

Philippians 1:12-30: *To Live, Christ; to Die, Gain*

1. In 1:19 Paul says, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” “Deliverance” here is the same word often translated “salvation,” and it can mean either. Furthermore, it is a direct quote of the LXX of Job 13:16: “Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance,” where Job expresses confidence in the face of critics claiming his suffering is his own fault. What do you think “deliverance” means in 1:19?
 - a. Getting out of the joint
 - b. Not caving in and denying Christ, should he face torture and death (Lynn Cohick)
 - c. “Paul’s concern is altogether on Christ’s being magnified, however the trial turns out. Christ’s being thus magnified would be Paul’s vindication (not to mention his gospel’s)” (Fee)
 - d. Being saved eternally—just as in 2:12 Paul tells *them* to work out their “salvation” with fear and trembling
2. In 1:21 Paul writes the famous words which in Greek are literally, “to live, Christ (*Christos*), to die, gain (*kerdos*).” Facing possible death, he voices a miraculous equanimity, the “contentment in any and all situations” which he refers to later in the letter.¹

Later in this letter Paul gives clues as to *how* he has come to this peace: He models a single-minded focus on the gospel (3:13b-14—“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize”), and encourages deliberate focus on the good things in this world (4:8-9—“whatever is true, noble, right, pure, ...”).

Fee writes,

Too often for us it is ‘For me to live is Christ, plus other pursuits’ (work, leisure, accumulating wealth, relationships, etc.). And if the truth were known, all too often the ‘plus factor’ has become our primary passion: ‘For me to live is my work.’ Both our progress and our joy regarding the gospel are altogether contingent on whether Christ is our primary, singular passion. [74]

Surely this is easier for Paul, who has no family to worry about, and whose job is his ministry?

- a. What ministry do you feel God has called you to?
 - b. How are you doing at the balancing act of being single-mindedly devoted to it while still being appropriately devoted to your family, working as unto God, etc.?
3. Paul had longed to visit the Roman church, but in a disastrous turn finds himself in the hoosecow, both unable to preach and minister to them and unable to spread the gospel as he might. But where someone else might have found defeat Paul flips his circumstances to his advantage. To quote Fee,

Those who are fully alive because of the gospel, who in Paul’s language have nothing yet possess everything (2 Cor 6:10), exist as a constant threat to those whose minds are set on merely earthly

¹ Despite having a peace about his future, Paul does not view all death as preferable. So he says that God “had mercy on” Epaphroditus in healing him when close to death. Paul is not advocating martyrdom.

things. Leave Paul alone and he and his companions will be those who have turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6); put him in prison and he turns Caesar's elite upside down (Phil 1:13), not to mention Caesar's very household (4:22). To paraphrase Brutus, "Yon Paul has that lean and hungry look; he talks too much. Such men are dangerous." Here is a person not just making the best of his circumstances but actually turning them around for the glory of God. No wonder joy abounds. [Fee 58]

How dangerous as we as believers? Which would be your first step in becoming more of a threat?

- a. Immerse yourself daily in the word to change your patterns of thought (Rom 12:1-2)
 - b. Make daily meditation a priority (Lk 5:16)
 - c. Begin targeted prayer for the spread of the gospel (Eph 6:19)
 - d. Unite with other believers more regularly for coordinated outreach (Heb 10:25?)
 - e. Find a single unbeliever and focus on cultivating a friendship deep enough to provide a context for loving outreach (1 Cor 9:22)
 - f. Carry out your "secular" activities with such integrity and vision, that your good works might shine before others (Matt 5:15-16)
 - g. Your own answer here: _____
4. Theologians refer to the period of existence for a believer between death and the second coming as the "intermediate state." If we had no other information than what Paul writes in 1:23 to form a picture of the intermediate state, what would we conclude? (See also Mk 12:27, 1 Cor 15:18, 1 Thess 4:13.)
5. In the following chapter Paul will give Jesus as the model for our church culture as one where we put others first even to the point of suffering for their good. As a worked example of this Paul in chapter 4 will urge Euodia and Syntyche to bury the hatchet and get on the same page. In this chapter, Paul specifically refers to both the Philippians' opponents (28) and to his own enemies in Rome, and he is not shy about referring to his opponents' "selfish ambition", "insincerity" and "envy." In other letters (e.g. Galatians), he condemns his opponents thoroughly and completely; here shrugs and says, "well, at least the gospel's being preached" (18). Why the difference?
6. Paul is facing opposition from those with sinful motives (18). If you have worked in the church long enough, you have experienced this. Paul is willing here to call a spade a spade, and that even in front of believers outside the Roman church (so you can imagine what he's telling Timothy to say to the Romans themselves). Can you envision such a calling out ever occurring in a modern church? Should it?

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Fun fact: In its focus on sacrifice and unity, this chapter prepares us for the jewel of Philippians in chapter two, which eloquently describes Jesus' nature as fully human and fully divine. Western Seminary professor of theology Todd Miles has recently published a book, *Superheroes Can't Save You*, which explains complicated Trinitarian and Christological truths by means of superheroes. For instance, the heresy of *Docetism*, that Jesus was not actually flesh and blood, is embodied in Superman, who is not fully human. Antman, who can choose various forms (giant, tiny, Waspman) represents *modalism*, the idea that God is one person who wears different masks when appearing as the Father, Son or Spirit. Spiderman, who is not fully human but a blend of spider and human, represents *monophysitism*, the idea that Jesus was a blend of human and divine (Aquaman is in this category as well). And Batman, the one superhero without any superhuman abilities, represents the traditional liberal or atheistic belief that Jesus was a great teacher but not divine.