

FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Philippians 1:1-30

Key Verse: 1:21

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

The epistle to the Philippians is one of the prison epistles, together with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. When St. Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was in prison. In the epistle to the Philippians, the word "joy" is repeated six times, and "rejoice," eight times. He was not sorry for himself; he was happy. How could he be joyful or rejoice while in prison? Because he had a clear purpose of life in Jesus. He said in 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Let's learn Paul's attitude toward Christ Jesus so that we may have a victorious fall semester, 2000.

I. He who began a good work in you (1-11)

1:1-11 is greetings to the members of the Philippian church. As in all his letters, Paul first identifies both the sender and recipient, and next addresses a greeting. Look at verse 1a. "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus." Paul identifies himself to be the servant of Christ Jesus. At that time, the title "servant of Christ Jesus" was inglorious to worldly people. However, Paul was willing to call himself the servant of Christ Jesus, knowing that a servant was a possession of his Master. Timothy was his associate, but Paul mentioned his name together with his own name. Paul had basic respect and love for his junior coworker Timothy, though he was a silent and fearful person (2 Tim.1:6,7).

Look at verse 1b. "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons." The Philippian Christians had revealed themselves to be too worldly to be called "saints." Nevertheless, Paul called them "saints" because of their spiritual union with Christ. In verses 3-11 Paul shares three thanksgiving topics, and his earnest prayer for the Philippian Christians.

First, Paul thanked God for his partnership in the gospel with the Philippians. Look at verse 3. "I thank my God every time I remember you." When Paul remembered the Philippian Christians, he thanked God that he had the privilege of knowing them as partners in the gospel (4). Verse 5 says that they were partners in the gospel from the first day until now. As we studied in the book of Acts, when Paul crossed over into Europe, he first came to Philippi, which was the door to the European countries. The Philippians accepted the gospel and immediately became Paul's partners in the gospel. Now, at the close of Paul's first Roman imprisonment, they were still partners in the gospel. The Philippians were all his partners in the gospel and prayer supporters for his second and third missionary journeys, as well as in laying the foundation of grassroots gospel work in Rome. At first, Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, began to support Paul after her conversion. Then the Christians at Philippi began to support Paul all throughout his ministry until he finished his third missionary journey around the world. Whenever he remembered how their prayers and material help made it possible for him to continue to work for the gospel, he prayed for all of them with joy. Here we learn how much we have to thank God for those who support us in doing the work of God.

Second, Paul thanked God that God had begun a good work in them. Look at verse 6. "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul was in prison. Perhaps he worried about them, thinking about how they could survive spiritually to the end and how the work of God could be maintained in that hostile world. But he believed that God who began a good work in them would carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Paul believed that God was the one who began a good work in them, not he himself, and God who began a good work would carry it on and complete it.

Third, Paul thanked God that he could share God's grace with the Philippians. Paul was in prison to defend and confirm the gospel. They did not think of his imprisonment as misfortune; rather they thought it was the time of God's deep grace and spiritual victory. With prayer and material support, they shared his imprisonment and sufferings as God's grace.

Paul was in prison in his old age. So he could have thought only of himself. It is amazing that he did not think of himself like many elderly people who are in the nursing homes. Instead, he thought of Jesus and his partners in the gospel and longed for them with the affection of Christ. Look at verse 8. "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus." The affection of Christ Jesus is deep yearning and intense and compassionate love exhibited by Jesus himself, and now fostered in Paul by his union with Christ Jesus. It is instinctive for one to long for one's human partner. But we are Christians. We must love and long for our partners in the gospel.

In verses 9-11 Paul prays for the Philippians. Look at verse 9. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..." In this verse Paul prays for the Philippians that their love in God and for God may abound more and more. Paul knew that love is a basic human problem. Man cannot live without love. But what one loves determines the outcome of his life. If one loves God, then he becomes a slave to God who is holy. Look at verse 10. "...so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ..." When God's love grows in a person more and more, he can grow in spiritual wisdom and can discern what is best and what is true and false, and can be pure and blameless. One who has the abundant love of God in his heart is rich and is full of life, like a tree planted by a river. As a result, he bears the fruit of righteousness.

II. For to me, to live is Christ (12-30)

Worldly people might think that Paul's imprisonment was a misfortune. Some Christians may have had some doubt about God's reward for the servant of God like St. Paul who had worked so sacrificially until now. But what did Paul think about himself? Paul was not negative at all about his imprisonment. Rather, he was happy that his imprisonment served to advance the gospel (12). How did his imprisonment serve to advance the gospel?

First, in prison he preached the gospel to the palace guard. Look at

verse 13. "As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ." When Paul was in a Roman prison, he could not contact Roman college students, but only the palace guard, a contingent of soldiers who were individually assigned to guard him during the course of his imprisonment. Paul was not daunted by them. He preached the gospel to them. These palace guards could see that Paul was a man of God. They responded to Paul's preaching and accepted Christ Jesus as the Savior of the world.

Second, while Paul was in prison, fearful partners became courageous gospel preachers. There were many brethren who had been silent and inactive when they were urged to proclaim the gospel. People thought that they would fall away from the gospel because of Paul's imprisonment. But instead, these people became bold and began to speak the word of God without fear. Look at verse 14. "Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

Third, many of the Philippian Christians preached the gospel out of competition. The Philippians' response to Paul's imprisonment is interesting to note. When Paul was in prison, some preached the gospel in order to encourage Paul. Others preached the gospel in order to make Paul bitter. Look at verses 15-17. "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains." In verse 18 Paul said, "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." If he were a self-centered man, he would have died in anger because of those rebellious people. But he rejoiced. We learn from this that Paul was in Christ. He was a Christ-centered man. He was not at all self-centered.

Paul rejoiced in Jesus. But it did not necessarily mean that he was free from agonies. Paul eagerly wanted to be freed from prison. So he asked the prayers of his fellow workers and the help of the Spirit of

Jesus for his deliverance (19). But his real desire was not for his release or for a little convenience in prison or for human comfort, it was to have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ might be exalted in his body. He eagerly wanted to have sufficient courage so that he could overcome the adverse situation with faith and render glory to God. He wanted to have sufficient courage so that he might experience the grace of Jesus more and more. He asked to have sufficient courage so that he could exalt the name of Christ Jesus through his old body. At that time he had no other means to exalt the name of Christ except through his old body in prison (20).

What was the secret of his victorious life? Verse 21 says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." This verse tells us several things about Paul's victory.

First, Paul had a clear purpose of life in Christ. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul had a reason to live in Jesus. The purpose of living in the world for him was for Jesus' name's sake. It was to preach the gospel to all the Gentiles so that they might believe in Jesus and obey his words (Rom1:5). Some people want to live for the glory of God, but they never want to die for his name's sake. But Paul was ready to die gloriously in Jesus if it were necessary. He also had a reason why he could not die, even though he wanted to die and be with Christ. He was in prison and he was old. If he had given up in prison, then he would have died. But he could not give up in the midst of his anguish because he had to pray for the spiritual progress of God's flock. (25) In brief, Jesus was all the world to him. He had a philosophy of life in Jesus beyond life and death. When he said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," Jesus was the whole world to him.

Second, Paul had a personal relationship with Christ Jesus. These days people who live in this post-Christian era seem to have a kind of "group" relationship with Jesus. They seem to have no personal relationship with Jesus, not to speak of having a personal life commitment to Jesus. Because of this, many Christians become like tasteless salt.

We learn from Paul what kind of personal relationship we should have. Before Paul met Jesus, he had a connection with the Jewish

authorities, he volunteered to be the ringleader in persecuting and destroying the early Christians. He wanted recognition from the Sanhedrin so as to acquire a top position in his country. In the course of living for his ambition, he became a murderer before God. The risen Jesus visited him and forgave his sins. Since then he lived by the grace of God. By the grace of God he was what he was. In Christ Jesus he was a new man with a new life. He was deeply indebted to the grace of Jesus who was crucified for his sins. His personal relationship was based on the grace of God, and it was inseparable. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

When he lived for Jesus' name's sake, his life was not easy. He was full of agonies and conflict. Paul expressed his inmost conflict in verses 23,24. "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." He had a conflict between his desire and necessity. In his conflict he was torn into two pieces.

We cannot escape from conflict in Christian life. But these days many Christians hope to be Christians without conflict. We learn from Paul that he was in great conflict though he was a mature servant of God. Martin Luther was a man of conflict. His conflict helped him understand the deep meaning of Romans. We should not try to escape conflict. If we give up the life of conflict, we can't have any true life or happiness. God created us to have conflict so that we might grow in the image of God.

Look at verses 25,26. "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me." He made up his mind to remain in the body so that he might help fellow-Christians in Philippi make spiritual progress so that their joy in Christ Jesus might overflow because of him.

Finally, Paul encouraged his co-workers in Philippi to live lives

worthy of the gospel of Christ. Look at verse 27. "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel...." How can we live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ? We must stand firm in one spirit as one man, defending and confirming the gospel. In brief, we have to be like Christian soldiers. As Christian soldiers, we should not be frightened by the opposition of the enemies of God.

Look at verse 29. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him." In this verse Paul tells the Philippians that Christian life is not only to believe, but also to suffer for Christ's name's sake. The gist of his saying is that suffering for Christ's name's sake is a blessed privilege for his people. Paul encourages them to participate in the suffering of Christ. He is right in doing so, because the more we suffer for Christ, the more we experience the grace of Jesus. Let's read verse 21 again. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."