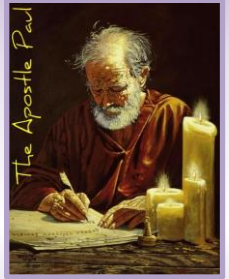


PHILIPPIANS

Joy In Christ



Lesson 04: Blessings of Life and Death ... [PHILIPPIANS 1:20-26]

PREVIEW

Paul did not want to be shamed for the sake of the gospel, but he was ready to die if necessary. Death to him was gain! He realized that to remain on earth and serve the Lord was important for the cause of the gospel but also for serving and encouraging the believers. In all of this Paul admitted being “hard-pressed.” To Paul, death was the bridge between two distinct expressions of life. It was the end of the old life, but it was also the beginning of a new life. Therefore he could rejoice in either circumstance and could use both for the glorification of God.

The Philippians wanted the apostle to live, but they were afraid that he would soon be martyred. For them, only Paul’s living would bring advantages. They needed to look at his life and death options through his eyes and from the divine perspective.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST: (1:20-23)

PAUL’S TESTIMONY (20)

In ancient times, the noun “**EXPECTATION**” was used of the spectator who sat on the edge of his seat and stretched his neck to see the outcome of an athletic event. Thus, it meant to watch eagerly with strained expectancy and longing. Elsewhere it is used of all creation, which anticipates a deliverance from the curse when the children of God receive their new bodies (Romans 8:19).

The word “**HOPE**” denotes one of the three main Christian virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13). It refers to a settled assurance of heart caused by a firm conviction that what is believed will come to pass (Romans 8:24-25). All committed believers are looking for the “blessed hope” of the coming of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). Thus, hope is not a crossing of the fingers, a naïve wishful thinking against great odds; rather, it is a divinely implanted response to the sure promises of God.

Consequently, Paul had an expectant hope that he would be released, that he would see the Philippians again, that he would love to have further ministry, and that he would see Christ, either at his death or at Christ’s coming.

Shame should not become a blot upon the family of God. God is not ashamed to be called their God (Hebrews 2:11). Thus believers should not be ashamed of God. They should not be ashamed to confess the name of Christ in salvation (Romans 10:10), to share the gospel (Romans 1:16), not to identify themselves with other Christians (2 Timothy 1:8).

The inclusive phrase “**IN NOTHING**” refers to both good and bad times, to situations of life or death. In Paul’s cause, it denoted both freedom and imprisonment.

PAUL’S CREED (21)

Paul’s creed was simple yet profound “**TO LIVE IS CHRIST.**” Literally, the Greek reads, “**THE ACT OF LIVING: CHRIST.**” Paul’s thought, feelings, and actions were fixed on Christ and controlled by Him. The Savior was both the center and the circumference of Paul’s daily existence.

The emphasis of the phrase “**TO DIE**” is on that split second of time when death actually occurs, when the self is separated from the body. That even is instantaneous, whereas life is constant. The process of death, which is often long and painful, is not contemplated in this concept.

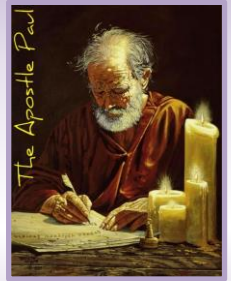
When believers die, they are immediately free of suffering and are directly present with Christ in the third heaven. From that point on, they will be with the Savior forever. This is why Paul could call the instantaneous act of death “**GAIN**”. God views the death of His children as precious (Psalm 116:15). Thus, when believers pass away, earth’s loss is always heaven’s gain.

PAUL’S CHOICES - TO BE ON EARTH (22)

No one can will his or her own death (Ecclesiastics 8:8). Only one person, Jesus Christ, had the delegated

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authority to release His spirit at death and to resurrect Himself (John 10:18). Nevertheless, the apostle could express his preferences, leaving the actual choice with the sovereign God.

Paul knew that he would continue to live. The phrase **"IN THE FLESH"** denotes life on earth in the natural body; it has no connotation of sinful flesh here. Paul also knew that his ministry would be successful. The demonstrative pronoun **"THIS"** refers to the continuation of his natural life. In addition, Paul did not disclose his personal preference (**"AND I DO NOT KNOW WHICH TO CHOOSE"**). Death would be a personal gain to him, but an extended ministry would have value both for him and for others.

PAUL'S CHOICES – TO BE IN HEAVEN (23)

Most people want life without death rather than life with death. The natural desire of humans is to live, not to die. Paul's case, however, was much different. He had to determine where he wanted to live – on earth or in heaven. Either location had advantages.

Paul gives his reasons for why he preferred heaven. **First**, it was an inner compulsion (**"BUT I AM HARD-PRESSED FROM BOTH DIRECTIONS"**). **Second**, he had a **"DESIRE"** an intense passion or drive for heaven. Paul wanted to **"DEPART"** and Paul wanted **"TO BE WITH CHRIST"**. Thus, death was not an escape for Paul; rather, it meant that he would be with the most important person in his life. The Bible says nothing about a soul sleep after death or a temporary residency in purgatory. At death a believer goes into the presence of Christ and continues to live (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). **Third**, Paul preferred heaven because it was **"FAR BETTER"**.

I SHALL REMAIN: (1:24-26)

PAUL'S CONCERN (24)

Paul's inner struggle was whether to depart or to abide. His preference for heaven and Christ, though sincere and holy, manifested a slight selfishness. After all, Paul was foremost a servant, and a servant must live to meet

the needs of others. He knew what he wanted to do, but he also recognized what he had to do.

Paul accepted the fact that he would **"REMAIN ON IN THE FLESH"** i.e., he planned to remain on the earth in his natural body. In addition, Paul continued living was **"MORE NECESSARY"**. People who make decisions out of love and humility will always do what is best for others, not what is best for themselves. Finally, Paul wanted to abide for them (**"FOR YOUR SAKE"**).

THE INCREASE OF FAITH (25)

Paul knew by the indelible conviction of the Holy Spirit that he would be set free. The verb **"I KNOW"** stresses an innate knowledge in contrast to experiential, learned wisdom; Paul knew he would remain alive (**"I SHALL REMAIN"**), and he knew he would return to Philippi (**"CONTINUE WITH YOU ALL"**).

THE JOY OF REUNION (26)

Paul saw **four** possible features in the Philippians' proud confidence in him. **(1)** It would **"ABOUND"**. It would be full and running over constantly. **(2)** Their confidence would rest **"IN JESUS CHRIST"**. He would get the glory and praise for what would be accomplished. **(3)** Their confidence would also reside in Paul (**"IN ME"**). A believer can rejoice at the presence of another believer and of the omnipresent Savior at the same time. Such rejoicing is complementary, not contradictory. **(4)** Their confidence would be caused by Paul's personal return (**"THROUGH MY COMING TO YOU AGAIN"**). Neither Epaphroditus' return nor Timothy's visit would generate the joy that the apostle's physical presence in their midst would produce.

