

For me to live is Christ

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Shall we turn now to our reading in the New Testament, the epistle of Paul to the Philippians and then verse 21. Philippians chapter 1 and at verse 21, For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Perhaps we would be wrong to take this verse, at least the first part of it, as the apostles' testimony.

This is the apostles' testimony for me to live is Christ and what follows is based on that. It's good that Christians should, from time to time, in different places, in different ways, be giving their testimony.

But it's interesting and instructive to notice how Paul's testimony comes in here. It doesn't just stand by itself.

It's part of the whole statement that he's making here, a statement that he feels to be of vital importance for the Philippians. Paul was writing as a prisoner from Rome.

He received the gifts from the Philippian church that were the expression of their love. And he had also received from the Philippians their ambassador, their messenger, Epaphroditus.

[1 : 47] And from his communications with the Philippians that had always expressed such concern and such love and regard for the apostle.

From his communications with them, the apostle knew that the Philippians were terribly anxious and concerned for him at this time.

He greatly valued the apostle. Not only for what he had done among themselves, but for his work in such a wide area as the apostle of Jesus Christ.

They greatly valued him. They knew his worth. But now here he was, shut up in prison. It seemed such a waste of his talents.

It seemed to be so harmful to the interests of the gospel. And they were concerned for his own comfort and safety.

[2 : 49] And it was because he knew that they were so concerned about him. And because his own heart went out in loving concern to them.

That he wrote to them. And he begins right at the first part of his letter to assure them, I want you to know, brethren. I don't want you to be any doubt.

That the things that have happened unto me, all my experiences, the situation and the circumstances in which I am now, I want you to know that all these have turned out to the furtherance of the gospel.

And I'm not depressed. Rather, I'm rejoicing. If things are turning out for the furtherance of the gospel, that gives me joy.

Therein I rejoice. And I will rejoice. I can rejoice as I look at the present. I can rejoice as I look at the past. I can rejoice as I look at the future.

[4 : 01] For to me to live is Christ. You see how the apostle's testimony, these words that speak about his own attitude to life, his own understanding of life, his own purpose in life, see how they come into the statement that he's making here.

A word of comfort and encouragement to the Philippians. His testimony is not forced. It comes in naturally.

We were saying that it's good for Christian people to bear testimony. But sometimes some of us perhaps fall into the snare of when we're giving testimony, we're drawing more attention to ourselves than we are to Christ.

Paul hasn't fallen into the snare. His testimony comes in here naturally. He makes it not because he wants to draw attention to himself, but because he wants to comfort and encourage those to whom he's writing.

And he wants to give glory to Christ. For to me to live is Christ. And to die is gain.

[5 : 29] What is Paul saying here? What is the meaning of his words? Well, the meaning seems pretty obvious. We should just take the words as they stand.

Indeed, there are some passages, some verses in Scripture that we need to think a lot about before we're sure we've got the right meaning. But there are other verses, other statements, that if we think about them too much in the wrong way, we're in danger of twisting their meaning, getting the meaning perverted.

Here it's all so straightforward and plain. Paul is saying, for me, the meaning of life, the purpose of life, the source of life, is Christ.

If you were to put to Paul the question, what is our life all about? What is your hope in life? What is your aim in life?

What's your purpose in life? What does it mean to live? He would answer all these series of questions with one word.

[6 : 49] Christ. For me to live is Christ. Living is Christ.

Christ. But we know that living or life is a two-way thing. If we see a living plant, it's living because it's drawing life from the soil into which it has been planted.

If you take it out of the soil and just lay it aside, it's no longer living. It's living because it's planted in the right kind of soil and it's drawing nourishment from the soil.

But you also know that that plant is living because it's producing. It's producing leaves. It's producing flowers. It's producing fruit in its own time.

Life is a two-way thing. It's a matter of receiving and giving. There's a taking in and a giving out.

[8 : 05] And when Paul is saying for me to live is Christ, is he not saying just that? That Christ is the source of his life and Christ is the goal of his life.

He lives from Christ and he lives to Christ. For me to live is Christ.

However you think about life, whether you think of its source, whether you think of the continuing supply of all that is needed for life, not just physical existence, but life in fellowship with God, for this is what we were made for.

Whether you think of the aim and the goal and the end, it's all Christ. For to me to live is Christ.

This is Paul's very plain and straightforward testimony. And it's a testimony that's substantiated over and over again.

[9 : 29] Wherever Paul speaks, wherever we have an account of his life, wherever we're hearing Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, wherever other people are telling us about his living, this testimony is substantiated.

It's easy enough to speak the words. But when the life is examined, does the life bear out the testimony?

It's not sufficient for us just to be making claims. These claims must be substantiated in our life. And see how Paul's testimony is substantiated.

We don't really need to go out with this little epistle to find this testimony substantiated over and over again. He says, for me, to live is Christ.

We think of Christ as the source of life. We're thinking of Paul as claiming where he had his life from.

[10 : 40] this new life, this endless life filled with hope and promise, filled with meaning and purpose now.

He says it's Christ and he substantiates that. There was a time when Saul, the Pharisee, looked for a life in his own inherited privileges and in his own religious achievements.

He bears testimony to that in the third chapter of this epistle in which he warns the Philippians against false teachers, those who come in and who claim to be true teachers.

But Paul speaks in very damning terms concerning them. He turns their own language against themselves. These false teachers, they were Judaizers, those who despised those who weren't Jews, those who thought of those who were outside the Jewish pale as being dogs, as being evil workers, those who prided themselves in being circumcised and having the mark of the covenant people of God.

Paul turns all their own language back upon themselves when he warns the Philippians against dogs, evil workers, the concision, and he says, we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

[12:27] And then he goes on to speak about the time when he had confidence in the flesh, when he was looking for life in his own inherited privileges as a Jew, in his own religious achievements.

And he speaks about all the things that he had been totting up on the credit side, the things that he thought would win him acceptance with God, the things that would win favor, the things that would gain life.

And then he comes to the point where he says, but what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ, ye doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the surpassing, for the incalculable worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but down, that I may win Christ and be found in him.

Here Paul substantiating his own testimony, Christ and Christ alone as the source of life, Christ and Christ alone as the one in whom he had new life and fellowship with God.

And as Christ is the beginning of that life, so Christ is the continuing source of it. Notice how he's speaking in the immediately preceding verse of the verse of our text.

[14:10] He's looking forward and he's looking forward hopefully. He speaks about his honest expectations and his hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.

Now these are not the words of someone who's boasting in his own strength or in any sufficiency he expects to find in himself. He's looking forward hopefully.

He's looking forward confidently. His hope and his ambition is that Christ will be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death.

But what is the ground of that hope? What is the ground of that expectation and confidence? The immediately preceding verse 19 tells us, for I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

The supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ. One thought him through prayer, his own prayer and the prayer of fellow Christians.

[15:46] The prayers of these beloved Philippians. But it was this supply, this provision, this ongoing communication of Christ's own life through the spirit.

This was the source of his confidence. This was the ground of the hope that he expresses here. life. This is why he's able to say, for me to live is Christ.

And again and again in this little epistle in different ways, he's bearing the same testimony, he's substantiating his testimony in the same way. For me to live is Christ.

The source of my life, its origin is Christ, and its continuing supply is through the spirit of Christ. the same sort of thing as he was saying over and over again.

Wherever he spoke, remember how he wrote to the Galatians, I am crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.

[16:58] And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

For me to live is Christ. Christ is the source of life. Christ is the one who constantly supplies his own life. For me to live is Christ.

The goal and the aim of his life was Christ. His earnest expectation and his hope was that Christ would be magnified.

And verse after verse of this epistle is saying the same thing. He gloried in knowing Christ.

And his aim in knowing Christ was to glorify him. he lived by Christ and he lived to Christ.

[18:10] By the desire to depart and to be with Christ. But even that longing to be with Christ was being subjected to Christ's will.

If it was better for Christ's own people, if it was in the interest of the church that instead of departing now to be with Christ he should abide, he was confident he would.

The one who opened this letter by calling himself and Timothy, born slaves of Jesus Christ.

And this living to Christ was of course accompanied with a forgetfulness of self. That forgetfulness of self was the other side of living for Christ.

We see it here in this opening chapter, we see it in the immediate context of our text. We've seen it as we've been reminding ourselves how this testimony comes in.

[19:16] He was reassuring the Philippians that there was no need to be depressed or over anxious. Everything had turned out for the furtherance of the gospel and that's all that mattered to Paul.

He wouldn't have been writing this letter if he wasn't forgetful of self and concern for others. Paul was a prisoner.

He had plenty to concern himself about with regard to his own circumstances. There was plenty to be preoccupied about, but he who was able to say for me to live as Christ wasn't preoccupied with himself.

He was preoccupied with Christ's glory and the interests of others. And there he was, a prisoner in Rome, in what was burning his heart, for not his own troubles, but the fears and the worries and the anxieties of the Philippians.

people. And therefore he writes to them. And he not only writes to them, but he sends back to them Epaphroditus and he sends Timothy.

[20 : 37] Paul tells us here that there were very few people around him at this time who shared his own testimony. Timothy would be a great help to Paul day by day in his imprisonment in Rome.

Epaphroditus had shown his love for Christ in serving Paul there. But Paul isn't saying, well, I can't afford to be without them.

I must keep them. I can't even afford to be a few weeks without them. And he's concerned for the Philippians. he sends back to them their own Epaphroditus.

And he sends to them Timothy. For to him to live was Christ. And the very references to Timothy and Epaphroditus show us that it wasn't only Paul's testimony.

These others share that testimony. remember how he writes about Timothy in this letter. He's speaking about Timothy and he says, I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your state.

[22 : 01] For I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ. But ye know the proof of him, that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

And then he goes on and he speaks about Epaphroditus. And he says, receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness and hold such in reputation because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

There was a uniqueness about the apostle Paul's ministry and life. But you see, we're not entitled as Christians to set him on a pedestal and say that his manner of life was only expected of him and that it's not what we're being called to as Christians.

We see Timothy and we see Epaphroditus sharing the substantiated testimony of Paul.

Timothy is a son with a father. And Paul leaves us in no doubt that what he was is what we have been called to be in Christ.

[23 : 37] For he doesn't hesitate to say towards the end of this epistle, follow me, mark them which walk so that ye have us for an example.

For me to live is Christ. Oh, it's a high calling, but it's a gracious calling. There are high demands and there's a great challenge.

If we're going to face up to it, it's going to be challenged again and again. The selfishness, the sin that remains within ourselves will challenge us at every turn when we seek to live by this pattern.

The evil one who hates Christ, who hates the glory of his name, who hates to see his cause being advanced, will challenge it. Oh, when we look back again and again with Paul, to Christ who loved us and gave himself for us and as the source, of our life, when we remind ourselves with Paul of the supply of his spirit, then we'll have both the motivation and the power to live for Christ.

And oh, Paul speaks here in this epistle of the wisdom of living in this way. For me to live to live this Christ.

[25 : 30] Oh, how foolish to look for life anywhere else. That's what Paul was indicating in what we've been seeing in the third chapter. He at one time was looking for life anywhere else, but he saw the folly of it, he saw the emptiness of it, he saw the futility of it.

He counted all now but done that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God, by faith that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.

You see, our God is a righteous God, and there's nothing that will satisfy him but the standard of his own righteousness and that righteousness is the righteousness of Christ and it's the righteousness that's offered to us and that we are called to know as we hide ourselves by faith in Christ.

righteousness and life go together and there's no life for us who by nature are dead in trespasses and sins but in Christ as our righteousness and all the wisdom of living by Christ, the wisdom of living to Christ and for Christ because Christ is Lord.

Paul wasn't living for himself. Christ himself didn't live for himself.

[27 : 21] He was the eternal son of God, humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. For God have highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

For it's this little epistle that in wonderful ways sets before us the reality of the Lordship, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is Lord now, and the day is coming when all the whole universe will acknowledge his Lordship. O the wisdom of living for him whom God has made Lord of all.

And O the wisdom of this when we listen to the complete statement of Paul here. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

These two parts of the text cannot be separated. There are none who can say to die is gain, but those who can say life for me is Christ.

[29 : 00] Death we cannot escape. And physical death is a reminder to us of the presence of sin in the world and that we ourselves are fallen creatures and that the wages of sin is eternal death.

But Christ is life. Christ is the Savior who died for his people's sin. Christ who is risen triumphant, the victor over sin and death.

He is life. Oh, the follower seeking to live without Christ, apart from Christ, for such living is death and leads to death.

Oh, the wisdom of standing where Paul stands, of progressing on the road Paul progresses on.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Amen.

[30 : 21] Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, grant that thou would speak to us through thine own word as thou dost see us this day.

If it be, oh, Lord, that there be those of us who have stood apart from him to whom thou dost point us in thy word, who himself speaks in the scripture saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

May his own word be powerful in our own experience even now. And if it be, oh, Lord, that thy word has been a word of challenge to us who have been brought to believe in Christ and yet who have not been living those lives of grateful obedience and glad dedication that ought to be ours, humble us, rebuke us, and yet deliver us from the despair of the Satan and grant us to look anew to Christ as our sufficiency and to know in a new way the enabling supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Continue with us now in this day as we remember him when this day rose gloriously triumphantly may we know what it is ourselves to have fellowship with him to know the power of his resurrection and be conformed to him who gave himself for others and all we ask for thine own name's glory in him Amen N R to