

Christ is my Life—studies in Philippians (1)

Living For and From Christ Philippians 1

Paul cannot address his friends at Philippi, or the issues they are facing, without constant reference to Christ. We are accustomed to frequent reference to Jesus in Paul's letters but the range is all encompassing. He is mentioned 20 times in the first chapter.

Christ *is* Paul's *life* in two directions: from Paul to Christ (his meaning in v. 21), but underneath this, from Christ to Paul—as this chapter makes clear.

Jesus Christ as the reason to live

When Paul says 'for me to live is Christ', he means being alive to preach the gospel to others—'fruitful labour' (vv. 21-22).

- Literally, 'to live—Christ'. The absence of a verb suggests Christ supplies all that Paul wants and is the focus of all that he does.
- At this point, he is not thinking of an inner life but life in his body (vv. 20, 22, 24; also Gal. 2:20). He has in mind something eminently practical.
- Cf. I live to make money, look after my family, play football, make music. We all need a calling or vocation.
- Paul is comparing living for Christ, and dying, and his present body is the difference between the two! He has a body *so that* Christ will be glorified in it—in particular, by fruitful labour of gospel preaching and pastoral care of the churches. That is the rationale for his continuing to have a body.
- This was the way Christ regarded his body (Heb. 10:5-7).
- Clearly, as the setting shows, Paul does not just mean that Christ is his 'job'. To have Christ as his vocation means heeding his word, relying on his power, seeking his reign and anticipating his future.

Jesus Christ as Master

- Paul has introduced himself as a slave of Christ (1:1; also Rom. 1:1; Phil 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Tit. 1:1; cf. Col. 1:7; 4:7). Later, Paul says he was 'seized' by Christ (3:12).
- Jesus assumes we will be his slaves but treats us as friends (John 13:13, 16; 15:15).
- Paul says we are no longer slaves—to this world—but sons and heirs of God (Gal. 4:7).
- As friend-slaves, with an experience of true freedom, we welcome living under our Lord, Jesus Christ—not having our own agenda, hope, resources or powers, but only his.
- Living for Christ is not a compartment of life but a complete life, embracing everything else (cf. 1 Thes. 2:8).
- The world will not acknowledge God's purpose to unite all things in Christ (Col. 1:17) and so lacks the means for a true humanity, sociality or future. In fact, it seeks to kill Christ all over again in order to establish its own humanity as a self directed, self authenticating and self empowered entity.
- Christians dare not do the same. Rather, we are to find our life so fully in Christ that we respond with a constant 'No!' to our own native impulses because we prefer to have the life Christ gives.

Jesus Christ as the truth of life

- Paul regards gospel preaching as 'preaching Christ'—whether his own preaching or that of others (vv. 15-18; cf. Acts 17:18). Other preachers may preach because of jealousy; others may be merely absorbed in their task; but Paul is absorbed with Christ. Christ is the gospel's content, but not just that. He is also its life and power. Christ is present to the

speaker, and to the hearer (cf. Rom 10:14, 17; Eph. 4:20-21). In one sense, we can't preach *about* Christ as though he was not present.

- Through Paul's preaching, and its manner, others will glorify Christ because of him (v. 26). Paul will so live that it will be the dignity and accomplishments of Christ that will be obvious, not his. In line with this, Paul's imprisonment is for Christ (v. 13).

Jesus Christ as the source of life

Numbers of references in this chapter speak of Christ as the source of life and ministry and hope that Paul has.

Christ is the source (with the Father) of grace and peace (1:2)

- Paul's expressed wish or prayer conveys, to those with faith, what it says. We may compare Jesus' command for the disciples to let their peace come to towns that accepted them, and return to them if they did not (Luke 10:6).
- Grace and peace are not merely remembered by us or contained within us but are constantly being received by us. They are a fountain rather than a status.

Christ is the source of Paul's affection (v. 8).

- Paul wants readers to know the truth of his love for them, and calls God as witness to its reality. The certainty of this does not come from Paul because it is the love of Christ, reflected in Paul. Christ is 'the source of the love that embraces and lays claim to the apostle's whole personality' (see O'Brian on *Philippians*). Elsewhere he says the love of Christ constrains him (2 Cor. 5:14).
- Love unites the love and the loved. This is wonderfully true of God's love for us in Christ. The revelation of this, and trust in its being so, unites us in love to him and we tend to become like that which we love.

Christ is the source of the practical righteousness for which Paul prays (v. 11). They come through him.

- Christ, or God, are always the well-spring of our love or works (2:1-2, 12-13). That is why God gets the glory (Matt. 5:16)!

Christ's Spirit helps, or supplies what we need (v. 19).

- The Spirit enabled Christ to do what he did, and now comes to us replete with all that Christ has accomplished (John 16:14).
- He is the way that Christ is present among us now, empowering personal living and Christian ministry.
- Christ is the one worthy and sufficient to shape our whole manner of life and inspire our perseverance in suffering (vv. 27, 29). Later, he says he has not attained this life perfectly but that he aims for it (3:12).

See Geoffrey Bingham's song, 'He is my own' captures this well.

4. 'My heart is caught into Your heart;
I live because Your merit
Cleansed every sin of mind and heart
And purified my spirit.
Now free I am—so free to love—
Full free to tell the story,
A holy priest a joyous slave
To cry Your endless glory.

5. Lords other than th' Eternal Lord
Are lords without true glory:
They live in lies and die their death
Without an endless story,
But Christ our Lord abolished death
And opened heaven's portals:
He gives to us His own dear life
That we may be immortal.