

To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain Philippians 1:19-26

In as brief a statement as was possible for the apostle Paul, we are given his philosophy of life and death. In a few short verses we discover what it was that made him so effective in life and fearless in the shadow of death. May God help us to adopt this same outlook in our lives.

First we observe Paul's purpose statement - *Now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death* (v.20). In a moment we will look at Paul's quandary, which will make no sense unless we first understand his understanding of the purpose of his being which is to *magnify Christ*. The word magnify (Grk - megaluntheésetai) means to *show great*. Paul's desire in life and death is to make much of Christ. He wants to show others how excellent, wonderful and glorious the Lord really is. Christ is great, but because of our sin and self-absorption we fail to see Him for what He really is. Paul says, "my life is devoted to helping people come closer to seeing Him for what He is." He also says he wants to have the courage and boldness to face death in such a way as to show others the greatness of Jesus.

There are so many great applications of this. So much for us to learn if we only will. Paul is saying, "I don't want to waste my life." He is saying, "I don't want to waste my imprisonment." He even says, "I don't want to waste my death." For Paul, freedom means going about preaching Jesus as Lord. Prison means influencing the Praetorian guard and household of Caesar for Christ. Death meant showing his executioners that the glorious and loving Christ was standing just beyond the veil of death to catch him when he passed through it. So, Paul is telling us, no matter what our circumstance, don't waste your life!

From his imprisonment, Paul awaits his trial. What will be the verdict? Will he be put to death, or set free? Which option does Paul prefer and which does he anticipate? Paul describes this quandary as being *hard pressed* v.23. But he views it not as being hard pressed between two difficult decisions, but between two wonderful possibilities. To depart and be with Christ is far better. To continue in the world would be beneficial to his brethren. He summarizes his feelings about the situation with the well known words, *For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain* (v.21). To live is to preach and live and labor for Christ. To die is to gain the unsurpassed profit of being in the very presence of Christ. Paul want's both so bad, that he is hard pressed to choose between them, let's explore the meaning of each of these a little closer.

To Live Is Christ & To Die Is Gain (v. 21). To live is Christ is expressed elsewhere this way, *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God* (col 3:3), or like this, *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Gal 2:20-21). To die is gain. When we come to see Christ as the source of every earthly blessing, we are willing to say farewell to the blessings, that at last we may enter into full fellowship with the Blessor. This is not a rejection of life or a hatred of creation. It is simply the surpassing desire to be in the embrace of Him from whom all life and creation flows. We should not hate life. Do not want to die so that you won't have to live here anymore. To live is Christ! But, nurture your relationship with Christ so that your desire to live on in this world, though great, is eclipsed by your desire to go and be with Him.

I want to close by revisiting the quandary Paul faced. Is that the quandary before you? How would you fill in the blanks:

“For me, to live is _____, and to die is _____.”