
PHIL 1:21 : TO LIVE IS CHRIST

No. EE3

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says in a sermon on v.21: "We stand here face to face with one of the sublimest and greatest statements ever made, even by this mighty Apostle of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

In Greek the verse constitutes only nine words, but how can one plumb the depths of such a laden statement?

Let us now consider the first half of v.21.

INTRODUCTION

□ In this epistle Paul is trying to dispel the worries of the Philippians about him.

To be sure, he is in prison, he says, and has suffered many trials. But in His sovereignty the Lord has used all this to glorify His name. Contrary to expectation, this has even led to the gospel being spread wider (v.18). As to his future, everything still hangs in the balance: he might be released, but likewise he might be executed. Ultimately, whatever happens is not very important. The only thing that matters is that Christ be exalted. As long as that one goal is achieved, it is immaterial to the apostle whether he lives or dies (v.23) - *because to live is Christ and to die is gain*. Therefore the Philippians need not be anxious about him.

In v.22-26 the apostle reveals something of the attitude of his heart. If it were up to him, he would prefer to die and be with Christ. But he also knows that his brothers and sisters still need him - and thus he believes that the Lord will spare him.

□ It is revealing to analyse v.21a more closely:

- Paul's statement begins with "for", and as such it is the continuation and explanation of what preceded it. He is therefore saying: "Christ will be exalted in my body" (v.20) ... *because for me to live is Christ, etc.*

- In the Greek the emphasis is placed on the words, "for me". Christ is therefore not glorified in every person's life as a matter of course. No, this only happens when life is Christ for you.

- Also in the Greek the expression "to live" indicates a continuous action. Paul is clearly not just talking about an opinion, but rather he has a *way of life* in mind.

□ What exactly does the apostle mean with this short comment that involves such a great deal? Perhaps it is easier when we regard the question as two separate, more specific, questions: *Firstly*, what does he mean when he talks about his way of life? *Secondly*, what does he mean when he says that it is Christ?

LIFE TO ME IS CHRIST

□ What is life? Why do I live? First of all just three general comments.

- Firstly, there are of course a multitude of people who never consider the meaning of life. They have received this staggering gift of existence, of personality, of individuality, of being (as the philosophers would say) - and they never marvel at it! They just plod on from day to day - like animals. They simply float along like corks on the waves.

- Secondly, the way most people view life is described in 1John 2:16: "...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..." (NKJ). These are the three things around which the world revolves

for the average Dick, Tom and Harry.

~ For some, life is about fulfilling the lower passions and desires of the flesh. Their motto is *wine, women and song!* They are Epicureans, following the philosophy: *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*. They are hedonists who toil through every week's work just to earn enough money for the pleasures of the weekends. They are adrenaline junkies, and for them the *summum bonum* of life can be anything from a bottle of wine to a 4x4.

~ For others life is all about so-called good and elevated things: human rights (and animal rights), benevolence, generosity, the arts, scholarship, science, the environment, etc. Now most of these things are, of course, admirable. But when the creation is considered more important than the Creator, it becomes idolatry.

~ And for others again life is all about status and power. Ambition, promotion, more possessions, more awards! That is what makes everything worth while for such people. And beware anybody or anything that stands in their way. *Business is business!*, is their slogan; *All is fair in love and war!*, their motto.

- Thirdly, for many millions *religion* is their life. Our time on earth, they say, is granted so that we can spend it climbing up to God - by the ladder of morals and ceremonies and sacraments. One has to render oneself acceptable to one's Maker.

□ If you ask the apostle Paul, "What is life? What is it about for you?", his answer is short and sweet and without hesitation: *Christ!*

To understand the full implication of the apostle's answer we have to ask: *How does life come to expression, how is it experienced?*

- *Firstly, one's life comes to expression in*

what you think and believe, in your thoughts and convictions. The centre of Paul's convictions was Christ and the work of Christ - His kingdom, His gospel, His church, His glory. Over and over again it takes precedence in the apostle's mind. When he is pondering, it is Christ; when he talks with friends, it is Christ; when he writes, it is Christ.

- *A person's life is expressed in how he feels, in his emotions.* Nothing brought about stronger passions in Paul's life than those things which please the Lord Jesus Christ and serve His glory. To know Him ever more intimately was his daily longing.

- *A person's life is expressed in what he does, in his everyday activities, in the priorities that he pursues.* For Paul Christ was in the centre. It was for Him he laboured, for Whom he employed every ounce of energy. For the extension of His gospel he gave all he had. No hardship was ever too much.

CHRIST IS MY LIFE

□ What is true of a person for whom Christ is his life? How did Paul experience it? How have Christians throughout the centuries experienced it?

- *Christ is the unwavering security of your life.* The most important question of all - how can I one day stand justified before my Maker? - is no longer the cause of daily fear. Now there is an everlasting Rock beneath your feet.

- *Christ is the joy and meaning of your life.* Christ in your life is the wisdom granted by God, the righteousness, the sanctification and the redemption (1Cor 1:30-31). In short, He is your everything.

You can be stripped of everything you value - your possessions, your dignity, your loved ones, and your freedom - and still you find meaningful joy in Christ. In fact, even more so.

- *Christ is the source of your life.* He is the

vine and you are the branch (John 15). You no longer live on your own; Christ lives in you (Gl 2:20). That is why the apostle can say in Phil 3:10 that it is his desire to live in the power of Christ's resurrection.

Millions know this as an experiential reality. One has only to read the life stories of God's people through the ages to see this.

- *Christ is the purpose of your life.* To know Him, to spread His gospel, to give yourself for the welfare of His church and the expansion of His glory - these are the things, more than anything else, that drive and motivate you. This is what Paul means in Rom 14:8: "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord".

Vice versa, remove Christ, and life becomes like death. Why? Because He became for you the way, the truth and the life.

This is what it means to love the Lord Jesus Christ with your whole heart, soul, mind and all your strength. This is what a personal relationship with the Lord entails. This is true Christianity! Christianity is not primarily a set of convictions or moral values - it is a passionate relationship with a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ!

WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

□ **This verse gives us what can be considered perhaps the most fundamental litmus test for authentic Christianity that can be found anywhere in the Bible.**

Even when they cannot verbalise it, all true Christians recognise from experience something of what has been said. By contrast, the non-Christian doesn't understand it at all - except that he knows that it does not apply to him.

The testimony of the history of missions and the church is indisputable: *those whose lives are governed by the things we have discussed, are those who truly make a difference in this world.* They

bear eternal fruit. They are the ones through whom the Lord does His greatest works.

Remove 90% of churchgoers from the past 2000 years in church history, and the coming of God's kingdom would have been just as far advanced as it is today. In fact, without these passengers, the church would have been much, much stronger. In the Lord's service a small but valiant band almost always achieves more!

□ **It is of cardinal importance to notice that the apostle is not issuing a command; he makes a statement of fact.**

What the apostle discusses here, we can not simply pretend or fabricate. No, it is the result of God's grace at work in a person. Only those who have been touched by the Lord experience it.

As we have noticed, what the apostle writes here, is really what it means to love the Lord. This love is a love of gratitude and awe. It is a love of enduring fascination, devotion and dedication.

Is there nothing I can do to experience this then? O yes, there is. Do what God's Word tells you: *give yourself, sincerely and absolutely, for time and for eternity, to the Lord Jesus Christ as great Prophet, Priest and King.* And you will experience what a host of people have experienced through the ages. The Lord will certainly through His Spirit pour out His love into your heart. And your life will never be the same again.

Nico van der Walt

- Nico van der Walt subscribes to the historically respected and internationally recognized 1689 Baptist Confession - like most Reformed Baptists worldwide - as well as the Confession of Sola 5, an association of God-centred evangelicals in Southern Africa.
- Subscriptions, changes of address, cancellations and correspondence: E: duplessismh@telkomsa.net; P.O. Box 35289, Menlopark, 0102, South Africa. Tel. 012-804 0316; 083 5544 941.
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