

Is it Better?

Pastor James Royster

Philippians 1:21-26

Verse 21 – “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

The character of every Christian should be “for me, to live is Christ.”

Think about it this way...

1. The glory of Christ ought to be the purpose of your life.
2. The grace of Christ, the principle of life.
3. And the Word of Christ, the rule of it.

Folks, we need to understand these things. Those who make Christ the principle, the rule, the and purpose of life are the only ones that can say, “to die is gain.” We have already put in the work, and therefore we can reap the rewards.

“For me to live is Christ.” That’s Paul’s statement about his life. What does your statement about life say?

Verse 20 - Is it your bold, earnest expectation and unashamed hope that Christ be magnified?

2 Corinthians 4:11 reads **“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”**

Galatians 2:20 says **“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

For to me live is Christ...

Question: Are you ashamed of the gospel?

Romans 1:16: " For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

1. How can one live for Christ if they hold back His words?
2. Paul was living for Christ because he had wasted too much time already living for his flesh.

1 Peter 4:1-4 says "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you." (Referring to a changed life)

Here is a story about a man responding to a pastor who gave him counsel on his marriage. "Every day I leave for work, put in a hard day, come home dirty and sweaty, stumble in the back door, go to the refrigerator, get something to drink, and then go into the rec room and watch television until supper time. After talking to you, I decided I would do better than that in the future. So yesterday, before I left for work, I showered and shaved and put on a clean shirt. On the way home I stopped at the florist and bought a bouquet of roses. Instead of going in the back door as I usually do, I went to the front door and rang the doorbell. My wife opened the door, took one look at me, and started to cry. When I asked her what was wrong she said, 'It's been a horrible day. First Billy broke his leg and it had to be put in a cast. I no sooner returned home from the hospital when your mother called and told me that she is coming to stay for three weeks. I tried to do the wash and the washing

machine broke and there is water all over the basement. And now you have to come home drunk!’ ”

Verse 21 – “To die is gain.”

It’s fitting how most people leave an inheritance upon death, but for the believer God gives an inheritance after death.

1 Peter 1:3-4 reads **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you ...”**

Colossians 3:23-24: **“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”**

People, there is gain when we leave this earth. It’s funny, some religious groups believe when you die your soul goes to sleep and waits on your angelic appointed attorney to work out your inheritance details.

2 Corinthians 5:8 encourages us with these words: **“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”**

Then we read the following:

2 Corinthians 5:9 – **“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”**

We make it our aim, our target. Here is a question you need to answer for yourself. What gain does death offer you?

1. No more taxes
2. No more pain

3. No more loneliness
4. Reuniting with loved ones
5. Being with Jesus

Verse 22 – “But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.” Paul is talking about his physical life with them and he knows that it will produce much fruit.

Can you say that if you were given extra time on this earth that it would benefit the kingdom? Notice again that Paul says to live on in the flesh means fruit from his labor.

Proverb 11:30 says **“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins soul is wise.”**

Notice next that Paul says, “yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. Is it better ...?” Is your ministry producing so much fruit that if the Lord was calling you home to be with Him, you would ask Him for more time? Is it better?

Verse 23 - Then Paul goes on to say that he is hard-pressed between the two.

Some Bibles might say “in a strait” or “perplexed.” It pictures a traveler on a narrow path with a rock wall on either side allowing him to go only straight ahead.

Paul knew no matter how difficult his path was, it was leading him to Christ. **Matthew 7:13-14** reads **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** The word “broad” suggests the way is wide open country, with no fences or boundaries. There are no rules or regulations to hinder one from doing just what he pleases. But the narrow road is for those who

choose to live a godly life in a ungodly world no matter what the circumstance are.

Back in **1 Chronicles 21:13** we find King David in a strait. He has to choose between three judgments, a sword, famine, or pestilence. But let's compare David's strait to Paul's:

- David's strait was due to disobedience; Paul's strait was due to obedience.
- David's strait leads to death; Paul's strait leads to life everlasting.
- God let David live, yet people died; Paul died to self, so that others could live for Christ.
- David enjoyed the pleasures of his life as a king in this world; Paul's strait was between serving Christ the King in this world, so that he could rule with Him in the next.
- Which are you? Have you put yourself in a strait? Or have you been placed in one?

Verse 24 – “Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”

When Paul says these words, what could he have been thinking? There is nothing better than being with the Lord [Verse 23 – “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”] To be with Christ is far better, folks; it's not 50-50. There is no one in heaven asking God to send them back to earth.

So what was Paul thinking about? Maybe it was the words of the Lord in **Matthew 9:35-38**: **“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’”**

Maybe Paul was thinking that he was an answer to prayer. What about you?

Are you a laborer for Christ?

Are you a sower of the seed?

Are you an answer to a prayer?

There is a story about a little boy who returned home from his first Sunday school class and his mother asked him, “Who was your teacher?” And the little boy answered, “I don’t remember her name but she must have been Jesus’ grandmother because she didn’t talk about anyone else.”

Does your conversation reflect your love of Jesus? Would your words give away your relationship with Him?

Verse 24 – “Nevertheless to remain...”

Verse 25 – “And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith ...”

This verse has also been translated to say, “I shall stay and stay near you all.” And, “I shall remain alive and serve.”

Since Paul was called to stay, he was not going to stay and just give orders. He wanted to stay and be a part of their spiritual growth. Notice Paul says, "For your progress and joy of faith." The word "progress" pictures blazing a trail so that an army can advance. Paul was an original trail blazer therefore if one chose to follow his path it would certainly lead them to Christ. **1 Corinthians 11:1** reads **"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."**

Verse 26 – "... that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again." Paul says that your rejoicing will be more abundant in Jesus Christ by his coming to you again.

What Paul is saying is that the fruit that he bestows on them is not of him, but it's because Jesus is working through him on their behalf. Also, it's a great thing to know and understand that when a man of God is being used by God it's for the benefit of the body of Christ. So the question you need to ask yourself is, "is it better to stay or to be with Christ?"

This is a worthwhile question indeed.

Amen.