

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Keeping Life and Death in Perspective!

Paul's heart's desire was to magnify Christ in his own body. Warren Wiersbe asks the question, 'Does Christ need to be magnified' and then answers his question this way:

"After all, how can a mere human being ever magnify the Son of God? Well, the stars are much bigger than the telescope, and yet the telescope magnifies them and brings them closer. The believer's body is to be a telescope that brings Jesus Christ close to people. To the average person, Christ is a misty figure in history who lived centuries ago. But as the unsaved watch the believer go through a crisis, they can see Jesus magnified and brought so much closer... Paul was not afraid of life or death! Either way, he wanted to magnify Christ in his body. No wonder he had joy!"

The psalmist David wrote in: *Psalm 34:3 (ESV)* ³ *Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!* Magnifying the Lord is a wonderful way to keep life and death in perspective.

Shouldn't it be the desire of every believer's heart to magnify the Lord God Jehovah? Sometimes the burdens of this life impede our thinking to the point that we find ourselves being hindered in magnifying the Lord. The way for believers to continually keep our telescopes (our bodies – our minds – our hearts) focused on magnifying the God of heaven and earth is to keep life and death in perspective.

Read Philippians 1:21-26 (ESV) ²¹ *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* ²² *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.* ²³ *I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* ²⁴ *But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* ²⁵ *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,* ²⁶ *so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.*

I will repeat a quote from last week's lesson concerning verse 21. A pastor named Pettingill said that 'gain is always more of the same thing. If to live is Christ, then to die would be more of Christ. It means to go and be with Him.' On the 'flip side' never forget that death will be a great loss to those who do not die in Christ.

Even though Paul's immediate circumstances were difficult, he knew that if he continued to live in the flesh, the fruits of his labor would magnify God. Can we say that about the fruits of our labors? Are we laboring for the King of Glory or the things of this world? Personally, by this point in his life, Paul knew just going ahead and dying would be better for him. Yet, Paul understood that he needed to remain in his body for his 'faith family'.

In verse 25, Paul says concerning remaining in the flesh: *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all.* Paul does not say whether he had a prophetic illumination concerning his release from prison; or, had heard some news from the guards; or something else – maybe he just had a ‘feeling’. Yet Paul was confident. Paul’s confidence reminds me of what the Apostle John wrote in **1 John 5:14-15 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.* ¹⁵ *And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

Sometimes, we feel like Paul. We just want to say, “Lord, take me home. Get me out of this place.” Then, we think of our loved ones needing us here and the Lord’s work that is yet to be and we like Paul feel torn. Like Paul, let’s stop and remember that we were formed for the purpose of magnifying our Maker in all that we say and do. **Micah 6:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

To those who don’t believe in Christ, what good life they have on this earth is all there is and whether they realize it or not – there will be no gain in dying without Christ. The death of non-believers might be considered as a release from the pain of this world – yet sadly, what lies ahead for them will be much worse. They are going to a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* as described by Jesus in **Matthew 8:12**. Paul’s whole reason for living was to speak out boldly for Christ so that more would escape the flames of hell and find Jesus before it’s too late.

When we think of to live is Christ and to die is gain, it is natural to wonder, ‘Where are the saved dead now?’ Depending on who you ask, the answer will be different. Let’s look at some of the different opinions.

- (1) **Soul Sleep** - Soul sleep is the view that believers die and later wake up at the resurrection. According to this view, there is no consciousness for the dead from the time of death until the moment of resurrection. One objection to soul sleep is the story Jesus told in **Luke 16:19-31** concerning the deaths of Lazarus and the rich man. When you read this passage, it is clear that the dead are conscious between death and the resurrection. It is highly unlikely that Jesus would use such an example if it were not based on fact.
- (2) **Immediate Resurrection** – Those who believe in immediate resurrection think that believers enter into their final heavenly state immediately after death. A major objection to this belief would be **1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (ESV)** ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* This passage makes it clear that we do not receive our final eternal bodies until we meet Christ in the air.
- (3) **Purgatory** – According to the Catholic Church, purgatory is an intermediate state where the soul goes upon death. The name purgatory, as it suggests, is a place where the soul will be purged, cleansed of remaining sin in order to prepare for heaven. It may sound good but God’s plan for the forgiveness of

sin does not work that way. The concept of purgatory disputes *1 John 2:2 (ESV)*² *He [meaning Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* After we die there no way to purge our sins. We must choose Jesus and be covered in His righteousness in this life.

(4) **Intermediate State** – This idea supports a conscious state of existence after death and before the final resurrection. Paul confirmed this in verse 23 and also in *2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (ESV)*⁶ *So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* Some say believers who die though conscious have no bodily form until the resurrection when we receive our new bodies. Others believe that we dwell in a ‘transitional body’ until the resurrection. This I know, we can rest assured that believers who are now in heaven are perfectly content, enjoying the glories there and worshipping the majesty of the Lord. Let’s read what Jesus said concerning heaven.

*Read John 14:2-3 (ESV)*² *In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?*³ *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people!

David Legge says this, “The place where the believer goes when we die now, that heaven is a temporary lodging place, it is only a stop along the way to the final destination of the new heaven and the new earth when we are resurrected.” This we do know:

*Read John 4:24 (ESV)*²⁴ *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

When the angels of God carry us through the valley of the shadow of death into the LORD’s Place, we are not going to be bothered if our room in heaven is finished yet OR if we are staying awhile in a transitional heaven with Jesus and our family and friends and all the other believers who have gone before us until we reach our ultimate destination of the new heaven and the new earth together. The finite mind is unable to fully comprehend the infinite things that await us.

It is awesome to focus on heaven to lift our spirits; however, it has been said, we should never become so heavenly minded that we are earthly good!

*Read Philippians 1:27-30 (ESV)*²⁷ *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,²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

Paul encouraged the Philippians to *let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*. The Philippians were not alone in receiving this message concerning living a life worthy of Christ. Paul wrote similar words to the Christians of Ephesus, Colosse, and Thessalonica. We need to ‘take the hint’ and focus on standing firm in our faith as well. Paul’s words are also a reminder that we are to ‘work together’ – *with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*. Look at how much time ‘church people’ have wasted over the years about things that do not matter one bit when measured on the scale of eternity. Paul said the Philippians should have *one mind* – that one mind is the mind of Christ which we study later.

Paul considered it a privilege to suffer for Christ. We do not by nature consider suffering a privilege. Nevertheless, we find the apostles considering their suffering for Christ as a way to be counted worthy. **Acts 5:41 (ESV)**⁴¹ *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name*. Let’s learn to use suffering to build our character and not resent it or let it tear us down.

We are living in a culture in our own country where being a Christian brings out more hostility to the gospel of Jesus while other religions are being more openly accepted. Christianity proclaims that entrance into heaven is only by the narrow way and the world does not like it. But, Jesus said in **Matthew 7:13 (ESV)**¹³ *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many*. Christianity cannot deny the narrow way of Jesus or we are not Christianity. Jesus also said in **John 14:6 (ESV)**⁶ *...“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*. We are not called to compromise the gospel by saying that everyone doing what is right in their own eyes is okay. What is right in God’s eyes is what matters. While disputing that there is even a heaven, the world still likes to believe that everybody is going to get to heaven somehow. That is the devil’s lie!

Christians need to face the fact that we are never going to be in the majority in this world. Nevertheless, we need not be fearful. Paul wrote in **Romans 8:31 (ESV)**³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Even with more open hostility towards Christianity, most of us in America do not have a clue about what “suffering” for Christ means. It is difficult for us to comprehend what Paul and the other early Christians went through to enable us to know the story of Jesus today. Most of us find it difficult to speak out as boldly as we should even when we know we are not going to face physical suffering.

For example, the Holy Spirit brings a person to our mind that we should mention Jesus to them. We consider ourselves as being obedient when we ask where they go to church and yet, we never get around to talking to them about Jesus. I am not trying to place blame. I know I am guilty of this myself or thinking I will speak to them later – when today is the accepted time of salvation. We must stand firm together and tell the story! Let’s be telescopes and magnify Christ so that those walking in darkness will see the Great Light!