



To Live Is Christ

We've come to a passage, and specifically a verse, that is one of the more popular in Scripture: [Philippians 1:21](#). It is often quoted, printed on coffee mugs and wall art, and sung in songs. But as we've become accustomed to, it's best to examine verses carefully to have a deeper and more accurate understanding of what the author intended to say.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. [Philippians 1:21-24](#)

Both here and in the preceding verses we see the apostle Paul fighting an inward struggle, one he openly shared with the believers in Philippi. He longed to go home to heaven to be with his Lord, but he also wanted to continue his work with the church. As we saw last time, that brought us to asking a tough question of ourselves about how deeply we were really committed to Christ. Will we follow Him even when it costs us everything? Paul's answer was clearly yes, and so must ours be.

With this in mind, what was Paul communicating in the famous verse 21, ***“for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”***? What does it mean ***“to live is Christ”***?

For our answer, let's continue reading. Remember, verses were first added to the Bible in the 16th century and Greek does not have the same sentence structure as English, so context is very important. ***“But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.”*** Herein, I am immediately drawn to three words found in this verse: ***live, fruitful, and labor.***

As is good practice in Bible study, let's look to some other Scriptures where Paul talked about fruit and labor:

...we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [Colossians 1:9-10](#)

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. [Colossians 1:28-29](#)



We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father. [1 Thes 1:2-3](#)

For it is for this [godliness] we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. [1 Timothy 4:10](#)

We're beginning to see a theme in Paul's statement, "**to live is Christ.**" Paul believed living for Christ was working heartily for the salvation and spiritual growth of others. This is a **fruitful labor**... work that bears eternal fruit in the Kingdom of God. And we can more clearly see his struggle, where he wanted to continue his work so that, specifically, the Philippian church would be blessed and grow spiritually. Yet he also understood that passing from this life to the next through death was **gain**, and the ultimate goal was to be with the Lord.

Indeed, life is precious and wonderful, and we must use our days wisely and in fruitful labor for Christ, but here we also see the release of fear in our death, because for the believer it is truly **very much better**. Paul was so committed to the mission that he set aside his desire to **depart and be with Christ** because he knew the Philippian church still needed him. As we see from his other writings, he lived in constant and untiring service to all the churches he planted or pastored. Even while imprisoned, his labor did not stop, even if it was simply to be in constant prayer for them.

The lesson we can take away from this passage is that, while the Lord has given us breath in our lungs, we must use our days in service to Christ. The Bible tells us that caring for our family, working our day job, and even resting are all perfectly normal parts of life, but the overarching theme of our life should be of service to Christ. **To live is Christ**. And in dedicating our lives to Christ, we are then freed from any fear of death, because that appointed day will be a blessing beyond our wildest imagination. **To die is gain**.

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece