

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a huge thing in life. When two persons get together, they face a lot of adjustments. This is especially true when the husband and wife are of different nationalities. My wife has two Caucasian brothers-in-law. The younger one of the two is a pure-breed American. He only dares to eat fried-rice when we dine at Chinese restaurants. Whereas, the other brother-in-law has been totally brain-washed by Chinese culture. He eats whatever is on the table! Chicken-feet, stinky Tofu, you name it, he loves it. In fact, his favorite food is pig's colon. One time when he was savoring his beloved dish, he commented: "I'm in heaven!" A lot of funny things may happen when a person is immersed into another culture. Actually, we go through a similar transition when we accept Christ. We abandon a sinful culture and gradually grow up to a sinless lifestyle. In Galatians 2:20, the apostle Paul told us that becoming a Christian is a one-time change, but living as a Christian is a life-long pursuit. Today is baptism Sunday. Only one candidate, sister Liu, will receive baptism. Whenever we have baptism, I will repeat the same reminder. According to the Bible, we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ. We are not saved by the water. Sister Liu has become a Christian on October 16 when she accepted Christ as her Savior and Lord. The ceremony she will go through today is a testimony of the faith she already has. I hope that the message today will be an encouragement to her and to all of us.

EXPLANATION

1. 我與基督同死 I Died with Christ

We shall study three aspects about our spiritual life based on this verse. First of all, Paul told us that a Christian had died with Christ. He said: "**I have been crucified with Christ.**" When you accept Christ there is something going on in your spirit. You confess verbally that you are a sinner and you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins. But not only did Jesus die, we also died with Him. Using Star Trek terminology, it was as if you were beamed back to 2,000 years ago and you were nailed to the cross along with Jesus. Paul described it this way in **Romans 6:6-7** – 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Paul told us that since a Christian had died with Jesus on the cross, sin no longer has any control over the person. When you go to a grocery store to buy a chicken or fish, you cannot ask the animal: "Come, let me feed you." Why? Because it was dead! In Christ, we are dead to sin. Paul described that "the body of sin might be done away with" when we died with Christ. It means that sin is rendered powerless on a Christian. Let us go back to the grocery store, but this time you shop for a live lobster. Boy, I love seafood! If you try to catch a lobster in the ocean the creature will defend itself with its claws. You will be risking your finger if you want to bring it to your dining table. However, thanks to the fishermen, they tie up the claws with rubber-bands. The threat of the lobsters' claws has been rendered powerless. Similarly, after we died with Christ sin would be rendered powerless on us. Satan will continue to lure us with all kinds of temptation, but he can no longer drag us to sin. In **Ephesians 4:21-22**, Paul used another analogy to illustrate our change in Christ: 21 Surely you heard of him and

were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. In the context, Paul depicted our new life in Christ as putting off our old sinful nature and putting on a new self. It is like after you work out in the gym you go for a shower. Normally, you will put on some clean clothes afterward. If you still wear those sweaty and smelly clothes, then your body will get dirty again. It is true that both verbs for putting on and putting off in this passage denote one-time actions. It means that at the moment when we received Christ, we have put off our old self and have put on the new self. However, we always have to keep in mind that Satan is very cunning. He will use all the tricks to stumble us in sin. Every morning we need a mental exercise before we get up. We need to tell ourselves that we had died with Christ and we should no longer live in sin. When a temptation comes, we will repeat the same process. We remind ourselves that we now belong to Christ. We can choose not to sin. When we rely on the Holy Spirit, He will empower us to flee from temptation.

2. 我與基督同活 I Live with Christ

Christians died with Christ. That is the negative aspect of our spiritual life. But of course, there are many positive things happening in us after we accepted Christ. One thing that Paul pointed out in this verse is that we now live with Christ. He said: “**I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.**” After we died with Christ, the old sinful me no longer lived. Do remember the dead chicken and dead fish! From now on, Jesus Christ lives in me. How does God live inside a person? He does so through the person of the Holy Spirit. Paul said in **Ephesians 1:13** - And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity God – the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that there is only one God. Therefore, theologians called the three parts as three persons. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts instantaneously when we accept Christ. Paul told us that when the Holy Spirit enters our lives, we are like marked with a seal. We have many book-lovers here. Although nowadays e-books are popular, many people still prefer to put paper book on their shelves and hold a book in their hands to read it. Some people also like to put a stamp on their collection to indicate that those books belong to them. The sealing of the Holy Spirit has a similar meaning. It is to distinguish God’s ownership of the person. After we received the seal, we live with Christ. God’s intent is not for us to conclude that it is now a done deal after we are saved. We should not say to God: “See you later in heaven! Don’t bother me.” Once we live with Christ, we will continue to live with Him for the rest of our earthly life. Sadly, there are many Christians in every church who do nothing but are waiting to go to heaven. In Mandarin, coming to worship sounds like sitting on the pews to worship. Coming to church once a week becomes the only religious expression for some Christians. That should not be the case. Jesus Christ saved us in order for us to live with Him. Look at **Ephesians 4:24** - and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. After you have taken off that dirty laundry you have to put on fresh clothes. We should reflect God’s righteousness and holiness in our new self. We have to consciously remind ourselves that we are living with Him. Imagine you were away for a week-long vacation. A week later you came home and you got into your car. Everything might look a little foreign. You had to remind yourself: this is how I turn the light and radio on, and this is how hard I need to step on the gas and brake pedals. We have to do the same thing when we live with Christ. Do you put on your new self every day before you leave home? Picture yourself as

prince and princess of the heavenly Kingdom. Put on a royal robe before you go out! No matter where you go, you display your identity as a heaven citizen. The way you speak and the way you treat even strangers should reflect God's righteousness and holiness. The people around you should be able to tell that you are different because you are living with Christ.

3. 我為基督而活 I Live for Christ

We died with Christ. That is our past. We live with Christ. That is our current status. Thirdly, Paul told us that we should also live for Christ. Paul said: **"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** Since Christ lives in us permanently, we should also live for Him. You may ask: what is the difference between living with Christ and living for Him? You live with your family members but it does not mean that you live for them. Some moms serve their kids like a maid. They take care of everything – cook, wash, pack lunch for their kids and drive them around, etc. On the flip side of the equation, the kids may not necessarily live for their dads and moms. You ask Bobbie to vacuum the floor. He responds: "How come you never ask Tommy to do it?" You want Daisy to wash the dishes. She asks: "How much are you going to pay me?" A person who is living for Christ seeks ways to please God and honor Him. Paul also said in **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** - 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. Christ died for us, and so we should be ready to sacrifice everything for Him. Once in a while we read in the news that some people risked their lives to save babies from burning homes or pull a drowned person from the water. The people who were saved or their family members gave away money or used other means to express their gratitude. If we show thankfulness to the people who offer us help when they are not obligated to do so, how much more should we commit ourselves to live for Christ who saved us from eternal condemnation? Living for Christ has to be a voluntary action. Paul said it in **Romans 6:13** - Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. Paul used the sacrificial ritual as an analogy for our Christian life. People in the Old Testament offered a best animal to be burned on the altar. Also, once they took the animal to the priest there would be no return. The Cantonese may love to save the left leg for themselves! However, in our daily life, we often choose to live for Christ when it is convenient to us. The Bible says we should not steal. We say to ourselves: "No problem! I will never rob a bank." But the Bible also warns us that we should not lie. We wonder: "If lying brings me good outcome and saves my face, then why not? After all, everyone does it!" No wonder there are so many professional Christians in the world. They hold one job from Monday to Friday. Then they are part-time Christians on the weekends. Once they exit the church doors, they shed their sheep skin and turn back to wolves. Brothers and sisters: living for Christ is not a hobby. Once we accept Christ, we should live for Him 24-7. From now on, no matter what occupation you are in there should be the same prefix before your title. You are now a Christian-student, Christian-scientist and Christian-stay-home-mom, etc. You do the best in the roles God calls you to do as a way to live for Christ.

CONCLUSION

In today's message we learn that becoming a Christian is a one-time change, but living as a Christian is a life-long pursuit. After we accepted Christ, we have changed our nationality. We immigrated from the dark domain into the Kingdom of Light. Our change in nationality should be reflected in our changes in personality. From now on, we should live for Christ. In my youthful years I played a lot of basketball. I played in the morning before school, during recess, after lunch and after school. I played in the evening and on the weekend too. I also joined a team with fellow classmates to compete for tournaments. Once a classmate made fun at our skills, our team name and even the color of our jerseys. However, his attitude changed completely after we asked him one question: "Do you want to be on our team?" From then on, to him it was no longer someone's team but my team. When we won, he also won. But when we lost, he shared the agony too. The Bible tells us that before we were Christians, we were God's enemies because of our sins. We were on opposite teams. But Jesus Christ saved us and recruited us into His crew. Therefore, we should no longer partner with Satan and indulge in sin. Rather, by the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can have victory in one contest after another.