

Philippians 1:21-24

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Philippians 1:21-24

21 - For to me, **to live is Christ** and **to die is gain**.

22 - But if I am **to live on in the flesh**, this will mean **fruitful labor for me**; and I do not know which to choose.

23 - But I am hard-pressed from both directions, **having the desire to depart** and **be with Christ**, for that is **very much better**;

24 - **yet to remain on in the flesh** is **more necessary for your sake**.

Paul's Dilemma

I DON'T KNOW WHICH TO CHOOSE...

...to live is Christ:

- live on [also "remain on"] in the flesh
- fruitful labor for me
- more necessary for your sake

...to die is gain:

- having the desire to depart
- be with Christ
- very much better

Paul's Dilemma

I DON'T KNOW WHICH TO CHOOSE...

...to live is Christ:

- live on [also "remain on"] in the flesh
- fruitful labor for me
- more necessary for your sake

to live is Christ: what happens here really is spiritually significant

live & remain on in the flesh: Paul is able to continue his earthly ministry

fruitful labor for me: Paul will be effective in the Lord's ministry

more necessary for your sake: Paul's earthly ministry is a spiritual benefit to the Philippians & others

Paul's Dilemma

I DON'T KNOW WHICH TO CHOOSE...

...to die is gain:

- having the desire to depart
- be with Christ
- very much better

to die is gain: what comes next is incomparably better than planet earth

having the desire to depart: motivated by the personal presence of Christ

be with Christ: seeing the Lord of glory face to face

very much better: not a minor improvement, but to a place with no drawbacks or regrets

What Paul is & is not saying:

- He is not saying that he can't decide whether to commit suicide or to purposely seek a lethal judgment against himself
- He is disclosing an eternal & spiritual perspective on life here & life with Christ
- Paul is revealing his heart's motivations here
 - what is of deep & basic & eternal value to him at the heart level

Isn't it interesting...

- Paul does not directly mention the trials he is experiencing as one constantly chained to a praetorian guard.
- The dilemma between the advantage to ministry in this life & the very great advantage of being with Christ presses upon him far more than the trials he is enduring!

Key words in Philippians 1:21-24

- gain: Greek *kerdos* = profit, the word is used often in monetary terms
- As a point of comparison, Paul is saying that being here is just no comparison with being personally & bodily with Christ
- The bottom line is that being with Christ puts Paul himself measurably ahead compared to being here on planet earth

Key words in Philippians 1:21-24

- flesh: Greek *sarx* = in this physical human body on earth (in this context)
- Paul uses this word *sarx* to mean different things in different contexts, but here he means simply being in the human body that he has until he goes to be with Christ
- In 1 Corinthians 5:1-6, Paul refers to this body as a tent, as we will see shortly

Key words in Philippians 1:21-24

- hard-pressed (KJV: "in a strait"): Greek: *sunecho* = constrained, perplexed, limited
- This word is often used in contexts that place someone in a confining mindset, circumstance, or in a dilemma

Key words in Philippians 1:21-24

- desire: Greek *epithumia* = strong, intense desire
- Not just a mild inclination, but an intense, passionate desire
- Paul very strongly desired to depart this life, not to get away from what was here so much as to *be personally & eternally with Christ*

Key words in Philippians 1:21-24

- depart: Greek *analuo* = *ana* + *luo* = up + loose = depart or leave
- This word was used of a tent's pegs being pulled up. Being a tentmaker, Paul could have used this word with this meaning in mind
- If so, dying & going to be with Christ would be the equivalent of "pulling up the stakes from this life's tent"

Key words in Philippians 1:21-24

- necessary: Greek *anagkaios* = necessary, needful
- This indicates that there is still a purpose in Paul's remaining here in earth
- Things have not quite gotten to the place where Paul's ministry to the church at Philippi is just supplemental or inconsequential

Concise Greek of Philippians 1:21

*"For to me, the living Christ
and the dying gain"*

- The Greek text actually has no verb (equivalent to "is") before "Christ" or "gain". It is added in the English translation for smoother reading
- Paul is using a figure of speech called "ellipsis", & he is using it in this case for emphasis

What Paul is saying in 1:21

- living = Christ; dying = gain
- All of Paul's life is summed up in Christ
- Dying would be nothing but gain, since there would be no drawbacks to being personally & eternally with Jesus Christ – face to face

Living = Christ

- Living life while on this planet is not by our seeking to identify with Him, but by God having identified each believer with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, ascension & seating
- These truths are set forth clearly in Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:18-20; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 2:10-20; Colossians 3:1-4, among other passages

Living = Christ

- Living life while on this planet is not to be by our very best efforts, but His very life in the place of ours
- Galatians 2:20 - "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

The end result of dying = gain

- Paul's view, the central focus of his desire, was certainly not the process of dying, but to "be with Christ"
- Departing this life, though mentioned, was not so much for the sake of just leaving this earth as "being with Christ"
- Paul describes it as "very much better"

2 Corinthians 5:8

...we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to *be at home with the Lord.*

Living here is all about being with Christ by faith

- We who have believed have an unchanging & untouchable position in Christ that comes from having believed in the spiritual facts in the first place
- We who have believed have a condition that is consistent with our position as we believe in the spiritual facts moment by moment – beholding Christ in His word

Faith is Fulfilled When We are Present with Christ

- Faith will no longer have a part in our beholding Him through the word, because we will see him as He is
- There will be no distraction or limitation from beholding the glorious person of Christ
- Even our hope & expectation will meet its end in reality & fulfillment