

## PAUL'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

### Philippians 1:12-26

In the preface of this epistle Paul poured out his love for his friends in Philippi. As he entered upon the main portion of his letter, it was only natural that he should tell his readers something of his own situation and experiences in Rome. He knew of their love. They had expressed that in their gifts, and in their unfaltering devotion to him. He was sure that they would be eager, first of all, to hear of his welfare. With the generosity of love he refrained from mentioning anything that would distress the minds of his friends. He assured them that all was well, and that he was both joyful and hopeful.

Evidently as a prisoner of distinction, reserved for the personal judgment of the emperor, and charged with no crime or felony, Paul was accorded a large degree of liberty and certain real courtesies. But even the more lenient and less rigorous imprisonment must have been distressing to Paul. To be chained to the wrist of a soldier, day and night, sleeping or waking, must have been a trying experience to one of Paul's sensitive disposition. Then, in addition to his physical discomfort, there must have been much to embitter and to distress him. He was eager to visit the churches he had founded. He had planned to continue his evangelistic tours. Then, too, there was the long delay of justice. Month after month dragged by and his trial was still postponed.

However, as Paul now addresses himself to his dear friends in Philippi there is not a word of bitterness or complaint. He was able to see the hand of God when things went against him. He was able to get sweet out of bitter. The capabilities of the Christian faith to triumph under all circumstances come into clear relief in Paul's account of his imprisonment. There is here no suggestion of defeat. Various things caused Paul to rejoice in his imprisonment:

1. The progress of the Gospel. 1:12-13.

That is, it had become known that he was in bonds because of no crime, but merely because he was a Christian. His very imprisonment, therefore, had led men to know and to discuss the story of Christ. It had become in itself a means and an occasion of making the gospel known, and that, too, in wide and unexpected circles, both in Caesar's court and among the Roman populace. Paul was never ashamed of Christ or of his bonds. His bonds became a badge of honor for they preached Christ to all who saw them and knew why he wore them.

2. The spurring of others to courageous action. 1:14.

This helpless prisoner, shut off from the work he loved, confined to his obscure lodging, spread new zeal and fiery devotion throughout the whole church in Rome. Some Christians may have lost heart. Some may have been failing in their witness. Some may have been unfaithful to their Lord. There are always timid souls who lose heart in times of persecution. Manifestly, some of them had been afraid to open their mouths for a while till they saw how brave Paul was in spite of his bondage and impending trial, and then they began anew their fearless testimony for Christ.

3. The opposition of some church members. 1:15-17.

Obviously they were envious of Paul. They were moved by personal jealousy and sought to undermine his influence. They sought to form a faction in the church. They were indeed so moved by malice that they would gladly have added to the distress of Paul's imprisonment.

Paul's attitude toward those who were seeking to oppose and offend him is an inspiring revelation of the greatness of the mind and heart of the apostle. He might have criticized and rebuked them. But Paul rose above any petty animosity. He seized upon the main fact, namely, that Christ was being preached, and instead of resentment his soul was filled with joy.

4. The proclamation of the glorious gospel. 1:18.  
Christ was preached. That is what mattered most with Paul. Other things are important in varying degrees, but this is primal.
5. Through his hardships he could glorify Christ. 1:19-20.  
Paul now turns to his own case and declares that it matters little what happens to him in Rome. He was sure that his troubles, his imprisonment, and the personal antagonisms of his adversaries, would result in his spiritual development, and therefore in his truest welfare. This spiritual development he further declared was in absolute accord with the supreme aim of his life. He wanted to act and to speak with such courage that Christ would be honored in his body "whether by life, or by death." If he lived he hoped to honor Christ by his continued service and testimony; if he must die, then by his dauntless courage he would do credit to his divine Lord.

Paul had a profound philosophy of life. It was expressed in a single comprehensive sentence, "For to me to live is Christ." The aim, the purpose, the inspiration, and the sum of his life were Christ. He here announced the principle of life so far as he was concerned. The personal pronoun has the emphatic place in the sentence. It means, this is what life means to me, whatever it means to others. With many life means pleasure, sensual indulgence, money, power, flattery, having one's way. But with Paul the regulating principle of life was Christ. Baskerville said, "Christ Jesus must be the origin of life, the essence of life, the model of life, the aim of life, the solace of life, the reward of life."

Whether he was looking to the past, at the present, or into the future, wherever he turned his eyes, Paul saw only Jesus Christ. All the strength of his faith, all the fulness of his hope, and all the longings of his soul were centered in Him. From that day, on which Paul had his revolutionary experience on the road to Damascus, Christ ruled and reigned in his life.

To exist and to live are widely different conditions. All who breathe exist, but those who really live are the ones who have dedicated their minds and undivided energies to Christ. When self is completely yielded to Christ, the life will be a joyous one.

"For to me to live is Christ." What did Paul mean by this statement? He must have meant that inasmuch as Jesus Christ had imparted a new nature to him and he was drawing all of his resources from Him that he was becoming more and more Christ-like. Life was worth living because the power of Christ was felt in his soul and life. It was a power that lifted him up, strengthened him, and filled him with a calm and holy joy in all of his numerous trials.

No one can truthfully say, "To me to live is Christ", until he has received Christ as his Saviour and enthroned Him as Lord. This power of the indwelling Christ is sufficient for every emergency, victorious over every obstacle, fruitful of all good works, and full of complete satisfaction.

Paul loved Christ with all of his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Because of his love for the Saviour, he gladly dedicated himself to Christ's service. The Master took possession of him and molded him according to His own gracious purposes. Paul's thoughts, interests, plans, activities, and hopes were centered in Christ. In thought, word, and deed, he sought to reproduce the spirit, character and life of Christ. His only employment was the service of Christ. In substance he said: "Life equals Christ" or "Christ equals life." This conception always makes life exceedingly interesting and profitable.

Such a view of life, as Paul had, gives to life a real unity and a true nobility. It ends those conflicting aims, those divided allegiances, which destroy all harmony, which make efforts fruitless and fill life with those activities which are at once complex and futile. Such a philosophy also dignifies all one may do or may endure. When tasks are undertaken for the sake of Christ they are ennobled, no matter how obscure they may be. When distress

is endured patiently through the power of Christ the very experience has about it something of joy.

Paul was about to say that, if he was to live longer, it would be with the one hope of being fruitful in his work for Christ and helpful to the followers of Christ. So, he said that the supreme aim for him was to make Christ known. He can be interpreted as saying, "I live only to serve Christ and have no conception of life apart from Christ. Christ occupies the whole of my life. I have no secrets apart from Him. I have no locked doors to keep Him out of any part of my life." In a word, Paul led a surrendered life and found the utmost peace and power in it. It was the victorious life in the truest sense.

Christ was his all in all. But then what about death? Simply more of Christ. That was all. "To die is gain." All that death could do for Paul was to give him more of Christ. Paul felt like an eagle in a cage. Death would be the liberation from the limitations of his flesh. He looked upon death as a friend in disguise, the door to complete and glorious union with Christ. Paul was not dissatisfied with life here, but was ready for death.

He faced life or death with equanimity. He was ready for either. He had made known that for him death meant fuller and richer life in gaining Christ. But he was not discontented to live on in the flesh if that was the will of God for him. There would not be a moment's hesitation with Paul if it were clear to him that his work was done. Just to eke out a useless existence had no charm for him. He did not wish to be like a fruit tree that no longer produced fruit but just cumbered the ground. He had no desire to be laid on the shelf, to be past the dead-line in the ministry. Paul had no friends to take care of him in his old age. One of the saddest of all spectacles is the sight of an old minister whom no one wants to hear preach and who is no longer able to support himself. But Paul had no hesitation in declaring his personal preference for death since that meant the riches in Christ. But it seemed clear to him that there was work yet for him and so he was "in a strait betwixt the two," life and death. He faced his work with joy, but he would have had more joy if he had gone to be with Jesus. The hero was no shirker. The matter was in God's hand and he would not have it otherwise.

Paul was hemmed in on both sides by two good things. He was between living and dying, but Christ was connected with both. It was simply a question of whether he should enjoy Christ in glory or serve Him on earth. He thought that by dying he could be closer to Christ and attain a more perfect state of union with Him. Feeling that this life kept him away from Christ to some extent, Paul expresses his great delight that death would conduct him into His immediate presence. The blessedness awaiting us in Christ's presence is beyond the power of language to express. Paul's surrender to Christ was so complete that he wanted the Lord's preference to be the determining factor. Entirely submissive to the Lord's will, Paul was ready to go and willing to wait. What a splendid example for all of us!