

## **TO LIVE IS CHRIST**

### **The Book of Philippians #7**

We are once again in the book of Philippians, the first chapter, and we are looking at the statement which Paul made in verse 21 of the first chapter in the book of Ephesians.

*“To live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

Over the past two weeks we have looked at two church doctrines that seek to reveal what happens to us after death. And we came to the conclusion that neither doctrine could stand up to the truth of Scripture.

We also gleaned that Paul was right. There is a gain in death. And it is an immediate gain. We are ushered immediately into the presence of Christ, receiving our inheritance of eternal life, experiencing reunion with fellow believers, and eventually seeing a new heaven and a new earth, where there is no more crying, no more sorrow, no more tears, no more pain. And Paul longed to experience this “gain” (Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8). He preferred to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Today I want to look at the first part of Paul’s statement. We know what he meant when he said, ‘*to die is gain*’. But what did he mean when he said “*to live is Christ*”? How could living be “Christ”?

But before we examine Paul’s statement let’s ask ourselves the same question Paul asked of himself. What is life? Why do I live? What do I live for? If we were to answer the question, “For me, to live is” followed by a blank space, what would we put in that blank space? Would it be “money” or “possessions” or “people” or “fame”? How would we answer this question?

To live is to:  
Have enough money to retire early  
Have a nice car, a nice house, a nice family  
Have a big screen TV with all the sports channels available to watch endless sports  
Have my dream job, have my health  
Live on an island, cruise the world  
Be somebody people idolize and respect  
Read books or watch movies all the time  
Own my own business, be my own boss

Regardless of how you answer contemplate this. What we think the most about, what we devote the most resources to, monetarily and emotionally, are the things we most desire. They are the things that drive us, that consume the most amounts of our time and resources.

It’s been said that in order to determine what your priority in life is, simply look at your bank account. Whatever you spend the most money on is where your priorities lie. Now this is not all bad. Saving for the future is a good idea and planning for your children’s college education and your future health needs is a good thing. Saving money to buy a house or a new car is also good. But even this reveals what your priorities are. Some people need a new car but spend their money gambling or eating out every night. What they need and what they actually spend their money on are two different things. For them to live is eating out, not a new car.

I remember the days when we could barely afford to pay our bills. We were driving cars that were given to

us so they often broke down. We were constantly having to move because the houses we rented either got sold or the rent was raised higher than we could afford. If someone were to look at our bank account they would have seen that a large chunk of our money was going to pay for private school tuition. They would not have seen any cable TV service or car payments or homeowners insurance or even much of a clothing allowance. They would have seen that our emphasis was on our children's education, not on material things. This is what we lived for. To live for us at that time was to provide a quality education for our children, free from the philosophy of the world.

And if you looked at the last year of our lives you would see from our bank account that our priority was to provide for our daughter and son-in-law's move from Tennessee to California, to pay the increased expenses of additional people living in our home, to replace a washer and dryer so that baby clothes and diapers could be washed, to replace the heater and air conditioner so that we and our grandchildren would be comfortable, and to keep both cars running so that all four of us could get back and forth to work. A lot of savings expended on others which in turn reduced our retirement account. Our priority was helping our children. For us, this past year, to live was to serve, not to gain.

But back to our original question. For me, to live is....what? What does life boil down to for you? What can you not do without? What do you consider the top priority of your life?

For Paul it was Christ. Certainly he lived the priority of preaching the gospel in spite of opposition. But this was the outward action of an inner truth. Just as saving money can be an outward sign of an inner truth. The answer really lies in what is driving the action? Will those dollars you save up go to serve yourself or others? Will they be spent on luxury vacations or mission trips? Will they provide for yourself and your family so that you will not need assistance? Will they make your parents last days more enjoyable? Will they provide food and housing for the more unfortunate and persecuted among us? Or will they buy you a dream home in the woods?

Now don't get me wrong. None of these choices are bad in and of themselves. And I am in no position to pass judgment. I have had to ask myself these same questions throughout my life, and still do. All I am trying to point out is there are reasons for our madness. We put our money where our heart is.

The same goes for our time. If you were to keep track of your time every day, where would the bulk of that time be spent? For those of us who are not independently wealthy, it would be spend providing food and shelter for our families; But what about our "free" time? What do we spend our "free" time on? What is our time priority? What is the desire of our heart when it comes to our "free" time?

Paul's heart was in serving Christ. He spent both his time and his resources in this endeavor. He went out and preached the gospel because he was commanded to do so by God Himself (1 Timothy 1:1) but also because the love of Christ compelled him to do so (2 Corinthians 5:14). The inward drive for Paul's outward action was his obedience to God's call, his desire to serve, and the compassion of God welling up within him. Even when he worked at making tents it was so that he might not be a burden to others while he went about preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ.

When Paul said, "*to live is Christ*", he was expressing the truth upon which he built his life – the mercy and grace he found in Christ was greater than the sin committed by this "chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). After living in his own strength, trying to keep all the commandments of God, he came to realize by revelation that it is and always has been by faith that we attain God's forgiveness. When he found forgiveness in Christ he found true life. And the life he then lived was by faith. From that moment on ceasing to live by his own strength he began to live by the strength which God supplied. Paul speaks of this

in Galatians 2:20.

### **GALATIANS 2:20**

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”*

He was compelled because he was loved. He crucified his flesh so that the life he lived would no longer be dictated by it. He allowed Christ to inhabit every room in his house of flesh because he believed by faith that Christ was “*able to do far more exceedingly and abundantly above all that (he) could ask or think according to the power that worked within (him)*” (Ephesians 3:20).

This was not some “name it and claim it” philosophy. This lifestyle was forged in the trenches of suffering and persecution. His faith was tested. His strength was tested. His flesh was tested, multiple times. But he was determined to fight the good fight, to finish the course and to keep the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). And he was able to do this, not by his own strength but by the strength which God alone supplied.

Paul knew that life in Christ meant continued persecutions and sufferings. And he knew these sufferings, though intermittent, would continue as long as he lived. But he also knew the purpose of these sufferings. And he let us know what the purpose of suffering was in the following scripture:

### **2 CORINTHIANS 4:10-11**

*“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body.”*

The purpose of suffering is to die to self so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our flesh.

This concept of dying to self and living for Christ is not new. We are told that we have died to sin and are now alive in Christ. This is a past-tense event; but actually living this way in the present presents a challenge. Living for Christ does not come naturally to us. The flesh and the Spirit are constantly at war with one another. So how can we “live for Christ”? What are the steps we must do to make this a reality for us as it was for Paul? I am going to attempt to outline these steps using several Scriptures.

First of all **we must deny ourselves and follow Christ**. We must say “no” to the desires of the flesh and say “yes” to the desires of the Spirit. This is impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit but with His power residing within us it can be done.

### **LUKE 9:23-26**

*“And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what does a man profit if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.’”*

We must be willing to let our life go in favor of the life of Christ within us. We must choose the desires of Christ and not our own selfish desires. In this case, to live is: to deny ourselves and follow Christ.

Next, **we must stay connected to Christ**. We stay connected by obedience. We do the things He has asked us to do. And by doing so we remain connected to the source of power necessary to live the righteous life he

has called us to. We cannot produce this fruit of righteousness without Him.

### **JOHN 15:1-11**

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.*

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”*

Some of the ways we stay connected is to read our bible, to pray, to communicate with Him often, to continually ask, seek and knock, searching for guidance and direction so that we may be pleasing to Him. In this case, to live is: to stay connected to Christ.

**We must also forsake sin and walk in the newness of the life God has purchased for us in Christ.** We do this by presenting the members of our bodies to Christ for His service and not to ourselves for our own pleasures. Our master must be Christ and not the flesh.

### **ROMANS 6:1-14**

*“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,*

*“...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

*“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

We must choose who will be master over our flesh – sin or grace. The ability to make this choice has already been accomplished by Christ on the cross. What awaits is the uniting of our will to the reality of the event. In this case, to live is: to walk in the new life we have been given.

As part of this process **we must allow our minds to be transformed by the reality of grace.** We cannot live for our future home if our mind is stuck in the past. And we cannot live in grace if our mind is still set on the world.

### **ROMANS 12:1-2**

*“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

God has transformed the state of our existence from condemnation to grace. He has transferred us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. But this reality must be worked out from within. And it is by faith that this is done. We must allow the reality of the work of Christ to be the reality of our daily thought life. For it is out of our thoughts that our actions spring. In this case, to live is: to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

Another thing **we must** do is **remember who we belong to.** There was a price to be paid for our sin and Jesus paid it. We no longer belong to ourselves but we belong to Him who paid the ransom for us. We are no longer free to do whatever we please as in our former days. We are now under obligation to please the one whose great love redeemed us from our sins.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 6:20**

*“You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”*

### **ROMANS 14:7-8**

*“For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 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.”*

We are the Lord's. We belong to Him. We have been crucified with Him and bought with a price through His one sacrifice. In this case, to live is: to live for the one who purchased our redemption.

These five things should help us move down the road of living for Christ. To sum them up we must:

- 1) Deny ourselves and follow Christ
- 2) Stay connected to Christ
- 3) Forsake sin and walk in the newness of life God has purchased for us
- 4) Allow our minds to be transformed by the reality of God's grace
- 5) Remember to whom we belong and live for the One who purchased our redemption.

Paul understood these principles and followed them in his journey of serving Christ.

I started out by asking you to fill in the blank to the question: For me, to live is: \_\_\_\_\_ (what?). What does your life consist of? What is the reason you wake up each day? What is the source of joy and motivating power in your life? It's a question we should all spend more time contemplating than just a few moments on a Sunday morning. But thinking about it will give the Spirit some room for conviction where it is needed and some affirmation as well.

What did Paul's life consist of? What was the reason he woke up each morning? What was his source of joy and motivating power? For him to live was....what?

For Paul the word that filled in the blank was Christ because Christ filled in the blanks of his life. All the missing pieces came together as one united whole when Christ interrupted His life on the road to Damascus. And through his continued faith in Christ Paul's life was filled with purpose. His life was no longer centered on fulfilling the Law but on fulfilling the obligation that came as a result of the grace that was given to him.

Paul understood that just as Christ was crucified in the flesh so he too was crucified. And just as Christ was raised to newness of life so was he.

### **GALATIANS 2:20**

*"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*

Paul said the life he lived in the flesh was lived by faith in the Son of God. How do you live your life in the flesh? By faith? And if by faith, faith in what? Your self? Your abilities? Your bank account? Your possessions? All of these can be wiped out in a millisecond. Only the faith that is placed in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself up for us is reliable faith.

Faith placed in material things will fail but faith placed in the unseen will stand firm in the midst of trial and loss. To live for self is to die to God. To die to self is to live for God. What are you living for? What word did you use to fill in the blank? For me, to live is ...(What)? I hope you were able to answer as Paul did,

### **PHILIPPIANS 1:21**

*"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."*

I'm going to close this sermon by singing a song written by Steve Fry back in 1986. This song contains the essence of what Paul was saying and I believe it sums up nicely what I have been talking about.

### **TO LIVE IS CHRIST**

To live is Christ, and to die is gain.  
There is no other life that I desire to claim  
Than the life that's dead, that I might live again.  
No more in self to pride for I have died.  
And to live is Christ, and to live is Christ.  
For I've been crucified and to live is Christ.

And my single thought is just to hear Your voice.  
For this I have been bought, to make my Lord rejoice.  
And if all I do is bring joy to You,  
Then let my life be poured an offering to the Lord.  
And to live is Christ, and to live is Christ.  
For I've been crucified and to live is Christ.

Let my life be a fountain of your blessing.  
Let my life be a fragrant sacrifice,  
That the hurt and bruised may know  
The God that loves them so.  
Forever let my prayer be.

And to live is Christ, and to die is gain.



There is no other life that I desire to claim  
Than the life that's dead, that I might live again.  
No more in self to pride for I have died.  
And to live is Christ, and to live is Christ.  
For I've been crucified and to live is Christ.

*"To Live Is Christ"* Words and Music by Steve Fry, © 1986 Birdwing Music, CCLI #829565

*Unless otherwise noted all scriptures have been taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.*