

E. Excursus III: Does Galatians 2:20, Or Any Other Text of Scripture, Teach that Christ Lives the Christian Life Instead of the Believer?

Some have employed Galatians 2:20 to affirm that Christ lives the Christian life instead of the believer, or at least the believer who enters into¹ the Higher Life² or the

¹ None of the texts that are alleged as support for the doctrine that Christ lives the Christian life instead of the believer distinguish between an upper class of Christians who have entered into a Higher Life or second blessing and a lower class who have not done so. Galatians 2:20 is true for every Christian, and every Christian has Christ as his life, is legally dead to sin, and has his life hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3, 4).

² For example, Hannah W. Smith, in line with her Quaker quietism, mysticism, and doctrine of the Inner Light and Voice, followed this view of Galatians 2:20, writing: “[H]ow few realize that as to themselves they are dead, and it is only Christ who is alive, and they in Him!” and affirming that the Inner Voice only gives “certain guidance” when one has recognized this secret (Letter to Abby, August 20, 1865, cf. Journal, July 22, 1859, reproduced in the entries for February 3 & January 19 of *The Christian’s Secret of a Holy Life*, Hannah W. Smith, ed. Dieter). “[W]e Quakers” can say to one another, “do not expect . . . ever to find yourself any better . . . [y]ou yourself will always be utterly vile, and ignorant, and corrupt, but Jesus is your life now. It is with you ‘no more I’ but Christ who lives in you. And isn’t this glorious to lose your own life and find Christ’s divine life put in its place” (Letter to Frank, May 30, 1871, reproduced in the entry for June 6 of *The Christian’s Secret of a Holy Life*, Hannah W. Smith, ed. Dieter). She knew that Christ was “not only the One who gives me life, but the one who lives it too . . . it is no more I who live but Christ who lives in me,” so that since “Jesus is our life, of course our only work must be to keep from living our own life and let[ting] His life work in us. . . . [We are to] reckon ourselves dead and alive only in Christ. . . . Is our new nature anything more than Christ in us?” Thus, “I am dead, and . . . the only life I have now is His life,” as she “by faith claim[s] His life as [her] own” and became “passive of choice and willingly” (Journal, 1867; Letter to Sister Mary, 1867; Letter to Mary, March 8, 1867, Letter to Priscilla Mounsey, March 15, 1874; Letter to Daughter, May 25, 1878, reproduced in the entries for February 24, 26, 27, July 10, & August 26 of *The Christian’s Secret of a Holy Life*, Hannah W. Smith, ed. Dieter; cf. also the entries for March 1, 3). Thus, that “He would live my life for me” is “a genuine Quaker experience I am sure . . . a truth which the early Friends, and especially George Fox, rejoiced in . . . the secret of all their lives of devotedness and power . . . the secret of holiness” (Letter to Mother, March 18, 1867, reproduced in the entry for March 7 of *The Christian’s Secret of a Holy Life*, Hannah W. Smith, ed. Dieter). “[W]e are dead, really and truly dead, and the only life we have is ‘Christ living in us.’ . . . [W]e have no more independence of being . . . apart from Christ” (Letter to a Friend, March 27, 1867, reproduced in the entry for March 8, *ibid*). “I am sure the early Friends understood this, and when they spoke of ‘the Seed’ & ‘the Light’ etc. they meant Christ” (Letter to a Friend, March 28, 1867, reproduced in the entry for March 9, *ibid*; cf. the entry for March 10 & April 1). Thus, Mrs. Smith preached her Quaker quietism in sanctification based on her view of Galatians 2:20: “It is your own trying to live your life that is the greatest hinderance. Stop this, and let His life live in you . . . let Him be your indwelling life[.] . . . Then it will be easy to live right . . . no effort to live. . . . You are trying to live, and your life is nearly strangled with the effort. Give up trying, and let Christ, who is your life, live in you, and you will live easily and without effort” (pgs. 70-71, *Account of the Union Meeting for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness, Held at Oxford, August 29 to September 7, 1874*. Chicago: Revell, 1874).

Hannah W. Smith’s teaching on Galatians 2:20 became that of the Broadlands Convention and its successors, the Oxford, Brighton, and Keswick Conventions; thus, those at the first Broadlands Convention heard: “I know that Christ lives in me] . . . recognize that it is Christ and not *I* that lives in the soul” (pg. 121, *Memorials [of William Francis Cowper-Temple, Baron Mount-Temple]*, Georgina Cowper-Temple). Broadlands knew that “the Christ-life” is present in all men because “Christ is the life of men, the Divine seed in every one” (pg. 178, *The Life that is Life Indeed: Reminiscences of the Broadlands Conferences*, Edna V. Jackson. London: James Nisbet & Co, 1910); the Christ-life is simply the Quaker doctrine of the Divine Seed. An important proclamation of Broadlands from the first was that “it is Christ

and not I that lives in the soul” (pg. 134, *The Life that is Life Indeed: Reminiscences of the Broadlands Conferences*, Edna V. Jackson. London: James Nisbet & Co, 1910). At Broadlands Mr. and Mrs. “Temple [experienced] great joy as the result of this meeting [where] many [came to live] . . . the heavenly life . . . Christ’s life . . . Christ Himself . . . living in these [bodily] tabernacles a supernatural life” (pgs. 130, 125, *Memorials [of William Francis Cowper-Temple, Baron Mount-Temple]*, Georgina Cowper-Temple). The Keswick and Higher Life leader Evan Hopkins relates that he learned from the catalyst of the Keswick Higher Life movement, Hannah W. Smith’s husband Robert Pearsall Smith, that “Christ . . . would live in him His own holy life” (pg. 159, *So Great Salvation*, by Steven Barabas; pg. 15, *The Keswick Story: The Authorized History of the Keswick Convention*, Polluck). Mr. Smith taught Hopkins that Christ “would do all, and would live in [the Christian] His Own Holy Life—the only Holy Life possible to us” (pgs. 52-55, *Evan Harry Hopkins: A Memoir*, Alexander Smellie; italics in original). Indeed, as Robert P. Smith preached at the Brighton Convention, “Christ . . . is living His life in us . . . Christ’s own glorious life in Heaven is to be lived down here in these poor, mortal bodies,” based on Galatians 2:20—a doctrine which Mr. Smith associated with the Faith Cure. Thus, Smith taught that those who experience the Christ-life “will have power to work all [their] days for the Lord Jesus” and “will not wear . . . out” but “live as children do,” their “youth . . . renew[ed] . . . like the eagle’s” (pg. 338, *Record of the Convention for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness Held at Brighton, May 29th to June 7th, 1875*. Brighton: W. J. Smith, 1875; cf. pg. 84 for Mrs. Smith’s preaching of the Christ-life; cf. also pgs. 118, 152, 220, *Account of the Union Meeting for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness, Held at Oxford, August 29 to September 7, 1874*. Chicago: Revell, 1874.). William Boardman likewise taught that Galatians 2:20 teaches that “Christ . . . [is] dwelling in [the believer] to do His work, and to live His life in and by them,” and since Christ is the one who is living, not the believer, and Christ is perfectly holy and healthy, based on Galatians 2:20 “[m]en and women [can be] . . . so used by the Spirit, that He can use them as the Father used the Son, and as the Son used His apostles,” so “that He might use them in defeating the devil in the souls and bodies of all who are willing to hear and heed the Word,” in a flourishing ministry of Higher Life sanctification and Pentecostal healing (pgs. 225-226, *Life and Labours of the Rev. W. E. Boardman*, Mrs. Boardman), a belief which permeated the later Keswick and Pentecostal movements. Jessie Penn-Lewis wrote: “Galatians 2:20 . . . ‘No longer I’ is the very central point of deliverance . . . the man himself retiring . . . to make room for the Risen Christ to dwell in him and live his life for him! . . . This is the deliverance of Calvary . . . it draws the believer . . . out of sight into the crucified Lord, making way for the Christ Himself to possess the earthen vessel and manifest His life and power” (pgs. 66-70, Pg. 74, *The Warfare With Satan*, Jessie Penn-Lewis). A. B. Simpson wrote: “[The believer’s] life has been superseded by the very life of Christ Himself. ‘Not I,’ nay, not even the new and heaven-born I, but ‘the Christ that liveth in me.’ . . . [T]he Christ who lived of old is living again in me, thinking in my thoughts; choosing in my will; trusting in my faith; loving in my heart; triumphing in my victories, and covering my insufficiency with His glorious all-sufficiency. . . . Are we living the Christ life rather than trying to live a Christian life?” (“Spiritual Talismans” (*Alliance Weekly*, June 14, 1919, 178-179). Watchman Nee preached that “the secret of the overcoming life . . . is to let Christ live in our stead, according to Paul’s testimony in Galatians 2:20” (pg. 131, *Watchman Nee: A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age*, by Witness Lee); indeed, Nee went to the point of affirming that Christ is the one who not only lives instead of the believer, but that Christ believes instead of the believer: “When we believe and receive the Son of God, not only His life but His faith too enters into us. Hence we may live by His faith” (pg. 29, *God’s Plan and the Overcomers*, Watchman Nee. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977). Modern Keswick advocate John R. Van Gelderen writes:

Keswick . . . was for the deepening of spiritual life. To accomplish this purpose a definite theological position was taught—sanctification by faith, sometimes called holiness by faith. The focus of the theology was on Christ as one’s life. This was sometimes called ‘The Higher Life’ or ‘The Deeper Life’ or ‘The Victorious Life.’ . . . [T]he ‘Higher Life’ . . . is a Life. That Life is a Person, and His name is Jesus! Jesus is the ‘Higher Life.’ Jesus is the ‘Deeper Life.’ Jesus is the ‘Victorious Life.’ How can it be otherwise? Sanctification or holiness by faith is simply accessing the ‘Holy Life’ by faith. It is ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me . . . by faith’ (Gal. 2:20). Holiness by faith is accessing the Holy Life of Jesus to empower holy living and serving. . . . Keswick teaches that just as justification is by faith, so also sanctification is by faith. . . . Faith for victory means you are depending on the victorious Life of Christ to enable you to obey. It is not a matter of you trying to live the Christian life . . . Jesus Christ is the only one who can live the Christian life! Jesus is the Christian Life. . . . Jesus is the Victorious Life, the Higher Life, the Deeper Life, the Spirit-filled Life, the Revived Life, the Hidden Life,—the Christ-Life! To us, when holiness by faith—the Holy Life accessed by

Christ-life.³ It is difficult to figure out what the meaning is of such an affirmation; it would seem to lead to either the heresy of the absolute perfection of the believer in his will, nature and in all his acts, for Christ considered in His human nature is absolutely perfect in His will, nature and His acts, or to the heresy that Christ fails and Christ sins when the believer sins,⁴ since, allegedly, Christ, not the believer, is living the believer's life.⁵ Happily, since Galatians 2:20 never states that Christ lives the Christian life instead

faith—is attacked, the attack is ultimately on the indwelling Life of Christ” (“Keswick: A Good Word or a Bad One?” http://www.bcmedu.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=73&Itemid=138).

VanGeldereren wrote elsewhere:

Receiving the Holy Life of Jesus opens the way for accessing the Holy living of Jesus. . . . The Lord Jesus, the Holy One, moved into you at salvation to live His life, not yours. . . . The Christian life is a *life*—a person—and His name is Jesus. Jesus Christ is *the Christian Life*. Therefore, no one can live the Christian life but Christ. . . . Christ [is] the *Christian Life* Himself. . . . [and He] moved in to impart to you that very life so that you can live, yet not you, but Christ in you, the Christian life. . . . [T]here is hope for holiness by means of the Holy One living out His holy life in and through you. . . . [H]oliness is not something you accomplish but rather that which you allow . . . a matter of dependence on the one whom you are allowing to work His holiness in and through you. . . . Faith is the one thing you can do . . . faith is not a work[.] . . . Personal holiness is not imitating moral motions. Personal holiness is accessing the Person of holiness by faith to live His holy life through your personality. . . . The provision for holiness is perfect. It has to be—His name is Jesus. It is our consistent access of Him that is sadly imperfect. (pg. 14, “Holiness by Faith in Jesus,” by John R. Van Gelderen. *Revival* magazine, Issue 12 (2011). Germantown, WI: Revival Focus Ministries, Inc.)

The Keswick affirmation that when one is “filled with the Holy Spirit . . . the Holy Spirit has absolute possession and control of our spirit. . . . [The] human personality . . . is . . . controlled by a divine personality; . . . the human personality is brought under the domination and control of the Holy Spirit” (pgs. 143-144, *So Great Salvation*, Barabas) appears to provide the third Person of the Trinity the same sort of “absolute . . . control” of the human personality that is ascribed to Christ when it is affirmed that the Son of God lives the Christian life instead of the believer.

³ In the Higher Life movement, the doctrine that Christ lives the Christian life, while the believer simply passively trusts or abides, is the “Christ-life”; “The Christian life is a large, generous Christ-life that lives itself” (pg. 181, *Account of the Union Meeting for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness, Held at Oxford, August 29 to September 7, 1874*. Chicago: Revell, 1874; cf. pgs. 158, 168).

⁴ Hannah W. Smith, while usually restricting sinless perfection to the human spirit, so that she did not quite reach a claim of the literal perfection of Christ that was the necessary consequence of her Higher Life theology, did nevertheless affirm that those who have had the “definite experience” of “a heart made pure by faith” are “created pure and holy” so that “temptations will come” only “from without,” not from within—an idea, however contrary to the Bible, that makes it much easier to follow the guidance and revelations of an Inner Voice—at least until they cease the moment-by-moment Higher Life walk, at which time, somehow, “nothing but impurity remains,” although “the carnal nature” had “been cast out” at the time of the second blessing. She did, however, have to confront the question, “How can we sin if we are made and kept pure in heart?” a question to which she had only a very unsatisfactory answer (see Letter to Anna, September 6, 1871, reproduced in the entries for June 17-18 of *The Christian's Secret of a Holy Life*, Hannah W. Smith, ed. Dieter; cf. the entry for June 22).

⁵ One cannot avoid these heretical implications by simply affirming that the believer fails to perfectly access the Lord Jesus' personal life, and for this cause the Christian still sins, for this accessing of Christ must be part of the Christian life—indeed, according to the advocates of the view that the Lord Jesus lives the Christian life, accessing the Savior is the essence of Christian life. How then, can Christ fail to do this accessing for the believer, but be the One who lives the Christian life? Yet further, what can such a notion possibly mean—is Christ accessing Himself as He allegedly lives the Christian life? The idea that Jesus Christ lives the Christian life, not the Christian, has other severe problems as well; for example, the Lord Jesus, as He is in heaven, does not live by faith, as He has personal sight of all the glory of God, so the Christian on earth would not have to live by faith. Indeed, the idea that the Lord Jesus lives the

of the believer, neither heresy has any support whatsoever from the text. The verse affirms that 1.) Paul was crucified with Christ, 2:20a. 2.) Nevertheless, he was spiritually alive; the apostle had spiritual life, that he “might live unto God,” Galatians 2:19; 2:20b. 3.) The “I” who was now alive was not the same “I” as before Paul’s conversion (cf. Romans 7:17), in that Paul was no longer an ungodly, unregenerate person, a natural man and a slave of the old covenant, as he was when he was under the law (Galatians 2:19). He was now dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:10-11). The good in his life was not sourced in himself, but in the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10). He now had a new principle within him and was a new man, Galatians 2:20c. 4.) Christ now indwelt Paul, and was the source of spiritual life and strength for him, 2:20d. 5.) The Apostle now lived his natural life in his body by faith in Christ, 2:20e. 6.) Christ loved Paul, and died for him, 2:20f.

The “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”⁶ in Galatians 2:20 does not mean that Paul actually did not live the Christian life and the Lord Jesus lived it instead of him. Such a conclusion would neglect the fact that Paul specifically says “I live.” Furthermore, Paul does not say, “Christ liveth *instead of me*,” but “Christ liveth *in me*.”⁷ The “yet not I” clause means simply that Paul did not have strength sourced in himself to follow the Lord, but he received grace from Christ to enable him to “work out [his] own salvation with fear and trembling [since] it is God which worke[d] in [him] both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul personally “strived” to serve the Lord, but nonetheless his service was what “Christ hath . . . wrought by [him]” (Romans 15:20, 18). Parallel Pauline texts shed much light on the “not I, but Christ” portion of Galatians 2:20:

1.) “And unto the married I command, *yet not I*, but the Lord, (οὐκ ἐγώ, ἀλλ’ ὁ Κύριος) Let not the wife depart from *her* husband.” (1 Corinthians 7:10). Paul certainly did command the wife not to depart from her husband. He was very active in making this command. However, more importantly, it was God Himself who made the command through Paul. It would be poor exegesis to conclude from this verse that Paul himself did not really command wives not to leave their husbands because the command was sourced in God.

2.) But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of

Christian life instead of the believer is either abominable heresy or mystical gobbledygook that cannot be given any clear propositional content. It certainly does not help the believer live a holy life.

⁶ ζῶ δέ, οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός.

⁷ That is, the preposition ἐν, rather than ἀντί or ὑπέρ, is employed.

God which was with me (οὐκ ἐγὼ δέ, ἀλλ' ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ σὺν ἐμοί) (1 Corinthians 15:10). Obviously God's enabling grace strengthened Paul to work, and all the glory for Paul's labor was given to the grace of God, as is evidenced by the "yet not I, but the grace of God" affirmation. Nonetheless, Paul labored very actively and fervently, indeed, "more abundantly than . . . all." It would be poor exegesis to conclude from this verse that Paul really did not labor at all because his ability to labor came from God.

3.) "Now then it is no more I that do it (transgress; νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτό), but sin that dwelleth in me Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me (οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτό, ἀλλ' ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία)." (Romans 7:17, 20; cf. Romans 7:14-25). Before Paul was converted, his entire being consented to and produced nothing but sin. His statement in Romans 7:17, 20 means that the sins that he did as a regenerate person no longer proceeded from the unified desire of his whole person. Rather, Paul's transgressions were now sourced in the remnants of sinfulness that remained within him. Nonetheless, whenever Paul sinned, the Apostle was by no means passively employed by some exterior agent moving him unconsciously to transgress—he still chose to do so himself.

4.) The Old Testament, and other New Testament texts,⁸ present a similar picture. Joseph tells his brothers in Genesis 45:8: "So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God (וְעַתָּה יָדַעְתֶּם אֲנִי אֱלֹהִים; LXX, νῦν οὖν οὐχ ὑμεῖς με ἀπεστάλκατε ὧδε ἀλλ' ἢ ὁ θεός): and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." Joseph's "not you . . . but God" statement does not mean that Joseph's brothers did not sell him into slavery (cf. 45:5, "ye sold me hither"), but simply that God was the ultimate sovereign source of his being sold. In Exodus 16:8, "Moses said . . . [T]he LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what *are* we? your murmurings *are* not against us, but against the LORD,"⁹ but the affirmation that Israel's grumbling was ultimately against

⁸ For example, Christ tells persecuted believers: "But when they shall lead *you*, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" (ὅταν δὲ ἀγάγωσιν ὑμᾶς παραδιδόντες, μὴ προμεριμνᾶτε τί λαλήσητε, μηδὲ μελετᾶτε: ἀλλ' ὃ ἐὰν δοθῇ ὑμῖν ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ, τοῦτο λαλεῖτε: οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑμεῖς οἱ λαλοῦντες, ἀλλὰ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον. Mark 13:11; cf. Matthew 10:19-20; Luke 12:11-12; 21:14-15). The Lord Jesus' statement, "it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost," did not mean that the persecuted saints in question did not actually open their mouths and consciously speak; rather, they indeed spoke, but the Spirit directed them and guided them. Thus, the Lord could command, "speak ye," for the very reason ("for") that their words did not originate in themselves ("it is not ye that speak") but in God the Spirit. Note the following related texts: Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 10:16; John 12:44; 13:20; Romans 13:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה . . . בְּשִׂמְעֵי יְהוָה אֶת־תְּלַנְתְּיֹכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם מוֹלִינִם עָלָיו וְנִחַנּוּ כְּמָה לֹא־עָלִינוּ תְּלַנְתְּיֹכֶם כִּי עַל־יְהוָה:

Jehovah certainly did not mean that when “the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness” (Exodus 16:2) they did not really murmur against Moses and Aaron.

Similarly, Paul’s “not I, but Christ” statement in Galatians 2:20 means that the source of the Christian life that Paul lived was not his own inherent ability or strength, but Christ’s grace and power. The Apostle’s declaration models the pattern set by his Savior, that Son of Man who stated “I can of mine own self do nothing” (John 5:30) and “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). The Lord Jesus, in His human nature, was entirely submissive to and dependent upon the enablement He received beyond measure from God. One sees, however, extremely active labor for the Lord in the incarnate Christ. The Divine Person of the Son also did not work independently of the Person of the Father, but nonetheless the Son of God actively did whatsoever He saw the Father do.

In Galatians 2:19-21 Paul is proving that he is dead to the law (2:19a) and not trusting in the law for salvation and frustrating the grace of God by so doing (2:21) but instead is living unto God (2:19b, 2:20). He is not proving that somehow he does not live the Christian life but Christ lives it instead. Paul and all Christians are given strength and grace from Christ, apart from whom they can do nothing good, John 15:5, and they are to live by faith. Certainly the facts of the saint’s union with Christ, the Savior’s indwelling presence, the spiritual life that is derived from Him, and the power He gives believers to will and do of His good pleasure are glorious truths worthy of that joyful acceptance and humble meditation that results in loving, faith-based obedience. However, to go beyond the actual declarations of Galatians 2:20 to say that the believer does not live the Christian life but Christ Himself does it instead is to make the verse affirm what it does not say and thus grieve the Spirit and displease Christ. Such an affirmation also confuses the Christian who believes it, hinders his sanctification, and opens the way to serious Christological error. The glorious truths of Galatians 2:20 should neither be minimized and ignored nor turned into something other than they are by illegitimate extrapolation.

A few other passages can be employed to attempt to support the doctrine that the Lord Jesus Christ lives the Christian life instead of the believer. However, no text in Scripture actually affirms such a proposition. 2 Corinthians 4:10-11 refers to “the life . . . of Jesus.” However, the reference is to spiritual life produced by and sourced in the Lord

καὶ εἶπεν Μωϋσῆς . . . διὰ τὸ εἰσακοῦσαι κύριον τὸν γογγυσμὸν ὑμῶν ὃν ὑμεῖς διαγογγύζετε καθ’ ἡμῶν ἡμεῖς δὲ τί ἐσμεν οὐ γὰρ καθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ γογγυσμὸς ὑμῶν ἐστὶν ἀλλ’ ἢ κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.

Jesus, not to the Lord Jesus Himself personally living the Christian life instead of the Christian. Paul speaks of the spiritual life produced by the Lord Jesus in him in connection with the renewing of his inner man (2 Corinthians 4:16)¹⁰ and associated with the physical suffering and persecution through which he was troubled, distressed, and persecuted (4:8-9), was being always delivered to death (4:11), had his outward man perishing because of affliction (4:16-17), and thus bore in his body “the dying of the Lord Jesus” (4:10).¹¹ The believer’s spiritual life is unquestionably produced, sustained, and increased by Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus, and the entire Godhead, alone receive the glory for all the believer’s spiritual life and growth, as the Author and Sustainer of all; “the excellency of the power [is] of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). This fact is weighty and wondrous truth. It differs, however, from the unscriptural affirmation that the Lord Jesus Christ actually lives the Christian life instead of the Christian living the Christian life.

Colossians 3:4 speaks of “Christ, *who is our life.*” Again, the passage makes no reference whatsoever to Christ living the Christian life instead of the Christian living the Christian life. The verse indicates that all believers, not a minority only that have found a secret Higher Life, but all who will “appear with Him in glory” (3:4),¹² are in union with and identified with Christ, have their lives hid with Christ in God (3:1-3), and will consequently be with Him when He returns to bring in the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus is the One who guarantees them eternal life, and is the Author of all spiritual life and

¹⁰ Similarly, the “life of God” (Ephesians 4:18) for the believer is freedom from the sins of the unregenerate (4:16-18), putting off the old man and putting on the new man, having God renew the spirit of his mind, living a holy and righteous life, telling the truth and having holy speech instead of lying and having ungodly speech, and so on (4:20ff.). The believer does not have the personal life of the eternal Trinity living the Christian life instead of him.

¹¹ Note that one who wished to make “the life . . . of Jesus” (ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 4:10-11) into the personal life of the Lord Jesus Christ would have great difficulty in making Paul’s experience of “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” (πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες, 2 Corinthians 4:10) into the Apostle enduring the physical and personal death of the Lord Jesus.

¹² None of the texts that indicate that the believer’s spiritual life is derived from the Lord Jesus, and abused to affirm that Christ Himself lives the Christian life, support the notion that a certain higher class of Christians lives a “Christ-life” at a higher plane, while another mass that have not learned the alleged spiritual secret live a life at a lower plane. Colossians 3:4 and Galatians 2:20 are true for all believers, not a special few. It is true that only some believers experience the kind of persecution that the Apostle Paul mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4, but this fact provides no assistance to those who affirm that Christ lives the Christian life, as they generally study devotional literature promulgating their theological notions to leap to the higher plane of the “Christ-life” rather than seeking to be persecuted.

It is also noteworthy that Colossians 3 also says nothing about a single faith decision whereby certain believers allegedly access Christ to live the Christian life for them. Rather, the truth of Colossians 3:4 produces commands to think on heavenly things (3:2), put sin to death (3:5), cease from anger and dishonesty (3:8-9), practice holy deeds (3:12), forgive (3:13), love (3:14), be thankful (3:15), fill oneself up with Scripture (3:16), and so on.

blessings to them, and, indeed, the One who gives them all blessings and good things of every kind whatsoever. However, Colossians 3:4 does not teach that Jesus Christ lives the Christian life instead of the believer, much less that Christ lives the Christian life for an elite minority of believers that have discovered a Higher Life.

Parallel passages illustrate the sort of eisegesis required to make Colossians 3:4 teach the doctrine that Christ lives the Christian life while the Christian does not. Deuteronomy 30:20 states: “The LORD thy God . . . is thy life, and the length of thy days, that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers.” Does this passage affirm that the Lord lived the Jewish life instead of the children of Israel, and that He also lived out the length of their days in Canaan instead of them (whatever that could possibly mean)? Or does the passage rather teach the obvious truth that God was the One who gave the children of Israel life and length of days? Deuteronomy 32:46-47 commands: “Set your hearts unto all the words which I [Moses] testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it *is* not a vain thing for you; because it *is* your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong *your* days in the land.” Does this passage mean that the children of Israel did not live the Jewish life, but the law lived the Jewish life instead of them, because the text says “this law . . . is your life”? Does it prove that the Jew cannot and must not live the Jewish life, but only the Pentateuch can live the Jewish life? Or does the text, rather, obviously mean that obedience to the Law of God would lead Israel to live a long time in the land of Canaan? What exegesis fits the obvious meaning of texts such as Psalm 27:1 (“The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”) and Psalm 42:8 (“*Yet* the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song *shall be* with me, *and* my prayer unto the God of my life.”)? The ideas read into—not out of—Colossians 3:4 about Christ living the Christian life are impossible in other Biblical texts that contain similar phraseology.

It is an inexpressibly glorious truth that Christ, as God, possesses self-existent life, and that He as the God-Man¹³ is the fountain and source of the believer’s derived eternal spiritual life.¹⁴ Life supplied by Christ and in union with Him (Colossians 3:1-4)

¹³ Compare John 6:57; 14:19; the Theanthropic life of Christ as Mediator is derived from the Father, and, as the Theanthropos, He communicates life to His own.

¹⁴ “When our Lord said, ‘I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing’ (John 15:5), He certainly meant that the vital union between Him and his people is something more than that which may subsist between disciples and their master, — a union including merely trust, congeniality, and affection. The influence to which the fruitfulness of the believer is attributed is something more than the influence of the truth which He taught;

is the basis for the mortification of indwelling sin (Colossians 3:5). It is certainly true that the Lord Jesus is the Author, Preserver, Upholder, and Finisher of the Christian's spiritual life. Such life is communicated to the believer by Christ, with whom the saint has come into an intimate mystical union. Furthermore, the believer must trust in and obey Christ if he wishes to grow in grace. However, it is false and dangerous to pure doctrine and a holy life to teach that Christ lives the Christian life instead of the believer.

Benjamin B. Warfield correctly wrote:

[T]he believer . . . is made alive in Christ—and it is *he* that is made alive. It is not only that he has Christ in him and Christ is living, but it is he himself that is living, for Christ has made him alive: yes, he has life in himself (John 6:53). It is not true that [t]he believer is portrayed as a man in himself spiritually dead, indwelt through the Spirit by Jesus Christ, who is his spiritual life[.] [Rather, he] is portrayed as a man who is spiritually alive, in whom Jesus Christ the source of all his life, dwells by His Spirit. The man himself is saved, and his new holiness is *his* holiness. It is a grave error to suppose that the living Christ can dwell within us without imparting life to us. He *quickens* whom He will: and he whom He quickens, lives.”¹⁵

Biblical and historic Baptist truth recognizes the glorious fact of union with Christ and the need to seek strength from Him by faith. The Christian grows in personal holiness as he is quickened by that Divine-human Savior with whom he has been united. Such truth must not be corrupted by unscriptural additions or subtractions, such as the idea that the believer does not personally become holy as he lives for God, but that Christ Himself actually lives the Christian life instead of the believer.¹⁶

however that truth may be applied or enforced. Their abiding in Him, and He in them, is something more than abiding in the profession and belief of the truth. Christ is the head of the Church not merely as its ruler, but as the source of its life. It is not I, says the Apostle, that live, ‘but Christ liveth in me’ (Galatians 2:20). ‘Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?’ (2 Corinthians 13:5). It is from Him, as the same Apostle teaches us, that the whole body derives those supplies by which it lives and grows (Ephesians 4:16). ‘Because I live, ye shall live also’ (John 14:19). ‘I am the resurrection, and the life’ (John 11:25). ‘I am that bread of life’ (John 6:48). ‘He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him’ (John 6:56). ‘This is that bread which came down from heaven: . . . he that eateth of this bread shall live forever’ (John 6:58). ‘We shall be saved by his life’ (Romans 5:10). ‘The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit’ (1 Corinthians 15:45). ‘As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself’ (John 5:26). ‘Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him’ (John 17:2). ‘Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.’ (Colossians 3:3, 4). The Scriptures, therefore, plainly teach that there is a vital union between Christ and his people; that they have a common life analogous to that which exists between the vine and its branches, and between the head and members of the body. The believer is truly partaker of the life of Christ’ (*Systematic Theology*, by Charles Hodge, part. 3, Soteriology. Chapter 14, “Vocation.”).

¹⁵ pg. 557, *Perfectionism*, vol. 2, Chapter 4, “The ‘Higher Life’ Movement.” Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003; reprint of 1932 Oxford ed.

¹⁶ The idea that Christ's own personal holiness is imparted to Christians has properly been rejected by Baptists as unbiblical. In the words of the London Baptist Association in 1704, “It is the opinion of this Assembly that the doctrine of sanctification by the impartation of the holiness of Christ's nature does, in its consequences, render inherent holiness by the Holy Spirit unnecessary, and tends to overthrow natural, as well as revealed religion” (pg. 171, Chapter 8, *Bye-Paths in Baptist History*, J. J. Goadby. Elec. acc. *Baptist History Collection* CD, ver. 1. Paris, AK: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005).