

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me.”
—*PHILIPPIANS 1:21-22*

Chapter One of Philippians is one of the most autobiographical statements in all of Paul’s writings. Forty times in this chapter he uses the words “I”, “me” and “mine”. He is writing this from prison, and he says, “I want you to know what my frustrations are and what my circumstances are, but at the same time, I want you to know how I have discovered an underlying sense of confidence and joy; joy being one of the words that occurs frequently throughout this book.

The key verse not only in all of Philippians, but possibly in all of Paul’s writings is “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”. Normally, if we meet someone who tells us dying is going to be a better option for us, we would be worried about them. Most of us, without question, would say living is the better option. But Paul says that “to die is gain”. What makes him say that? Here is a man who is enthusiastic about death. How often will we meet someone like that?

What Paul is saying is that he is torn between two things. I desire to depart and be with Christ. I desire to die, but it may be that my staying alive is going to be useful to other people, namely to you, he says to the Philippians. So I am not sure what to do. I would like to die, but I probably need to stay around a little longer because you need me. He is saying that life is fantastic, because despite the

troubles and sufferings, he has all the resources he needs by the presence of Christ within him to accomplish what he has been called to do. But he is also saying there is something I cannot wait for. I cannot wait to be with Christ, which is a reality far better than his mortal existence.

Paul is not depressed, but confident. He would actually prefer “to be away from his body and at home with the Lord”. This turns on its head the secular view of death where everything we are and everything we have ends. We only know how to face life when we know how to face death. “To live is Christ,” Paul says, and therein lies the key to a contented life, because Christ becomes our life. In Him we have eternal life, and there will come a day when all struggles and turmoil will cease. For the Christian, death has lost its sting, and like Paul, we look forward to our heavenly home with Jesus.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, thank You for giving us the inner strength and confidence in dealing with death, and for encouraging us to live our lives to the fullest in your name. Amen.

TO REFLECT UPON: What does the statement, ‘We only know how to face life when we know how to face death’, mean to me?