

## PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 1:21-30

Lesson #6

### TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN

*21 For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22 Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. 23 I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ—which is far better— 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25 Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your advancement and joy in the faith, 26 so that, because of me, your confidence may grow in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.*

*27 Just one thing: live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is evidence of their destruction, but of your deliverance—and this is from God. 29 For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him, 30 having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear about me.*

Phil 1:21-30 (HCSB)

*21 For me, living is Christ and dying is gain.*

**a. Living is Christ: (Initial Backdrop)**

This is certainly among those most remembered and quoted passages of scriptures. You and I may quote this phrase today, but we probably aren't in prison awaiting a possible sentence of death for the heinous crime of preaching the good news that Jesus Christ came into the world and died for our sins that we might be forgiven and spend eternity with Him in his kingdom. Oh yes, there is also that troublesome little part about repenting of our sins and living sensibly, righteously, and godly in this present age. That part does create a bit of a problem doesn't it? Because, mankind really loves, and protects, and defends his vices doesn't he? So much so that even when faced with the threat of an eternal punishment of burning hell fire, he will not and cannot forsake his desires for his pleasures. Just as a leopard cannot change its spots, or an Ethiopian his skin, neither can mankind change what his heart loves and desires by an act of his own free will. We can exercise some degree of control over our actions and words, but we really can't volitionally change the thoughts and desires of our hearts, even when we wish that we could.

Have you ever had a desire for something that you knew was bad for you and you wished very much that you didn't desire it? Then why didn't you just stop desiring it? Why doesn't the thief stop desiring to steal, why doesn't the drug addict stop desiring to take drugs, why doesn't the adulterer or homosexual just stop desiring their destructive passions?

Isn't it true that we all know full well that we aren't consciously in control of the things that we desire in our hearts and minds. We don't go through a mental checklist and pick those passions and desires that we want and reject those that we don't. Desires, passions, preferences, prejudices, lusts, and every deep motivation of our hearts is just there inside us and we usually don't even know where they came from or how they got there.

Why do some people desire to kill and injure other people while at the same time others desire to help and care for them? Why do some people believe there is one god, and others believe there is another god, and still others believe there is no gods at all? Why do we desire what we desire and believe what we believe. And more importantly, who or what made us feel and believe these things? Is it true that all these things are not conscious choices that we have volitionally made, but rather innate characteristics that we have mysteriously living and residing inside us? Is it true that people are predisposed in heart and mind to certain beliefs and behaviors?

If this is so, if we aren't really in free will control of our hearts desires and passions, then aren't we free to do as our hearts dictate, since we aren't really in control over them? Can we be held guilty of conduct that is in our hearts if we aren't in control of those desires? Well, the next time you are caught driving 80 MPH in a 55 MPH zone just tell the cop that your heart desired to go 80 and you had no control over that desire, so you can't be given a ticket for something you didn't control.

Or, if you get caught in an affair, tell your spouse your heart just desired it, and therefore you aren't culpable for your actions because you didn't choose those uncontrolled desires of lust and passion by your own free will.

Or, as we often hear from those in the homosexual community, that they aren't responsible for their actions because they were born with those tendencies, so how can it possibly be wrong to do them if they were born with the desires and have no capacity to change those desires?

How far can we take this? Can the cannibalistic serial killer be absolved of guilt because he didn't voluntarily choose to have those tendencies, but was born with them, or acquired them by the circumstances of his childhood?

The question then is this. Does an innate desire or predisposition of the mind automatically make acting out on that desire acceptable? Does society in general, and God in specific, have to make accommodation for the actions of people who are predisposed to break the laws and disobey the mandates of order and acceptable behavior because they didn't have the heart's desire to obey and conform?

From these examples we see that having a desire, whether you chose it or not, does not in any way excuse the acting out of that desire. What we do control is our choices and actions, and for them we are answerable to the laws of man and the laws of God. Having a genuine heart's desire to break man's laws does not absolve anyone from breaking them. And having a heart's desire to break God's laws does not absolve man of his guilt before God for breaking them.

But wait a minute. Aren't we free in this country to make our own choices and decide our own pleasures? Isn't the pursuit of happiness a constitutional guarantee?

The problem is we confuse the freedom of choice with the freedom of desire. While we do enjoy the freedom of choice in our democratic society, we have just seen that we can't always pick what our hearts and minds desire, even when we know those desires are harmful and destructive to us. A drug addict cannot free will his way out of his addictive desire, an adulterer or homosexual cannot free will his way out of his destructive passions, and neither can an unbeliever free will himself out of unbelief in Christ and God, these are not within our conscious free will control. And yet, we all understand that we still must answer to the laws of man when we disobey the laws of man, and likewise, we must answer to the laws of God when we disobey the laws of God. It is compliance to the laws, not agreement with them for which we answer. And yet, agreement with them strongly motivates and empowers compliance, and disagreement usually breeds disobedience.

So thus we must inescapably conclude that simply having a desire or preference for something that we didn't choose to have does not in any way excuse or absolve us of disobedience to the laws of man or the laws of God. We are fully responsible for our choices of actions, choices of behaviors, and choices of words, irregardless of how we may feel in our hearts or minds. It is very common today to hear someone say "well, just follow your heart and it will lead you in the right direction." This was kind of the theme of the 1960's hippie movement and the Doctor Spock generation. But quite to the contrary, the scriptures tell us that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked in its desires. (Jer 17:9) Therefore we have to make laws, and hire policemen, and build prisons, to restrain the actions of man's wicked desires that he will not, or cannot restrain by himself.

If these things are so, and I think they are self apparent, then it is impossible that anyone can truly say that for them "to live is Christ" as Paul has stated in this passage we are examining. Unless something completely outside of human capability has transpired, then every man, woman, and child is contaminated with various passions and desires that are contrary to God's commands, and has no volitional control by which to change or purge those innate passions. So, if this argument is true, then isn't this a hopeless situation for which we have no possible solution?

Yes it is, absolutely, and God has intentionally made it that way so that He may, in His own time, and His own way, visibly display to His elect children, the boundless glory of both His infinite mercy and His immense wrath. (Rom 9:19-24)

So, is there any solution, and if so, what and where is it? How does one acquire it? But an even better question yet, how does one even desire to have it in the first place if we don't really choose our desires and beliefs? The scriptures clearly and definitively answer these questions.

### **b Living is Christ: (The Solution)**

First, we are told that those whom God foreknew and predestined, He also called. (Rom 8:29-30) Called how? By an irresistible drawing of their hearts and minds to their plight (hence: John the Baptist) and then to His solution, (hence: Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God) as declared by Jesus Himself and recorded by the Apostle John in chapter 6, verse 37. In the same way, and at the same time, He made it clear that no one had the desire or capability to believe and follow Him by themselves when He stated twice that none could come to Him unless His Father were specifically drawing them in this manner. (Jn 6:44 & 65)

No one chooses, by their own free will, to deny themselves and follow Jesus Christ in total faith and absolute selfless obedience. This takes a change of mind and heart that is outside of the ability of mankind to perform with his own strength of will or depth of reason.

We have made a persuasive argument that man does indeed choose his actions and behaviors, but he does not choose what he believes in his mind and desires in his heart by an act of his own free will. No where in the scriptures is this more clearly illustrated than the account of the man who had a demon possessed child that the disciples couldn't help, so he went to Jesus directly. He said to Jesus "If you can, take pity and help us." Jesus was a bit indignant at the "if you can" statement and declared that all things were possible to those who believe. Hearing this, the man cried out that he did believe, but then begged Jesus to help him in his unbelief. (Mark ch 9) Here we see a man who desperately wants to believe, but has to admit that even to save his own son he cannot do that by himself, so he cries out to Jesus to help him to be able to believe. Which, by the way, Jesus does, and heals his beloved son for him.

For anyone to understand the meaning of Paul's declaration that for him, to live was Christ, it is first absolutely essential to have a complete change of heart and change of mind. Which, just as the desperate man we just mentioned, requires help from an outside source. Let's be clear. A person can want to believe, and even know that he needs to believe, and yet not truly believe. Here is a piece of biblical wisdom that is somehow lost among the mass of Christendom. Belief is a gift of God, not an action or decision of man, although once he receives the gift of faith he then immediately begins to use it to make every meaningful decision for the rest of his life. (Eph 2:8-10)

A decision to follow Jesus Christ is the outcome of the gift of faith, not the other way around. The gift must precede the decision not follow it. The vast majority of Christendom believes that faith is something that one acquires through persuasive argument, or sound reason, or stirred emotions, and then declares he has managed to secure it. And therefore he is now saved by that free will decision to have faith and place it in Jesus. This is a faith and salvation perspective that could only have been invented by someone who has never received the real ones themselves.

Every believer knows full well that those circumstances that accompanied their conversion, whether instantaneous or slow and drawn out, was not being volitionally performed by them of their own choosing, but rather happening to them from an outside source. And yet it did always involve their minds and hearts, and did call for a decision upon conclusion. That conclusion is not whether or not to believe, but rather the decision to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ and trust Him for one's salvation. Which decision could not be made without having first received the gift of faith. Faith enables the decision and therefore must precede it.