

## Philippians: To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain

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Philippians 1:18b-30

Paul was asking the same question as an English punk rock band, The Clash. Netflix used The Clash's 1981 song in a series called "Stranger Things." It had these words, "*Should I stay or should I go?*" Paul desired to be with the Lord, but he also knew there was still work for him to do. He was so convinced that the next life would be so much better that he could hardly wait to be there. This is the blessed hope for Christians. No matter how bad things get, followers of Jesus always have a future with hope. This is the gift of God through the Resurrection of Jesus. Two contemporary philosophies existed when Paul wrote. The Stoics did not want to express emotion. "Grin and bear it" was their motto. Their opposites were the Epicureans. Their motto was "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." Neither philosophy embraced a future with hope. Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C.S. Lewis, wrote, "*...the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.*" That philosophy is completely opposite of Paul. When we make the sign of the cross, we begin at our forehead and then move down. We shift our hand from the heart to the right side of our chest, then to the left. The sign of the cross is vertical and then horizontal. We relate first to the Lord, top to bottom, and then to the community of Christ and to the world, horizontally. As we make the sign of the cross, there are many sayings we can use, including our memory verse for the week: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* This is wonderful self-talk. This verse reminds us that our identity, both here and now and for all eternity, is rooted in Christ. Those final words, "*and to die is gain,*" is so comforting when we lose our loved ones who are in Christ. Followers of Jesus simply cannot lose. Jesus said, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*" (John 12:24-26) Paul had great successes, but also endured an enormous amount of suffering. He shared two secrets about how he made it through his trials (in verse 19). They apply to us: The Holy Spirit fills us with His presence and coaches us. Other followers of Jesus help us, too. If a spiritual giant like Paul needed help, how much more do we need it?

APPLICATION: Our theme this week is **DYING TO LIVE**. This is a gift to us because of the Resurrection of Jesus. Memorize verse 21 this week: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* How can you focus on the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit? How are you helping build community with the Holy Spirit and with other Christians? How we respond to this question goes a long way to determine how influential we will be in Helping Others Follow Jesus. Our response will be reflected when we go through our inevitable suffering. We need

Jesus. We need others. Jesus prayed that we would find others. How will you find a place of community? What can you do to help us help you?

**FEAR** is part of being human. As children, we learned there is much to fear. It might be separation from parents, bullies, strangers, or getting an “F.” We outgrew some fears as we got older, but there’s always something to fear: a Pandemic, war, violence, economics, health, relational problems, and the Chicago Cubs. Though we deny it, our mortality is always before us, too. Hebrews 2:14-15 *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* Our fear is based on our **INSECURITY**. We should be afraid and insecure. We can control some things; but so much pain can occur suddenly. Fear is seen in 2 ways.

**OUTWARD.** Anger is often the result of fear and insecurity. We live in an angry culture.

Sometimes we withdraw & go **INWARD**. We hide and depress, like living in a cave.

Fear/insecurity can leave us alone, anxious, sad, and depressed. We worry

**PAUL** had much to fear. Some said bad things about him. Others tried to kill him. He was beaten with whips & rods. He was stoned once, shipwrecked 3x, and was literally snake-bitten. He was imprisoned for 5 years. Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison. Yet his letter to the Philippians was not about fear, insecurity & how unfair life was, but was “The Epistle of Joy.” The word, “joy” appears 5x in Philippians. “Rejoice” appears 8x. Of the 104 verses in Philippians – over 10% of the book contains expressions of joy.

### **Philippians 1:18-30**

*Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

### **Paul’s 3 Helpers**

1) v18 *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.* To rejoice is his choice. This **HIS ATTITUDE**. He

wasn't rejoicing because his problems had gone away but was choosing joy in the midst of them. Life is a series of problems to solve. Something will always be wrong with faith, family, friend, finances, government, health, our job, etc. When our NYC-Dallas flight was canceled on our return trip from Israel, one of our travelers said, *"This is a 1<sup>st</sup> world problem."* She put it in a great perspective for me. That was disruptive, irritating, anxious, etc., but I thought of John Wesley coming in 1735 from England to America. It took about 10 weeks in a tiny little ship. Should I complain about a middle seat or insufficient legroom or that the attendant wouldn't give me a Coke Zero in comparison with Wesley's ordeal? The flight screen showed our plane would fly over Boston to NYC, & I was reminded of the book on 9-11, "The Only Plane in the Sky" where two hijacked planes flew from Boston into the Twin Towers. It is easy to lose perspective. We are perfectly capable of raging or rejoicing.

Jim Stovall's parents traveled all over the country when his sister was dying of Leukemia. The little girl who died in his book and movie, "The Ultimate Gift," was not fictional; it was his sister. His parents dropped Jim off in Springfield, MO where he had to stay with my grandparents. He was 3 or 4 years old. Without his friends, toys, or his dog, he had a bad attitude. His grandmother (the wisest woman he ever met) had a rule at her house. You could complain all you want after you fill out your "golden list." Before complaining, they had to write down 10 things they were thankful for. Jim could not even write, but she helped him make a list. Jim said, *"I defy people to write down 10 things you are thankful for & have a bad day."* Before we complain, get your "thankful list" & look at it. Everything comes to us as ENDOWMENT or ENTITLEMENT. Everything is either a gift from God or we think we are entitled to something. Entitlements leave us angry, disappointed, jealous, & upset because I think someone owes me something. If something bad happens, it's not fair to me. However, with endowment, we think everything is a gift. Jim lost his sight, but the Lord gave him Vision. He lost his ability to see, but Jim can hear everything. He's thankful. He did not have this gift the first 20 years of his life. Of course, there are times when being blind is frustrating. But that's true of everyone. Being blind is no different. When people go through divorce, bankruptcy, or an illness – we are only as big as the smallest thing it takes to divert us from where we are called to be.

2) *"Through **YOUR PRAYERS.**"* The church was praying for him. Paul is always talking about their attachment to one another through their prayers.

3) *"and the help of the **SPIRIT** of JESUS CHRIST."* The Holy Spirit in the Greek is "paraclete." It means "to be called alongside to help." The Holy Spirit transcends our human capacity. This was the ultimate source of Paul's strength, courage, and power. He didn't generate the power from himself. The Holy Spirit comforted him.

2) **Paul's Joy:** *"For someone to be happy, they must have 3 things.* Paul never says he's "happy," but he always had joy. Based on 3 dynamics in vs. 21

*\*For to me **to live** is \_\_\_* How do you answer? *"Make money? Spend money? Eat? Play golf or*

video games? Garden? Watch TV? There's nothing wrong with good things: family, friends, health, meaningful work, a nice retirement. But, *Why am I here? What is the meaning of life?* If all we have is "eat, drink, and be merry" then we are shortsighted. Paul had **SOMETHING TO DO**. Paul told Timothy to *"take hold of that which is truly life."* Paul was driven by one thing (1:12) *"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."*

\***...CHRIST** Paul had **SOMEONE TO LOVE**. Paul no longer tried to follow the rules; He tried to follow the ruler. His mission was to **help others follow Jesus** because he knew Jesus is the way, truth, and life.

\***And to die is gain** Paul had **SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO**. When I saw the tornado funnel 3 blocks away and headed my way in West Tulsa in 1974, I raced to the basement of Epworth UMC, pressed my face to the tile, and waited to die. The funnel passed right over the church. I felt the pressure and knew I'd die. Yet, I had such a spirit of calm and peace because I knew I would go to heaven. I was actually disappointed when I got up.

What is bad/evil will be eliminated, but (Rev 21:4 *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*). The Bible never pictures death for a Christian as a gain over the worst in this life, but as an incredible improvement on the BEST part of life.

Greatly multiply the best moment you've ever known in your life and sustain it forever. we will also become LIKE JESUS (conformed to His image), we will also ENJOY His presence forever. This is far better. Either way Paul wins. He can remain here and enjoy his friendships and ministry, or go and be with Christ. He (and we) simply cannot lose if we are in Christ. We are not earthbound. If we are in Christ, we don't need to fear what we are most fear.

Paul wrote to Timothy at the end of his life: 2 Timothy 4:6-8 *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.* And he also encouraged the Thessalonians: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.* (We grieve – those who have fallen asleep – a peaceful metaphor – do not.)

**Paul Taylor's** story. His daughter's father-in-law, 3 sons (18, 16, 11), + 11 yr old cousin were killed by escaped convict in Texas. I spoke to Paul last Sunday night. He said their church community came together to support the family & several people gave their lives to X thru the witness of the family & the ministry of the church. Paul apologized as we spoke. "I'm sorry to be preaching to you." Having heard him, made me feel so far behind in my faith. I'm personally ready to go to heaven, but it's hard for me to process loss of others. **If we could talk to those 5 who were in X, they'd probably tell us something like, "Don't be AFRAID. Don't WORRY. We have someone who loves us & we love Jesus. Don't worry about us. Comfort one**

***another.”***

If you have someone to love, Jesus, you have something meaningful to do and something wonderful look forward to. Give your life to Him this day.