

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for April 15: Jesus lives in believers

April 2, 2012

It has been my privilege to hear Jim Denison, president and founder of the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, speak several times. On more than one occasion as he spoke about the great increase in Christianity worldwide with the exception of North America and Western Europe, he stated the growth is not happening in our nation because for us, God is only a hobby.

Does that give you as ill of a feeling as it does me? And yet, as I compare what this week's Scripture passages say to Denison's comments, I believe he is correct. We have become content to play with God but not to live with him.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20-21 that he had joined Christ in his crucifixion so even though Paul is alive, it is really Christ who is living life through Paul. Paul's faith was such that he desired all aspects of his life to be a picture of Christ. He knew no amount of law-keeping ever could equate to Christ giving himself in Paul's place.

Paul's view of dying to self and being alive in Christ stands in sharp contrast to our view of controlling our own lives and doing what we want to do even if those actions are in direct conflict with God's word and his purpose for our lives.

For thought: Is God's desire for us that we be happy, and therefore, do whatever makes us happy? Or is God's desire that we live obedient lives of faith fulfilled in his Son Jesus Christ? Is Paul's position in Galatians 2:20-21

negotiable with God for our lives?

J.W. MacGorman, professor of New Testament for many years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, used to say the best commentary on Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia was Paul's letter to the church at Rome.

In the sixth chapter of Romans, Paul deals with an issue that has arisen within the church regarding sin and grace. Apparently some thought that it would be good to continue to sin so God's grace would continue to cover or forgive that sin. In Romans 6:1-7, Paul strongly reacts against this false theology and uses the act of baptism as a reminder of what life in Christ is to be.

The act of being placed under the water during baptism signifies the identification of the believer with the death and burial of Jesus. It is a demonstration of putting to death and laying aside a life without Christ in it. Coming up out of the water identifies the believer with the resurrection of Jesus and the beginning of a new life controlled by Christ.

For thought: I continually am amazed by those who see God's calling for us to repent of our sin as an option. Likewise, I am disturbed by those who figure sin can be dealt with at a later time. When you consider your own sin, do you view it in the light of society's opinion and take on it, or do you see it through the eyes of the Lord as he reveals his truth through the scriptures? Society wants life to be comfortable. God wants life to be right (righteousness).

For some believers, a relationship to Christ only is about dealing with the sin issue. As John reports the words of Jesus in John 15, it becomes obvious Jesus' expectations about a believer's relationship with him is not just an occasional connection but a constant and continual one. Jesus described this relationship with the words: "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). He

used the analogy of the branch of a vine abiding in the vine. A branch cannot survive, but rather dies, if it is separated or cut off from the vine.

In John 15:1-5, Jesus makes it clear this “abiding” relationship results in the production of fruit in the believer’s life. The question in the minds of many is what is this fruit? Some see the fruit as being fruit of the Spirit that Paul references in Galatians 5:22-23. Others see it as being a believer sharing Jesus with another person resulting in that person becoming a believer. The new believer is the fruit of the witness.

Various studies have been conducted showing the longer a couple is married, the more they begin to think alike and look alike. While that may be frightening to some wives, the truth is the longer a believer abides in Christ, the more the believer begins to look like, think like and act like Jesus.

Time spent in prayer, in the reading and study of the Bible, and in truly worshipping the Lord, increases our knowledge, understanding and appreciation for all he has done and is doing for us. But the fact that Jesus lives in the life of a believer results in our becoming more like him.

For thought: How does the reality of knowing Christ lives in you as a believer affect what you will say to others today? How will Christ living in you cause you to react when someone cuts you off in traffic? How will you respond to the needs of the helpless knowing that Christ loves everyone and dwells in you? How will you treat your family, your co-workers and those you do business with since Christ is in you? Can you honestly testify today that Christ abides in you and you in him?