles avail you nothing.

Christ's requirements are indeed unattainables--that you must learn first of all. In His demands Christ goes far beyond the natural. He asks for no mere initiations. On the one hand He well knows your incapacities; on the other hand He demands the utterly impossible. And the necessary shock that has to come to the believer is that Christ's standards are completely beyond the reach of the flesh. Who naturally loves his enemies, rejoices in persecution, hates himself, and goes the second mile? Yet these things are native to the true Christian life. We are at once indicted and hopeless. There is an impassable gulf between the humanly possible and the requirements of Christ. The flesh profiteth nothing. F. J. Huegel, in *Bone of His Bone*, rightly summarizes our failure thus: "We have been proceeding upon a false basis. We have conceived of the Christian life as an imitation of Christ. It is not an imitation of Christ. It is a participation of Christ."

Indeed we are to be partakers of the divine nature; and the doorway into such an experimental participation of the life of Christ is through identification-identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.

George Wyatt did not find deliverance by fighting the law or endeavoring to please the authorities. He took his death-position according to the Government record. He acted on the basis of "It is written." He had died in the person of his representative. Even so, I, too, have a Substitute and Representative. He entered a deadly combat and died my death. I have been "crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). That is a great fact. No amount of struggling on my part can make it more true. I am an actual partaker of Christ, and, therefore, of His death and resurrection. Christ actually liveth in me. His is a life of death to sin and aliveness to God; it is mine to yield my all to Him--to believe and rejoice and rest in Christ.

An old missionary had long lived a defeated Christian life. In his despair his eyes fell upon the words, "Christ liveth in me." "What," he said, "is Christ actually living in me?" He jumped up,--solid Presbyterian though he was,--and danced round and round his table, saying, "Christ liveth in me! Christ liveth in me!" When he realized that he was actually indwelt by the Crucified One, he came into blessed emancipation from the old self-life.

The life that is identified with Christ will be a life of sufficiency and fullness and victory. While it must not be confused with a life of emotion or of feelings, it is a life filled with "all joy and peace in believing." We must learn not to live in our feelings, for these are often misleading. The Lord Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." However, the experience of a great pioneer of modern missions, J. Hudson Taylor, greatly illuminates the truth. After months of agony and struggle to realize more life, holiness, and power in his soul, he came in final and utter self-despair to "rest upon the Faithful One." In a letter to his sister he says in part:

The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being more sweet than another, is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything . . . for He, I know, is able to carry out His will and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for the easiest positions He must give me grace, and in the most difficult, His grace is sufficient. So, if God place me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? . . . As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible, or so difficult; but the weight and strain are all gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine . . . All this springs from the believer's oneness with Christ.

Though I be nothing, I accept

The uttermost Thou givest,

One life alone between us now,

One life--the life Thou livest.

--Lucy A. Bennett.

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