

# Living and Dying to Christ

*A Study Through Philippians*

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**Bible Text:** Philippians 1:12-26  
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Open your Bibles, please, to Philippians one. I want to begin reading in verse 12 tonight, because it has been quite a while since we were in Philippians. I also want to begin reading in verse 12 that we might have the immediate context as we begin or resume or study in verse 21 tonight.

Philippians one verse 12. The apostle writes:

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 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.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1:12-26.

Paul, who has been in prison for several years, who really does not know the outcome of this particular imprisonment and time of trial, is writing to his beloved Philippian church and he is seeking to encourage them. He has just stated that his ambition is to see the greatness and glory of God disclosed whether through his life or through his death. It is his singular ambition. And his ambition is not mixed with other motives. There is no sense when you read Paul and listen to his words that he has a desire to promote the kingdom of God and promote his particular personal interests.

In this passage, verses 21 through 26, I think Paul is explaining to us in more detail what it means that Christ can and should be magnified in our lives or in our dying. Christ is magnified in the believer's living. I want us to look at Paul's statements here about his own understanding of the magnification of Christ in his living and draw some parallels for our life and ministry.

Would you note with me, first of all, that our union with Christ means that all of life is lived through and to him. The message of his preaching as he stated in verse 18 is Christ. The passion of his life as he stated in verse 20 is that Christ would be magnified. And now he comes to verse 21 and this very familiar verse to us. He says:

“ For to me to live is Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

In one sense it is difficult to unpack all that is in this statement of Paul's. It is difficult in part because it is comprehensive. And to understand exactly what Paul meant, you would need to know all that he involved himself in, all that he was passionate about, all that he gave himself to. The Scriptures unfold some of those things for us where Paul writes to the Church in 1 Corinthians two verse one:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.<sup>3</sup>

The boast of his heart was the cross of his Christ. In Galatians 6:14 he says very plainly:

“ But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

The passion of his life was to preach this Savior where he had not been know as Romans 15 tells us and one commentator notes:

“The preaching of Christ is the business of Paul's life. The presence of Christ is the cheer of his life. The image of Christ, the crown of his life. The will of Christ, the law of his life. The glory of Christ, the end of his life. Christ was the absorbing element of his life. If he travelled, it was on Christ's errand. If he suffered, it was in Christ's service.”

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 6:14.

I think that paragraph helps us understand just a little bit of what Paul means when he says:

“For to me to live is Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

And it is union with Christ that creates that kind of thinking. You see, our union with Christ means that all of our living is lived through and to him. You cannot compartmentalize your life and say this area is for Jesus, this area is for me. This area is for Jesus, this area is for my business career. This area is for Jesus. This area is for family. We don't create those kinds of dichotomies in our life. It is all of him. It is all through him and it is all to him.

In the second place I would have you note that union with Christ means that Christian living is personally profitable. I want to skip the remainder of verse 21 and take this theme of living for Christ and trace it through this passage. So hold on to that concept of dying being gain for a moment. We will return to that.

But note verse 22. Paul says:

“But if I live in the flesh...”<sup>6</sup>

That is, if I remain in this body, on this planet...

“...this is the fruit of my labour.”<sup>7</sup>

It amounts to reaping more spiritual fruit. Union with Christ means that Christian living is personally profitable. I think of what the Lord said in John's gospel, that if we abide in him, what happens? We bear much fruit. It is the inevitable result of being in union with Christ.

Not only is union with Christ what means that Christian living is profitable, but union with Christ means that Christian living is necessary for the larger body.

Look with me at verse 24.

Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.<sup>8</sup>

Remember, he is speaking of how Christ is magnified in his living. Christ is magnified, first, as Paul lives for him, through him, to him. Christ is also magnified as Paul yields the fruit of union with Christ. But in the third place, union with Christ means that

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<sup>5</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 1:22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 1:24-25.

Christian living is necessary for the body. Paul has not lost sight of the fact that he has been called of God, ordained of God for this gospel work in the context of Ephesians four. He is a gift to the body that they might be equipped to do the work of the ministry, that they body might be built up and promote its own growth which ultimately produces a mature body fitting the glorious head, Jesus Christ.

Paul says, “My living is necessary for you.”

It occurs to me as I meditate on this that our Lord is very tenderly dealing with these Philippian Christians.

We took a look at Acts and how this church was planted, the initial converts, who knows what had transpired in the ensuing years, how many more had been added to the faith we do not know, but it was obviously a growing number and yet that body was apparently at a place of spiritual maturity where for Paul to be removed from this world would have been to their harm. He sees his Lord doing something and he very graciously yields himself to that will and he writes for the encouragement of these people and he says:

“Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”<sup>9</sup>

Here is a man who realizes that his life is not about his own desires, but his life is about the magnification of his Redeemer and if magnifying Christ means remaining on planet earth for Paul, he is willing to do it. They were not ready to live and serve without the aid of this spiritual under shepherd. It speaks of our vital union, one to another. No believer is an island to himself. No believer is an independent entity, but Paul’s living is necessary for the Philippians. He tells us specifically why and what areas it is necessary for.

Look at verse 25 again.

“And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your...”<sup>10</sup>

Progress, we could state.

“...and joy of faith.”<sup>11</sup>

First progress of faith. His presence and teaching would serve to build up that body. Again, it seems that the head of the Church Jesus Christ always has the best interest of his people in view when he adds or subtracts particular individuals to that body. It is not just our advancement in faith that the Lord Jesus is seeking, but, secondly, he is seeking our joy.

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<sup>9</sup> Philippians 1:24.

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 1:25.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

I am glad that Paul included that. I am glad to read that the great shepherd of the sheep always has our growing joy in view, our joy in the faith. We are to progress in faith, but we are also to experience great joy in the faith. Paul's living is nectar for the Philippians' joy.

And look with me at verse 26.

“That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

When Paul refers to that rejoicing he is speaking of the basis of joy. We might even say the ground of glory, that thing which you can be proud of. And what is uppermost in Paul's mind? Jesus Christ. It is their joy in him. It is not their joy in Paul, the great spiritual teacher, the preacher, the apostle, one of the pillars of the early church. It is their joy in Christ that he desires to inspire.

Note with me again in verse 26:

“That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

That is, that it may be present in large quantities. It is not just a matter of having marginal joy, but Paul has a great awareness that God has positioned him at that time for the great abundant joy of those people. Paul's living is nectar for the progress of their faith. Paul's living is necessary for the joy of their faith and he views his living as the opportunity to exercise his gifts that Christ might be magnified even through the joy of others.

I wonder if you look at your in such a life.

And before we think that living for Paul was easy, I want to invite you to turn to 2 Corinthians 11, this is one remarkable passage.

2 Corinthians 11. We will begin reading in verse 23.

There was apparently a group of people who were, I would say in some respects, trying to throw a pity party, trying to gain the approval and admiration of others. And every once in a while Paul steps out of that gracious and merciful demeanor and he drops these nuclear bombs, as it were, and just obliterates the discussion, that kind of thing your parents used to pull on you when they basically said, “Me parent, you child. Be quiet.”

The weight, I mean, the substance of this man's ministry, the substance of his life is so mind boggling. It shuts the mouths of those who would brag and boast about what they have endured for Jesus' sake. That is what he is addressing here. And it is not so that he might, you know, be lifted up and exalted and worshipped. It is so that Christ might be exalted. It is so that people might have the right perspective on their own living, even their suffering.

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<sup>12</sup> Philippians 1:26.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Let's look here at 2 Corinthians 11 verse 23 and I want you to think in terms of what it meant for Paul to think that he might remain on planet earth.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?<sup>14</sup>

This man is not speaking these things that he might boast and brag in himself. He is just setting life and, particularly, the ministry for Christ in perspective. It is important that we carry that résumé, as it were, into Philippians one and understand when Paul says to live is Christ, he is saying to be shipwrecked is an opportunity to live out Christ. To be thrown into these perils with false brethren or the heathen or the enemies of the gospel is an opportunity to live Christ. When he speaks of that internal care of the churches, who is weak and I am not weak, he is speaking of that portion of his life which means to live to Christ. This is no small statement. This is not written by a man who had lived an easy life and it is not written to believers who are simply seeking to make themselves comfortable. It is written to those who say earnestly, "Lord, God, let me live for you and through you and to you."

And then by faith you sometimes batten down the hatches because living for Christ means suffering.

But at this point in Paul's ministry he also understood and he even had said this earlier in chapter one that his imprisonment was actually building up the faith of others and many others were bold to speak the gospel.

You know the effect that it has had in your heart and life when you have heard ministers of the gospel, missionaries come and share those harrowing experiences where they escaped for their life barely and Christ honored and blessed and you remember hearing those stories, many of you when you were children and others of you who are just coming to faith and knowing Christ are hearing some remarkable things. And you say, "You mean, people do that kind of thing for Jesus' sake?" And the answer is, "Yes, they do."

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.

Why? Because to them to live is Christ. It is not about being warm and well fed. It is not about being clothed with your favorite fashion. It is not about having the house of your dreams. It is not about having extra money in your bank account. It is not about any of those things. It is about Christ.

Do you see that this servant of Christ was consumed with the magnification of his Lord? He understood how his living would magnify Christ. He understood even how his dying would magnify Christ. But I wonder if you see your life as vital to the magnification of Christ.

The story is told of a cobbler who came to see Martin Luther one time and he expressed a desire to serve the Lord and be faithful in ministry. And Martin Luther, apparently, this is my paraphrase, because I don't know German so I don't know exactly what he spoke. But he looked at the shoemaker and he said, "You want to serve Christ? Let me tell you how. You go make a good shoe and you sell it at a fair price."

That is living to Christ.

I continue to think about the fact that there are many of you that are called into numbers of vocations that in the estimation of some are less spiritual endeavors. And do you know something? I will say it again. There is no difference from the sacred nature of a call to a pulpit or a call to a desk or a call to an assembly line or a call to a construction crew or the creative arts of whatever it may be. God's call is what is most important for you to hear and answer.

Some of you say, "I am just a common, blue collar guy. I am an assembly worker. I am going to drive up to BMW tomorrow and put more cars together."

Well, you need to go to that assembly line and work hard to make your employer profitable, to make the very best product that you can make.

I know you are sitting there on that line like many of the rest of the people in the world saying, "I wish I could afford to drive one of these cars."

But, you know, your life is not about that automobile. It is not about your job. It is about Christ. He needs to be seen.

Many of you are students. Study diligently. Your medical skills or your teaching skills or your research skills or creative skills or your business skills are an important part of magnifying our Christ in the world, an important part of the body of Christ experiencing abundant joy.

You say, "Me? Wait a second. You know, you were talking about Paul's ministry. I could see how that would create an abounding joy in the Church of God."

Your skills are no less important to this local body or others like it where God may transfer you one day in the skill of a pastor or a teacher in the context of church.

If you do not live to Christ, you miss the thing for which you were created. Labor faithfully over the numbers. Your accounting skills are needed in this world for the glory of Christ and the joy of the nations. Sell your company product with enthusiasm. Your sales are for the magnification of Christ in this world and the joy of his people. This is what Paul is getting at when he says:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”<sup>15</sup>

I want to go back for a few minutes and look at this phrase.

“...to die is gain.”<sup>16</sup>

Christ is also magnified in the believer’s dying. Union with Christ means our death is our gain. What awaits us in heaven? You know, we really don’t know. The Bible gives us some clues. They are clues at best, do you know why? Because those things are indescribable.

What is interesting to me is that Paul gives a testimony in 2 Corinthians 12 that I think is important for us to understand here because apparently he at some point in his early ministry was caught up to the third heaven. He speaks in the third person about I know a man, but I think it is pretty obvious that it is Paul. I’m not willing to die over that. If you think it might have been somebody else he knew, I will concede that, but I think it is better understood in this way.

Whatever he saw put all of his life into perspective so that he could write in 2 Corinthians 4:17:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.<sup>17</sup>

Did you hear what he said about all of his beatings and stonings and shipwrecks and near death experiences and the peril that he was in and the great pressure that just pressed his heart down and out day after day as he cared for the churches? He called it light affliction. You might think that this man has lost his mind or you might come to the right conclusion that his vision of heaven was so powerful and his vision of Christ so dominating that he said, “Hey, I will go through anything here below just so I can get him and that.”

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<sup>15</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.



Light affliction. Some of us don't feel like it is very light.

It is a strange thing, isn't it, when we are under pressure and we need sleep that we often can't sleep. Some of you lie awake at night and you stare at the red numbers or green numbers or whatever numbers are on your clock. You pray that God will conk you on the head and just knock you cold. And it has nothing to do with the fact that you are in a hard, uncomfortable bed or that your house is dangerously hot or dangerously cold. It may have to do with the pressures that you feel in your heart, the wayward child, pressures in the office, the abuse you take on the assembly line because you are a Christian trying to make a good car for the glory of Christ.

Our Lord knows those things and understands those things, but he also wants to put those things in perspective because you look again at 2 Corinthians 4:17 that these afflictions work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I am absolutely persuaded that the degree to which we feel our hearts and minds pressed down even crushed to a much greater degree, we will experience relief and joy and peace, glory.

I think part of God's plan is to help us realize that this world is not heaven and it should not be protected and cherished and clung to so tenaciously. We have got better things waiting for us.

That is why Paul would say:

“...to die is gain.”<sup>18</sup>

No look at how else he describes this because in verse 23 he says:

“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”<sup>19</sup>

Some of you don't think that way. You wouldn't come right out and say Christ is a better choice. You say it like this.

“I hope Jesus doesn't come back before I get married.”

I thought that. Can I make a confession? Marriage is great. It is not heaven. And even though my wife isn't here tonight because of a sick child, I will tell her that, ok? That is not like a secret I am keeping from her.

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<sup>18</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>19</sup> Philippians 1:23.

Some of you hope that Jesus doesn't return before you are able to pay off your house or make a million dollars, go to Hawaii. We have got all sorts of things that in our heart of hearts we really believe are superior to Christ.

Look at verse 23 again here in Philippians one.

He says, "I have a desire to depart."

That is a word that if we took it very literally—and this would not be the best way to translate it, but I do this just to get you to think about it a lilted bit—it is a word that means to be loosed. You can almost hear what Paul is getting at when he says this.

"I just want to be free from this life. And all that keeps me from enjoying the presence of God as I long to enjoy it."

Is that how you think about this world, something that you would discard at any moment. Or is the world precious to you? Is your physical health precious to you? Your emotional stability, is it more precious to you than the presence of Christ? Union with Christ means that death frees us from the restraint of this earth. That is why Paul said to die is gain.

In the third place here, union with Christ means that death is something to be exuberantly anticipated. Look with me at how he describes this:

"... to be with Christ; which is far better."<sup>20</sup>

He heaps up the adjectives here. It is by far much better, we could say. Two different words that he uses to describe better. It is incredibly overwhelmingly better, way better, as some of our young people might say.

No, they wouldn't say way better. What would they say? Way cool? I don't know. I am out of touch anymore.

But Paul's language is exuberant language. To be with Christ is much, to a greater degree much better than living and living is a great alternative. Why? Because living means personal fruit that I can bear. It means the building up of the body of Christ and it means an opportunity to magnify Jesus here.

Do you see how Paul says it is a win, win proposition. And there are very few times in life, people, where you are in a win-win situation. You try to create that in your business environment. You who are salesmen, saleswomen, go out and you try to create a win-win situation of the client and for the company. Paul looks at his life and the contrast here is not between heaven and earth or glory and sin, but between serving Christ and his Church in this life and unbroken fellowship with him in the life to come.

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<sup>20</sup> Philippians 1:23.

“ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”<sup>21</sup>

Does that reflect your thinking tonight? Or is it more that to live is an opportunity for you to make money? To live is an opportunity for you to pursue your dreams. To live is an opportunity for you to defer the spiritual decisions of life for a time. TO live is an opportunity for you just to enjoy your retirement years without any thought for the kingdom of God.

For Paul to live was Christ. And for him to die was something he exuberantly wrote of and something he joyfully looked forward to. Why? Because it was the absolute best gain.

I read a passage like this and I sometimes wonder why we so aggressively pray people out of heaven. We joke about that sometimes, don't we? There is no doubt that our Lord plans to heal all diseases one day. But I think sometimes we belie our hearts spiritual reality and we indicate even by our best efforts to be spiritual people that we are not as spiritually minded as we think.

Oh, beloved, we serve a great Christ. He has triumphed over death that we might not fear that adversary. And he has called us into his service that we might live our lives in futility. He has paid the way with his grace. And even as Isaiah 40:31 reminds us that when you hope in God, he supplies that grace like a massive air current that lifts the eagle and even as that eagle spreads his wings, it is ultimately divine power that causes him to ascend. And so we do not live or anticipate death as those who have no hope.

But we live and even look to die that our Christ might be magnified.

*Heavenly Father, our hearts are not centered on bringing our God glory. But at this very moment as the Holy Spirit has encouraged our hearts through this brief message tonight, we say as one people that the greatness and glory of God being revealed in all the earth is our passion and we ask, Lord God, that you would seal to our hearts these words of truth and that you would develop in us that kind of thinking and living that characterized Paul. And so we look not just to model Paul, but we look to draw near to Christ because the Christ who was at work in him is also at work in us and, the Scriptures tell us, at work in us mightily.*

*So help us to rest in that. Help us to hope in it and help us to labor with great intensity in this week because of that divine power that operates in us. Lord God, let it be the testimony of every person here that whether to live or whether to die it is all about Christ. We pray these things in the dear name of your Son our glorious Savior. Amen.*

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<sup>21</sup> Philippians 1:21.