

Philippians 1:21-26

Paul writes here with punctuated, shortened exclamations, and this sentence contains no verbs, so it can be translated:

- To live – Christ!
- To die – gain!

And the absence of the verb provides a full meaning in connection with biblical principles:

- To live is Christ
- To live means Christ
- To live depends on Christ
- To live is growth in Christ
- To live honors Christ

Christ Jesus was everything in life to Paul. In other words, nothing else mattered as much as living for Christ. In **Romans 12:1-2** the Scriptures identify this same thought through different words and expression, “¹ *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* ² *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” This references the sacrificial lamb that was offered on the altar – giving 100% of its life. We are to sacrifice our life 100% as a “living sacrifice.” We are to give all.

William Barclay wrote:

- For Paul, Christ had been the beginning of life – on that day along the road to Damascus where he was arrested by the Shekinah glory of the resurrected Savior. Christ was the beginning of Paul’s life
- For Paul, Christ was the continuation of life – there wasn’t a day Paul didn’t live in the conscious presence of his Lord
- For Paul, Christ was the end of life – and the older Paul grew, the more he longed for the day of his final redemption
- Christ had given him the task of his life, making him an apostle
- Christ was the strength of his life – in His all sufficient grace
- Christ was the reward of his life he longed to see
- If Jesus Christ were taken out of his life, there would be nothing left

If Jesus Christ was taken out of our life – would we notice anything missing? Would anything change? And how long can we survive without His grace?

Spurgeon once said “*I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.*”

1. Productive labor (Vs. 22)

Paul’s words here translated *fruitful labor* are simply:

- An expression for living one day at a time in a demonstration of Spirit control – which yields fruitful attitudes; he refers to these attitudes as the fruit of the Spirit in (**Galatians 5:22-23** – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*)
- Fruitful labor not only refers to fruitful attitudes, but to fruitful actions – earlier in **Philippians 1:11** Paul calls righteous deeds “*the fruit of righteousness*”
- Paul also uses this idea for fruitful additions: he refers to winning converts to Christ as a “*spiritual harvest*” – a metaphor for fruitful evangelism. **Romans 1:13**

Sooner or later, the stuff of earth sours . . . whatever earth produces eventually spoils . . . rusts . . . expires. Whatever God’s Spirit produces lasts forever. Betty Stam wrote these words sometime before her martyrdom in China, “*When we consecrate ourselves to God, we think we are making a great sacrifice when we are only letting go of some little trinket ... and when our hands are empty, He fills them with His treasures.*”

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Vs. 23

Paul is swayed between two desires. The word “pressed” he uses is “*senechomai*.” This word was used in classical Greek writings to describe a traveler in a narrow pass, with a wall of rock on either side, unable to turn aside, able only to go straight ahead.

Paul also says it is his desire “to depart.” The Greek word translated “depart” is “*analuein*.” It is a word used for striking camp, to loosen the tent pegs and ropes and move on. It is also used for loosening mooring ropes, pulling up anchor and sailing on. However, its most interesting usage means to solve problems. Death is a solution for Paul, but to stay on would be a solution for those at Philippi that Paul could help.

Vs. 24-25

The word translated “remain” in verse 24 “*menein*” means to “abide.” However, in verse 25 Paul uses a different Greek word for “remain.” Paul uses “*paramenein*” it means to wait beside a person ready to help. This give us a clear picture of Paul’s faith and life. He would prefer to depart and be with the Lord, but he is more than willing to wait beside the believers at Philippi ready to assist them in their spiritual growth.

2. To motivate growth (Vs. 24-25)

That word “*progress*” appeared earlier in verse 12 for the progress (*prokope*) means “*advancement*” – of the gospel. It literally means to cut forward, it is the idea of is hacking your way with a machete through thick brush in the forest to make a path. It’s a word that refers to making progress against obstacles and in the face of resistance.

The believers at Philippi would certainly feel this way. Persecution of Christians was in its early stages, but it was present all the same. Paul has already seen heaven personally; he had seen things he wasn’t allowed by God to describe and he had heard things he wasn’t allowed to repeat. (*2 Corinthians 12:2*)

That’s why he said “dying is gain!” Let’s not miss this point – Paul is actually willing for God to literally postpone heaven in order to use him to help other Christians grow in their faith and joy. That type of character is difficult to explain and especially rare.

3. To magnify Christ

Ultimately, Jesus Christ will receive greater glory in Paul’s living and ministering, preaching and discipling rather than dying. And if the believers can receive even more incentive for glorifying Christ through Paul’s ministry, then Paul is fully willing to stay living.

Betty Stam would be martyred in China. She had written a prayer that would later be published throughout the western world: “*Lord, I give up all my own plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes, and accept Thy will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all utterly to Thee to be Thine forever. Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit. Use me as Thou wilt, send me where Thou wilt, and work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever.*”

For me to live is ...

To die would be...