

Text: Phil 1.21-24

Sunday afternoon we talked about Phil 1.18-20 and Paul's philosophy of Total Commitment to exalting our Lord Jesus Christ in his body.

Paul continues that theme in the verses we will go through this evening.

In v. 20, Paul's commitment was to exalt Jesus, "whether by life or death."

In our passage, Paul expands on that theme. His coming trial could mean the end of his life or his release from prison. This presents a dilemma for him, which option would be better.

From v. 21, I've taken this title:

To Die Is Gain

On Sunday, I put our study in a sermon format. Today, I want to make it more discussion oriented, so we will use a Bible study format.

I. Succinct motto for Christian life (21)

How is v. 21 connected to the preceding verses?

By "whether by life or by death" (20)

What does "to live is Christ" mean?

The whole point of Paul's life was complete devotion to Jesus

What ways can dying be "gain," or profitable? Consider this from Paul's perspective — is he thinking about "escaping the nasty now-and-now" or is he thinking about something else? (Two answers)

1. Being in the presence of Christ, 2. Being finally free from the sin nature

When Paul says, "to die is gain," does he mean he looks forward to the process of dying?

No, Paul looks for what comes after death

How could I apply this verse as a personal motto for my own life?

Various answers

II. The blessing of this life (22)

What does Paul mean by “live on in the flesh?” How is he using “flesh” here?

“Flesh” means body, not sin nature; he means continuing to live out his natural life

What benefit comes from continuing to live in the flesh?

Fruitful labor

How could this benefit be true for present day Christians?

Present day Christians would need to have Paul’s motto as their motto (21)

What does Paul think about the prospect of remaining on in the flesh?

He doesn’t know which to choose (if he could choose)

III. The appealing pull of both alternatives (23-24)

The word “hard-pressed” has the idea of pressure. Where is this pressure coming from?

From both alternatives: to advance to heaven, or to stay and serve

Depart = “unmooring a ship” or “loosening tent pegs” (to pack up camp).

The word “desire” speaks of a very strong impulse (translated “lust” in negative contexts). How does Paul characterize departing and being with Christ?

Very much better: “a double comparative” — much, much better

The word “necessity” has the idea of an essential constraint, an inescapable obligation produced by the distresses of this world.

Illustration: Paul says “necessity” is laid on him to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9.16).

¹ Cor 9.16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under **compulsion**; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

The distress of lost souls compels Paul to preach the gospel.

How does the condition of the Philippians create a necessity for Paul to remain in the flesh?

They (and the other Christians of the 1st century) still need Paul's guiding hand

We believe that Paul was released from this imprisonment, had another couple of years of ministry, then was imprisoned again and subsequently executed. Though Paul had continued ministry, it lasted less than a decade after Philippians.

Would the Philippians have felt that they were now fully formed and had no more need of Paul when his final end came?

Probably not!

What should believers do to prepare for the inevitability of leadership change, if the Lord tarries?

Adopt Paul's motto in v. 21

“Paul did not mention that life was preferable because he could also avoid the pain and suffering of death. He did not refer to separation from his loved ones or leaving behind what he had worked so hard to accumulate or accomplish either. These are reasons that many people give for not wanting to die. His love for Jesus Christ and for other people were the driving motives in Paul's life, not selfishness (cf. Matt. 22:37–39).”¹

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Phil 1.24.