

PHILIPPIANS 1

TO LIVE IS CHRIST TO DIE IS GAIN

As Paul opens his letter to the church in Philippi from his Roman prison cell, he considers his possible futures: Would he be martyred and go to be with Christ? Or would He continue on to serve Christ on Earth? We can see that God changed how He used Paul: The time of planting churches was complete, and now Paul was to pen letters, speaking to Bible-readers down through the ages. Planting churches was critical, but God's use of Paul in prison to write a good portion of The New Testament was clearly of a magnitude that Paul couldn't have understood. -JT

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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.

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may

abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 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.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 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, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

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 the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Study Notes [BlueLetterBible.org](https://www.BlueLetterBible.org) Commentary

Paul and Timothy: The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his close friends, the Christians in Philippi, from his Roman house arrest described at the end of Acts (Acts 28:30-31) as he waited for his court appearance before Caesar (around the year A.D. 61).

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi: The church in Philippi was founded by Paul some eleven years before this letter on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). This was the first church established on the continent of Europe.

"This is Paul's great singing letter. It was at Philippi that he had sung in prison at midnight, in the company of Silas. Now he was again in prison, this time in Rome." (Morgan)

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ: "The work of grace has its root in the divine goodness of the Father, it is planted by the self-denying goodness of the Son, and it is daily watered by the goodness of the Holy Spirit; it springs from good and leads to good, and so is altogether good." (Spurgeon)

This work in the believer will not be finally complete until **the day of Jesus Christ**, which in context has the idea of the second coming of Jesus and our resurrection with Him.

The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel: Paul here answered a concern of the Philippians. He wanted them to know that God's blessing and power were still with him, even though he was in prison. He was not out of the will of God, and God's work still continued.

Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice: So, people preached the gospel more energetically, motivated by Paul's imprisonment. Some were motivated in a good way and some were motivated in a bad way; yet nonetheless, they were motivated — and Paul could rejoice in that.

Paul's attitude went like this: "If you preach the true gospel, I don't care what your motives are. If your motives are bad, God will deal with you — but at least the gospel is preached. But if you preach a false gospel, I don't care how good your motives are. You are dangerous and must stop preaching your false gospel, and good motives don't excuse your false message."

I know that this will turn out for my deliverance: Paul knew that the Lord was in control of all events, even though his imprisonment and impending trial before Caesar Nero made the situation look pretty dark.

My earnest expectation and hope: These are words of faith. Paul mightily trusted God here, and Paul first trusted God that in nothing I shall be ashamed. He believed that God would not cause him to be ashamed or that God would not turn against him in the matter. Though he was in prison and awaiting trial before Caesar, Paul had the confidence that he was in the center of God's will. He knew God was not punishing him through the adversity he experienced at the time.

Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death: Paul also had this trust, and admitted to the Philippians that he might not be released from this present imprisonment, but it might instead result in his martyrdom. Paul lived his life not to preserve and promote himself, but to glorify Jesus Christ. If Jesus should one day decide that Paul could best glorify Him through laying down his life, then Paul would be well pleased by the opportunity. It is easy for us to dictate to God how He can and cannot glorify Himself in our lives. Paul wisely left all that up to God.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain: Paul knew that death was not a defeat to the Christian. It is merely a graduation to glory, a net gain for the Christian. Paul's death at the time would be a gain in two senses. First, his death for the cause of Christ would glorify Jesus, and that was gain. Second, to be in the immediate presence of the Lord was gain for Paul.

Look inside the envelope of pain for the message it enfolds. It is a rough packing-case, but there is treasure in it.

- MEYER

This also obviously showed that Paul did not fear death. Though some men may fear dying, no Christian should fear death. "When men fear death it is not certain that they are wicked, but it is quite certain that if they have faith it is in a very weak and sickly condition." (Spurgeon)

Having a desire to depart: "It appears to be a metaphor taken from the commander of a vessel, in a foreign port, who feels a strong desire, to set sail, and get to his own country and family; but this desire is counterbalanced by a conviction that the general interests of the voyage may be best answered by his longer stay in the port where his vessel now rides; for he is not in dock, he is not aground, but rides at anchor in the port, and may any hour weigh and be gone." (Clarke)

Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you: Paul understood that others still needed him; that his work was not yet done. So while allowing for the possibility of his martyrdom, he told the Philippians that he expects to be spared at this time (I know that I shall remain and continue with you).

Paul was confident and full of faith, yet seems short of absolute certainty. His lack of absolute certainty is a comfort to us. Even the great apostle did not have a prophet's certainty about the future.

As it happened, Paul survived this imprisonment, was set free, and was martyred later at Rome. He did come to visit the Philippians again.

But also to suffer for His sake: The ancient Greek word for suffer here is pasko. This word is used primarily in the sense of persecution. However, it is also used of physical sufferings not related to persecution (Acts 28:5, and Matthew 17:15), of suffering under temptation (Hebrews 2:18) and hardships in a general sense (1 Corinthians 12:26, and Galatians 3:4).

"Everyone cannot be trusted with suffering. All could not stand the fiery ordeal. They would speak rashly and complainingly. So the Master has to select with careful scrutiny the branches which can stand the knife." (Meyer)

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I AM
THE RESURRECTION
AND THE LIFE

JOHN 11:25