

To Live Is Christ

Philippians 1:20-21 (NASB 1995)

²⁰ *according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, **Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*** ²¹ **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**

Introduction

Three masons were building a palace. One said, “I hate this job.” Another said, “I do it to support my family.” The third said, “I thank God I get to build something meaningful.” Same work. Different attitude.

This morning, we are going to think about attitude. A godly attitude that sees all stages of life through Christ.

As pastor, I have the privilege of serving God's people through prayer, presence, and preaching. I enjoy all I do, but I really love sitting with folks, listening, and praying together. Once in a while, I hear from them, saying “Pastor, I don't know why I am still here. I wish the Lord would take me home.” I hear you. That longing is understandable. In today's text, however, Paul shows us a third option — not resignation, nor mere endurance, but a life so anchored in Christ that every day has meaning.

I dedicate this message to those who are pursuing Christ every day. We have some members in our congregation doing that. I am very proud of them and thankful for them. This message is also for those who are still looking for their life's purpose. I pray that you will find your purpose in Christ. I hope my message will lead you to that point. This message is also for those who want renewed joy and a better attitude toward life. I pray that the Lord will give you a godly attitude toward your life that each day you tackle your life's challenge with faith and trust. Wherever you are this morning — pressing forward, still searching, or needing renewed joy — this message is for you.

For my task, I don't have to look afar. Paul the Apostle shows us: a godly example to follow for our life's goal, attitude, and the reward we will get from the Lord.

Content

A. Paul's Circumstances Did Not Define Him (What He Suffered)

To Paul, life meant to live for Christ and to die for Christ. Everything he said and done boiled down to Christ. He prayed to Christ, learned from Christ, proclaimed Christ, and worked for Christ. Mind you that when he wrote this letter to the believers, he wasn't living

a life of luxury or comfort. On the contrary, he was sitting in a dungeon. He also suffered immensely throughout his life. He suffered for Christ. Even he died for Christ.

Concerning what he had been through, he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. He endured:

- **Physical punishments:** Five floggings of forty lashes minus one, three beatings with rods, one stoning, and three shipwrecks.
- **Life-threatening dangers:** Frequent exposure to peril from rivers, robbers, hostile Jews, Gentiles, cities, wilderness, seas, and false believers.
- **Extreme deprivation:** Hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, cold, and nakedness.
- **Emotional and spiritual burdens:** Daily anxiety and concern for all the churches he ministered to.

With such troubles, most of us would say, ‘No way!’ ‘No thanks!’ ‘Not me!’ Or ‘I quit!’ However, Paul was different. His attitude was “Bring it on! I can do all things through Christ! All for Christ! None for me!” Most people would have quit under such pressure. But Paul didn’t. Why? What’s the secret?

B. Christ Was the Source of His Strength (Why he endured)

What was so different about this man? Why was he full of energy and nothing could crush his spirit? Don’t we all want to have that kind of attitude? Listen more. Regarding his afflictions and hardships, Paul further wrote: “⁸ *we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;*⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;*¹⁰ *always carrying about in the body **the dying of Jesus**, so that **the life of Jesus** also may be manifested in our body*” (2 Corinthians 4:8–10).

Have you noticed? It was Jesus. Jesus or nothing. Life or death, it was Jesus for Paul. For Jesus’ sake, he was able to endure all. His circumstances attacked his body, but they could not defeat his spirit, because Jesus, who lived in Paul, who Himself is the life and resurrection, sustained him through all these life’s troubles.

Illustration: “The Crushed Can”

Consider an empty soda can. It can collapse under pressure. A sealed can, however, withstands pressure because something inside holds it up. Paul was not sustained by circumstances, but by Christ. Paul survived external pressure because Christ strengthened him internally. Let’s not forget that we do have the same Jesus in us. If Paul did it, we can do it too in Christ.

Let me say again. His anchor was Christ. His driving force was Christ. Let’s ask this honest question. What motivates you and sustains you to live the life you are living now? Is it self-promotion and glory? Is it your children? Is it power and fame? Is it money and wealth? But to Paul, once again, it was Christ.

So, what can we learn from his attitude? To live for Christ. To live every moment for Christ. Measure everything (success and failure) by Christ and His words. Paul did not wake up asking, 'What can life give me today?' He asked, 'How can Christ be glorified today?' Let's imitate Paul and live everyday life accordingly. E.g., A minister taught me to say in the morning, "What are we doing today, Lord?" It is a good way to start the day, wouldn't you say?

Christ was Paul's source of strength — but Paul also cultivated a specific discipline that kept his eyes clear.

C. The Discipline of His Focus (How he endured)

That was focusing on forward, not backward. Paul pursued the things of Christ while forgetting what's behind. Let's listen to him. ¹²*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on ... one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,*** ¹⁴*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:12-14). Paul lived every day with that attitude.

Illustration: "Windshield vs Rearview Mirror." The windshield is larger than the rearview mirror because forward direction matters more than looking backward. Paul refused to live in yesterday. Neither should we. Let us keep focusing on what we can do today for Christ forgetting what we have achieved yesterday.

This attitude helps a lot of folks, especially if you are an achiever. Sometimes, you may be called a workaholic, but you look forward to doing something that helps you to stay active. In our case, something meaningful and helpful for God's kingdom. I know one woman who is over 100 years old, still praying and reading God's Word every day, and even working with me for my books. In fact, in our own congregation, we have several members who are in their 90s and still actively involved in ministry of serving, teaching, praying, and worshiping with us. One thing is common among them: they don't dwell on the past glories. They move on and pursue the things of Christ.

D. Paul Kept His Eyes on Eternity (His reward)

Paul says that to die is 'gain.' We usually think of gain as getting more money or better health, but for Paul, death was gain because it meant the **attainment of Christ**. If 'to live is Christ,' then death is simply getting more of what he already loved. It wasn't an escape from the shipwrecks or the chains; it was a graduation into the immediate presence of the One he had been talking to and working for his entire life. To Paul, Christ was the treasure, and death was finally opening the treasure chest.

Paul understood that life is temporary— but eternity is forever. His end goal was Christ. He lived for an audience of One. Think of Olympic runners who endure pain because they see

the finish line. In the same way, Paul endured suffering because he saw eternity. At the end of his life race, Paul was convinced that he will receive a reward from Christ. He called it the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). We too expect to receive a reward from the Lord for how we lived our lives and for what we have done for the Lord and His kingdom.

Let me make it clear, though. What we are doing has nothing to do with our salvation. Salvation is already given to us as gift based on what Christ has done and based on our believing in Him. It is His merit not ours. However, there will be a reward for what we have done. Some of us will receive a greater reward than others. Others may receive nothing because they haven't done anything for the Lord. E.g., If you live only for yourself and not sharing the Lord's blessings with others, you will get no reward from the Lord.

E. Imitate Paul's Attitude

“Brethren, join in following my example...” (Philippians 3:17). *“9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you”* (Philippians 4:9). Paul urges us to be like him. Not in all the sufferings he endured, but in the goal and purpose of our life. To make Christ our goal for life. To live for Him. To die for Him. Paul traded the world's glory for the joy of knowing Christ. The attitude: To count all things to be a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Philippians 3:8). To serve the Lord Jesus with great joy (Acts 20:24). To forget things in the past and pursue Christ and His Kingdom ahead. Ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 21:13). Are you willing to do that?

Illustration: “Compass vs Clock.” A clock tells you what time it is. A compass tells you where you are headed. Many people manage time well but have no spiritual direction. Paul had direction: Christ.

Ask each day “Am I living for Christ? Am I ready to die for Christ? Is Christ glorified/magnified in my life today?”

Action Point. Do all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31): *“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* All of us can practice this with the words we speak and the actions we take. Even though the Lord has given us free will to choose and do whatever we wish, there will be a difference between the fruit of our own pleasure and the fruit of living for Christ.

Conclusion

In a separate letter to the Roman believers, Paul wrote: *“for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's”* (Romans 14:8). Let it be our attitude. Whether we live many years or only a few, may this become our attitude: Christ in life. Christ in suffering. Christ in success. Christ in

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death. For to us, to live is Christ and to die is gain. This week, ask yourself each morning: 'How can Christ be exalted in me today?' That's enough. That's everything.

Amen.