

PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 1:21-30

Lesson #7

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:

Last week we began our examination of the term Paul used that for him to live was Christ, and just what that meant to him in practical terms. Of course to recognize the practical applications, one must first clearly comprehend his mental concept of that phrase. This is what we discussed last week. From a strictly conceptual viewpoint "to live is Christ" would mean that one has Christ as their central point of focus in motivations, intentions, affections, and behaviors.

We went on to see that this kind of mind set is not something that is natural to humanity. In fact, according to the words of holy scripture, there isn't even one person who thinks like this by his own free choosing. (Rom 3:10-12)

There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, together they have become useless; there is no one who does good, there is not even one.

Romans 3:10-12 (HCSB)

Well then, how can Paul declare that for him to live is Christ? Answer, he had to be born again. Because as he was naturally he could not possibly see the kingdom of God, nor said Jesus, could anyone else without that rebirth of spirit. (Jn 3:3) So, first Paul had to be reborn of the Spirit of Christ to enable him to think and feel and desire to pursue a life that centered on Christ and not on himself. As we also know, and scriptures affirm, Paul didn't come to that realization on his own by sound reasoning, or stirring sermon, or beautiful emotional music, or even by intense personal bible study. Paul was born again solely by God's doing when he himself was headed in the other direction. And, though not as stark and graphic, so were we all saved by the Grace of God when we were, of our own choice, headed in the other direction.

But according to His timing, and by His choosing, we were mercifully saved by the gift of faith. (Eph 2:8-9; Tit 3:4-5) We were adopted into the New Covenant family of God, and washed by the blood of Jesus, and renewed (reborn, restored to life) by the Holy Spirit of God. As New Covenant believers we have received that new heart that was promised by Jeremiah and Ezekiel hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, and waiting for the predetermined day of its inauguration. At the table with His disciples the night before His crucifixion Jesus lifted the cup of wine and said, "this is the new covenant in my blood" which was signed and sealed the next day. (1 Co 11:25) Thus, mankind may acquire a new heart, fashioned after that of Christ's and focused firmly upon Him. This is a new covenant sovereign gift of God.

And, the second part of that new covenant promise was dealing with our minds, our way of thinking, that is to say those things that appear desirable and honorable and holy to our innermost being. Those things we once found useless we now perceive as priceless, and the things we once pursued with great vigor, we're now ashamed of having done them.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. 22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:20-23 (NASB)

For anyone to say with truth that for them to live is Christ, it must mean that they have been reborn, renewed, regenerated, set free from the bondage of sin, so that Christ has replaced self as the priority of their life. So that Christ motivates their decisions, dominates their attention, and especially controls their actions. Because Paul went on to say that if he lived on in his flesh body it meant fruitful work in the fulfillment of his ministry to the churches, and the growth of the saints in their faith. For Paul, living Christ meant serving Christ in tangible and practical ways that grow and strengthen the faith of the saints.

And by doing this, he was glorifying Christ and the Father, **from whom came** those new covenant gifts of heart and mind by which he served and ministered. The glory is to God the giver, not to man the receiver and user. Therefore, by using God's gifts visibly in our lives, we display the glory of God who gave them. And this is what He asks, nay, it is what He demands. So, we live Christ, to honor Christ and to glorify God our Father. It (that is, life and existence) really and truly is all about Him, and not about us. Hence the term to live is Christ (not me).

Sayings like: I live for my family, or I live for my job, or I live for my (fill in the blank) is a common expression. In fact, every time I hear someone make one of these statements my mind immediately jumps to this verse and brings it to my attention. Actually, this is good because then I'm forced to reflect on what my answer would have been if I had been the speaker. Might I have said the same thing, or something similar? Does Christ truly dominate and saturate my every waking moment to the point that He has an influence on everything that I think, and say, and do? If we're honest we'll all say that He certainly does influence our actions, but probably not nearly to the degree that we wish that He did.

Yet as a believer in Jesus Christ, and a receiver of the promised gifts of the new heart and spirit, and as those who have been freed from our enslavement to sin, we certainly do think and feel differently than before. We certainly do have new and different affections and appreciations and values than those we formerly knew. And this has almost certainly put us, in varying degrees, at odds with those around us. Sometimes even those who are closest to us are among them. And so, the testing and purifying process continues in the life of every believer. The delicate balancing act of being as harmless as doves and yet as cunning as a serpent. Always trying to maintain the integrity of Christ, our beloved Savior, yet without being intentionally confrontational or especially without becoming abusive or obnoxious.

This is a delicate balance that we seem to learn by the process of trial and error. We have the Spirit of God to empower us, and we have the Word of God to teach us, but at the very same time we still reside in this fallen body of flesh and blood which wars against our new heart. And this is the situation of every believer. In our hearts and minds we really truly desire to live and serve and honor Christ, but the accomplishment of that desire seems all too often to elude us. For us, to live Christ is a lifelong challenge that the sovereign God of creation has predetermined to be our lot.

Why, because He's angry with us? Absolutely not, quite the opposite. But rather because He has planned something so indescribably wonderful for us that He wants to assure that we understand and comprehend the immeasurable value of it. Only those who have known first hand the destructive ravages of sin, both on themselves and their loved ones, are able to appreciate the total abolition of it. Only those who have been in personal hand to hand combat with sin, and known first hand its power to damage and destroy, to rob and steal the very hearts and souls of its victims, only these will jump with joy and shout with jubilation when Christ returns and forever casts it out of all creation, forever and ever.

Brothers, I want us to be fully aware, lest we lose heart, that our heavenly Father has intentionally designed this situation in which we live. He has intentionally set us against an enemy that is stronger and more resilient than we ourselves, knowing that we will get beat up somewhat, but He has set limitations on the enemy's power over us, and personally guarantees our safety and final victory in this overwhelming battle in which He's placed us.

Our own Savior, as well as His Apostles, have told us that tribulations are determined for His elect, and it is through those many tribulations that we must enter into His kingdom. (Jn 16:33; Act 14:22)

33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 (NASB)

21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Acts 14:21-22 (NASB)

But we will All Enter, every single one who has been set apart by God to receive the gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ: Passage from 1 Corinthians:

57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 15:57 (NASB)

Passage from 1 Peter:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:3-5 (NASB)

Brothers, for us to live Christ is to fight the good fight of faith, to stand back up every time we get knocked down by sin, (and we will get knocked down by sin) because we understand, and fully accept and appreciate our Father's wisdom in putting us through this learning and purging process of life, so that we might be fit recipients of that glorious salvation for which He has appointed us by name before He ever created the universe. (Eph 1:4-5; 2 Tim 1:9; Rev 13:8, 17:8)

And yet brothers, lest we get too narrowly focused on our own specific lot in this predetermined plan of salvation and eternal kingdom, lets make sure that we thoroughly understand that it isn't just for our benefit that we must be made ready for that kingdom, but that God our Father and Creator has predetermined that this process is absolutely necessary in the preparation of a body of suitable eternal worshipers, to serve and glorify Him throughout all eternity.

We are His workmanship, crafted entirely to His specifications, and shaped, molded, and refined to become the finished product of His own desires. So, while the purging and sanctifying and maturing process works on, and in, and to the benefit of, us believers, yet in reality the major intended beneficiary of this whole process is God, who will get that family and kingdom for which He has predetermined.

I guess because the process is so personal and intense, we tend to lose our focus and begin to think that this whole creation thing is all about saving us people and securing our outcome. So we need regular reminders that we people are just the objects being used by God in the fulfillment of His eternal and grand purpose of creation. Which is a tangible and physical kingdom for Himself, under the rule of His beloved Son, and existing first and foremost to display His eternal glory, and worship Him as His adoring and obedient and faithful family.

As I have said so many times before, this whole creation, fall of man, redemption, and sanctification thing, isn't primarily about people, it's first and foremost about God. This is explained with crystal clarity in the passages of Romans chapter 8, where Paul writes:

28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified. Romans 8:28-30 (HCSB)

How can it be stated any more clearly? God set out from before creation to produce, through a specified process, a whole kingdom family that would be conformed to the image of His own Son, whom He loves, and that family would be set under His rule and authority, forever. So, ultimately, for everyone who is His, to live will be Christ. But that doesn't come instantly by some kind of heavenly zapping, but rather by the slow, and often painful process, of progressive sanctification. Which is the great commission of every believer, to become Christlike in every way, to the glory of God the Father. For this is His will, our sanctification. (1 Ths 4:3)

And yet, no matter how many times we say this, and hear it said, it seems that even among many of those who say "Amen", the vast majority still go right on acting and thinking like God's whole plan revolves entirely around saving people instead of primarily around glorifying God through the sanctifying process predestined for His elect.

But, So that we don't ourselves lose heart and get discouraged, this also is part of His plan. That only those who diligently seek the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God will be blessed with those glorious truths. Paul said it very succinctly, when he said "if anyone wants to be ignorant, then let them be ignorant." (1 Co 14:38 NKJV)

Not every child wants to grow up, and not everyone grows at the same pace, so we give glory and thanks to God for His indescribable gifts, and we all do our best to live up to the level of truth that we have attained. (Phi 3:16) Patiently allowing others to grow and mature at whatever pace they and God have determined, because we ourselves were once ignorant, and even sometimes hostile and resistant, to those marvelous truths that we now hold so dear. Therefore, let us not even think of being arrogant or self righteous or haughty because we might have been made recipients of some of the grand and glorious truths of God's great plan. Paul told some of the Corinthians:

7 For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, [then] why do you boast as if you hadn't received it? (1Co 4:7)

In other words, Paul was asking those brothers in Corinth, who had become haughty, why they thought of themselves as superior, since what they had was entirely a gift to them from God and not in any way attributable to their own great human strength or wisdom. If any boasting was to be done, it would have to be in the Lord, who had granted those gifts, and not to the recipients, whatever they might have been.

Summarization of Point A:

Then to try to summarize our analysis of the term "to live is Christ" we first decided that it meant grasping the spiritual significance of the term. And this includes our natural human spiritual condition, which was stone dead and completely powerless to please God, and even worse completely powerless to even want to please God. It wasn't that we didn't have the free choice to do so, it was that we didn't have the capacity to want to be righteous. We loved our unrighteousness and self interests, and were bound to them with unbreakable chains that we didn't want broken anyway.

Hence, our journey to comprehend the meaning of "to live is Christ" had to begin with His resurrecting our dead condition and regenerating our whole mind and spirit. Until that happened we couldn't even see the kingdom of God, let alone begin to make it our highest life priority. Which is the outcome of our regeneration. Once reborn into that realm of the Spirit, we begin the life long process of learning and experiencing an endless array of joys and amazements, along with tribulations, that we were once totally blind to. Then, little by little, the previous joys of the world begin to fade, and the joys of righteousness and the anticipation of His return start to become the dominant thoughts and priorities of our thinking. And as they begin to dominate our minds, then our actions and behaviors naturally start to follow suit. The next thing you know, for us to live is Christ, as He has so completely captured our affections that we have progressively re-tuned our actions toward those things that please Him, and benefit our brothers, and glorify God or Father.

Now while this whole process is started and empowered by God, it is not however without the willful and intentional participation of ourselves, because that is how He has chosen to do it. God first acts upon our wills so that our wills then influence our behaviors. Rather than being puppets on a string, we are made into willing participants in His glorious plan of creation, which is the progressive sanctification of the saints whom He has chosen to be His kingdom family. (1 Ths 4:3)

Oh the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God. He gets all the glory while at the very same time we are still allotted a free choice as to the degree and faithfulness of our participation in His great eternal plan. Sovereignty and glory to God, while at the same time, and not conflicting, accountability of man for his own actions. The two working in glorious concert, not in opposing conflict, as so many seem to perceive. Therefore, as children of God, we will answer to God, at the judgement seat of His Son, Jesus, as to our faithfulness to His commands. And we will be rewarded accordingly for the things we have done in this mortal body we inhabit:

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Cor 5:10 (HCSB)

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Cor 3:10-15 (NASB)

B. To Die Is Gain

Right in the beginning let me affirm that nobody, by their natural desires, considers dying a gain. God put in man a natural fear of death that is intended to protect him from harm, and this is not dishonorable or cowardly or ungodly. It is supposed to make mankind value both his own life and the life of others. And to a large degree it does that, however the ravages of sin have made some willing to take others lives for their own reasons.

Nevertheless, to the one who believes the word of God, and has faith in His Son Jesus, both life and death have a perspective that is impossible to perceive, even senselessly foolish and frivolous to all who don't believe. And yet to us, all life, death, and endless eternity literally hinges right here on these words spoken by Christ:

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said* to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."

John 11:25-27 (NASB)

These words of Jesus change everything for the true believer. For everyone who can truly answer "Yes Lord I believe" This puts all life on this planet, and in this entire age, in a very different perspective from the normal realm of thinking that it defies all natural human logic. Paul describes this unique and unnatural mind set in detail:

Victorious Resurrection

50 Brothers, I tell you this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and corruption cannot inherit incorruption. 51 Listen! I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will [all] be changed. 53 Because this corruptible must be clothed with

incorruptibility, and this mortal must be clothed with immortality. 54 Now when this corruptible is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory. 55 O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?

56 Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory [over sin and death] through our Lord Jesus Christ!

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Cor 15:50-58 (HCSB)

So, You see, for the true believer, death, thought inherently frightful and contrary to our natural feelings, can only be seen as gain. For in the death of our corruptible bodies lies the inheritance of an incorruptible eternal body, free forever from the ravages and even the desires of sin, and capable of entering the eternal kingdom of God our Father and our blessed Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Remember the Lord Jesus' own Message to the church in Smyrna?

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

Rev 2:8-11 (NASB)

CONCLUSION:

While we are nowhere encouraged to seek death, or given the freedom to hasten it of our own choosing, nevertheless we are told not to fear it, or to fear those who use it as a means to frighten us and turn us from our confession of Jesus as our Savior. (Mat 10:28) Paul went on to say in the subsequent verses that staying alive was more beneficial to the church, as it meant continued opportunity to minister to the saints, and give witness to the glory of the Lord. And so should be our thinking.

Our desire is to live for the glory of Christ, and to serve Him by our every activity, but, if it is His will we accept that there is an inevitable end to our earthly time of service, and when it is complete there awaits us a glorious resurrection that exceeds our wildest imagination.

9 But as it is written: What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what has never come into a man's heart, is what God has prepared for those who love Him.

1 Cor 2:9 (HCSB)

For every believer, death is swallowed up by the victory of Jesus Christ. To Him be the Glory forever and ever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church
Robert Andrews, Pastor