

What Are You Living For?

Philippians 1:21-30

TEXT

Philippians 1:21-30 “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **22** But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. **23** For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: **24** Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. **25** And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; **26** That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. **27** Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; **28** And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. **29** For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; **30** Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

INTRODUCTION

Everybody is living for something. Something gets your time. Something gets your energy. Something affects your decisions. Something matters enough to you that you build your life around it.

Paul knew exactly what his life was about. He says in verse 21, “For to me to live is Christ.” Paul is in bonds. His plans have changed. His freedom has been taken away. But his purpose has not changed because his purpose is Christ.

Philippians 1:20 “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”

That is what Paul cares about. Is Christ being magnified? Most people are asking, “Am I comfortable? Am I getting what I want? Are my plans working out? Am I getting ahead?” Paul is asking what happens to the cause of Christ through his life.

So what are you living for? Not what would you tell somebody at church. What does the way you actually live say?

I. LIVE FOR CHRIST — PHILIPPIANS 1:21–23

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Look at the words, “For to me.” Paul is talking about his own life. Christ governs that life. Christ controls what Paul values, what Paul does, and how Paul looks at what happens to him.

Paul says the same thing another way in Galatians.

Galatians 2:20 “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Paul says, “the life which I now live in the flesh.” That matches what we are reading in Philippians. Paul is still alive, and while he is alive his life belongs to Christ.

So what is at the center of your life? What controls your decisions? What are you constantly chasing? What are you afraid of losing? What do you think you have to have before you can be satisfied?

Maybe it is money. Maybe it is a career. Maybe it is comfort, reputation, possessions, entertainment, or personal success. Work your job. Provide for your family. Enjoy what God has given you. Have goals. But let Christ govern all of it.

Now verse 22 says, “if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour.” “Live in the flesh” here means remain alive in this earthly body. Then Paul says, “yet what I shall choose I wot not.” “I wot not” means, “I do not know.”

Verse 23 says he is “in a strait betwixt two.” That means he is caught between two alternatives. If he stays alive, there is fruitful work to do. If he departs, he will be with Christ.

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Why is death gain? Paul tells us. He has “a desire to depart, and to be with Christ.” Death is gain because Paul will be with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:8 “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

Paul still sees value in staying alive because there is fruit that can come from his labour. But if his earthly life ends, he is still not losing Christ. That is why his purpose cannot be taken away by circumstances.

He can lose freedom and still have Christ. He can lose his plans and still have Christ. He can lose possessions and still have Christ. He can lose his earthly life and still have Christ.

Can you say, “For to me to live is Christ”? Or would something else have to go in that blank?

II. USE YOUR LIFE FOR OTHERS — PHILIPPIANS 1:24–26

Philippians 1:24-26 “Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. **25** And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; **26** That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”

Verse 24 begins with “Nevertheless.” Paul has just said that being with Christ is “far better.” Nevertheless, staying alive is “more needful for you.”

“Abide in the flesh” means remain alive here. Paul moves from what he would personally prefer to what would help somebody else.

That is what happens when Christ governs a life. You stop asking only, “What do I want? What is easiest for me? What makes me comfortable?” You start asking, “How can God use my life to help somebody else?”

Verse 25 says Paul expects to remain “for your furtherance and joy of faith.” “Furtherance” means advancement or progress. Paul wants them moving forward. He wants their faith strengthened. He wants their joy increased.

Paul says something similar to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 1:24 “Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”

Paul wants to help these people. His ministry should make them stronger. His life should be useful to somebody besides himself.

So who is spiritually stronger because you are here? Who understands the Bible better because you took time to teach them? Who has been encouraged because you showed up? Who has heard the gospel because you were willing to speak?

You can spend your whole life turned inward. You can work for yourself, plan for yourself, spend on yourself, and build comfort for yourself. Paul looks at the life God has left him and says it is “more needful for you.”

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And notice where verse 26 ends. Their rejoicing is “in Jesus Christ.” Paul wants to help them, but he wants their eyes on Christ.

Help people and point them to Christ. Teach people and point them to Christ. Encourage people and point them to Christ. Serve people in such a way that Jesus Christ becomes bigger in their eyes.

If God gives you another year, what are you going to do with it? What about another five years? Another twenty? Will there be spiritual fruit because God allowed you to remain?

III. STAND FOR CHRIST WHEN IT COSTS YOU — PHILIPPIANS 1:27–30

Philippians 1:27-30 “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; **28** And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. **29** For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; **30** Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

Now Paul turns from his life to their lives. Verse 27 says, “let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.” “Conversation” means your manner of life, your conduct. “Becometh the gospel” means your life should fit the gospel you profess.

Then Paul says, “whether I come and see you, or else be absent.” Their faithfulness should not depend upon Paul being there watching them. Are you the same Christian when nobody from church is around? Are you still faithful when nobody is checking on you?

Paul says they are to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” They are standing together. They are striving together. The church is not supposed to be everybody running in a different direction. The gospel gives them something to stand for together.

Then verse 28 says, “And in nothing terrified by your adversaries.” “Terrified” means frightened or intimidated. The question is whether the adversary can frighten you into disobedience.

Will you stop speaking because somebody pushes back? Will you stop standing because people do not like it? Will you change what you believe because standing on the Bible becomes uncomfortable?

The verse goes on to call what is happening an “evident token.” Paul puts perdition on the side of the adversaries and salvation on the side of these believers, and he says that salvation is “of God.” Exactly how far the word “which” reaches in the sentence is not completely clear, so do not force the verse beyond what we can see. But Paul calls their stand a token connected with salvation, not the cause of salvation.

Now look at believers who faced that kind of pressure.

Acts 4:19-31 “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. **20** For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. **21** So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. **22** For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. **23** And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. **24** And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: **25** Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? **26** The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. **27** For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, **28** For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. **29** And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, **30** By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. **31** And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

What happened? Peter and John were threatened. They went back to the other believers and told them what happened. Then what did those believers do? They prayed. And what did they ask God for? Boldness to keep speaking His word.

The threats did not decide whether they obeyed God.

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Now look carefully at verse 29. Believing on Christ is one thing, and suffering for Christ is another. Paul says, “not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”

Suffering does not become another condition of salvation. You believe on Christ. Then as a believer, standing for Christ may cost you something.

And when Paul says believing is “given,” keep the verse where God put it. The verse speaks of believing within God’s gracious dealing, but it does not say God irresistibly gives faith to some people while withholding from everybody else the ability to believe. Paul’s immediate subject is believers facing suffering because they belong to Christ.

Verse 29 also tells us what kind of suffering Paul is talking about. It is suffering “for his sake.” Every bad day is not persecution for Christ. Paul is talking about suffering connected with allegiance to Christ.

The apostles experienced exactly that.

Acts 5:41 “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”

Why were they suffering? “For his name.” What did they do? They kept following Christ.

Now verse 30 says these Philippians have “the same conflict which ye saw in me.” “Conflict” means the struggle and opposition connected with standing for Christ. These believers knew Paul was not talking about something theoretical. They had seen what standing for Christ cost him.

So what happens when obedience has a price? Will you still stand? Will you still speak? Will you still obey Christ when somebody pushes back?

If Christ is what you live for, Christ is still what you live for when it gets hard.

CONCLUSION

What are you living for?

Paul has taken us through the answer. Live for Christ. Use the life God gives you for the spiritual good of other people. Stand for Christ when standing costs you something.

Work your job. Provide for your family. Enjoy what God has given you. Make plans. But let Christ govern all of it.

If your plans fall apart, is Christ still your purpose? If you lose something you worked hard for, is Christ still enough? If people oppose you because you stand on the gospel, are you still going to stand? And while God keeps you here, is anybody spiritually better because you lived?

Philippians 1:21 “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

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