

To Live Is Christ, Therefore, To Die Is Gain

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

While in prison, not knowing if he would live or die, Paul wrote to the Philippians. He was comforted because whether he lived or died, Christ would be magnified (**Philippians 1:20**). How could this be? Paul explained in **Philippians 1:21**. Christ would be glorified whether Paul lived or died, because to Paul, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”.

Discussion:

- I. To Paul, to die is gain.
 - A. Paul desired to depart this life. I am amazed at the commentaries that wiggle and squirm when commenting on these verses, feeling they must defend Paul. They are afraid his desire to get away from the hassles and torments of earthly living is self-centered. But this same point is reiterated in **II Corinthians 5:1-4**. Paul believed that every Christian groaned to be shed of this earthly tent in order to be immortally arrayed. Again in **Romans 8:18-25**, Paul says we have been saved in order to receive gain after death. Paul did not consider his desire selfishness but rather a natural desire for all Christians.
 - B. Paul's death would be gain because of what he would give up. No doubt, his soul was daily tormented by the sin around him. He was troubled with temptations--as are we all. He suffered physical anguish, begging three times for a thorn in the flesh to be removed (**II Corinthians 12:7-10**). He was willing to lean on God's grace, but that thorn in the flesh was still there. Don't you think he looked forward to heaven where there would be no thorns in the flesh? He was, no doubt, exhausted much of the time because of the hardship of his labors. In death, he would give all that up. He looked forward to his “Sabbath rest” (**Hebrews 4:9-10**).
 - C. Paul's death would be gain because of what he would receive. In **Philippians 1:23**, Paul said dying would be better because he would be with Christ. Paul's strongest relationship was with Christ and he longed for the day to be with him, not in faith, but in sight. Death was gain to Paul, not because he would be shed of family relationships, but because he would finally be with the one who was most important to him--the one he loved the most (**Matthew 10:37**). Can you imagine being with Christ? I know we are in God's presence right now. But can you imagine being in His presence and seeing Him? No wonder he saw death as gain.
 - D. Having said all of this, Paul was not suicidal. He did not wish for death because he felt life was not worth living. Rather, he was hard-pressed from both directions. He not only wanted to die, he wanted to live. Because to Paul, to live is Christ.
- II. To Paul, to live is Christ.
 - A. To Paul, to live was Christ because he would have more opportunity to work. He would have more fruitful labor (**Philippians 1:22**). Paul wanted to live, because he wanted more opportunities to glorify God by bearing fruit (**cf. John 15:8**).
 - B. To Paul, to live was Christ because he would be able to serve more people. While dying would be a gain for him, living would be gain for others. In **Philippians 1:24-25**, Paul claimed that living would help the Philippians progress in their spiritual journey with Christ. How many other souls would be saved if he lived? How many struggling Christians would be strengthened if he lived? How many stronger Christians would be spurred on to greater work in Christ if he lived? These thoughts pulled Paul back to life.
 - C. I have to confess, I am humbled by Paul's statement. Because I also feel this same conflict. I look forward to death. I look forward to heaven. But, I also want to live. My reasons, however, for wanting live are different from Paul's. When I think about why I want to stay here, it is almost always in relation to what I will get out of it. I want to see my kids graduate and my grandkids. I want to take a vacation to Europe some day. I don't want to miss out on some of the things this world has to offer. If I died today, I would lose out on those things. But Paul's desire to live had nothing to do with what he would get out of it. It had to do with what he would give. He weighed his desire for rest against the work he still had the ability to do. He weighed his desire to be with Christ against the good he could do if he remained with the brethren. For this reason, we could never claim that Paul was selfish. Sometimes I am not so sure about myself.

- III. If our living is not Christ, then our dying will not be gain.
- A. Recently I discovered something in this verse that I had missed in hundreds of readings: a subtle but life-changing point. Whether Paul lived or died while in that prison, one day Paul was going to die. And he knew that his dying would be gain. Why did he have such assurance? Because his living had been Christ and because if he continued to live, his living would still be Christ. The two halves of Paul's statement are related. They stand or fall together. Paul's living was Christ, so his death was gain. His death was gain because his living was Christ. If his living had not been Christ, his death would not have been gain.
 - B. Do you want your death to be gain? Then follow Paul's example. Make your living be Christ. Too many Christians want the last half of Paul's statement to be true without having to live the first half of the statement. Too many do not want to be challenged to bear fruit. Too many want Christianity to equal attending church if even that. Like those in **Matthew 7:21-23**, they will be turned away on Judgment Day because Christ was not their life.
 - C. If we want to claim, as Paul did, that to die is gain, we must first give ourselves to God--as did the Macedonians (**II Corinthians 8:5**). Christ must be our life as Paul said in **Colossians 3:3-4**. We must be crucified with Christ. We must no longer live but allow Christ to live in us (**Galatians 2:20**). Then and only then, whether we live or die, will Christ be magnified. He will be magnified in life as He lives through us, declaring Himself to the world through our lives. Or He will be magnified in death as one of his saints gains victory over sin, Satan and death.

Conclusion:

What about you? Can you claim what Paul claimed? "To me, to live is Christ." Is living about bearing fruit for the Master and magnifying Christ as you serve God and others? Does each day of life for you mean more fruitful labor for the Master? Do not allow the days of your life to be nothing more than time on earth. Make them days in which you work toward the goal of having the ultimate gain when you die. Satan wants you to believe this is asking too much. Satan wants you to believe you cannot achieve this. But you can. Paul must have expected the Philippians to feel this way because he encouraged them in **Philippians 2:12-13** saying, "... work out your salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you ...". We fear and tremble because we know our work is never enough to save us. But we keep on doing it because we know we are not alone. God is working through us and He will do more than we can ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**). With this in mind we must increase our efforts and our goals to live for Christ and to gain when we die.