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WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

Philippians 1:19-26

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Philippians Lesson 7

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A young man came to W. E. Gladstone when he was Prime Minister of England and said, "Mr. Gladstone, I would appreciate your giving me a few minutes in which I might lay before you my plans for the future. I would like to study law." "Yes," said the great statesman, "and what then?"

"Then, sir, I would like to gain entrance to the Bar of England." "Yes, young man, and what then?"

"Then, sir, I hope to have a place in Parliament, in the House of Lords." "Yes, young man, what then?" pressed Gladstone.

"Then I hope to do great things for Britain." "Yes, young man, and what then?"

"Then, sir, I hope to retire and take life easy." "Yes, young man, and what then?" he tenaciously asked.

"Well, then, Mr. Gladstone, I suppose I will die." "Yes, young man, and what then?" The young man hesitated and then said, "I never thought any further than that, sir."

Looking at the young man sternly and steadily, Gladstone said, "Young man, you are a fool. Go home and think life through!" (Told by Leonard Griffith, *This is Living* [Abingdon Press], pp. 48, 49.)

What are *you* living for? Your answer to that question will determine the direction of your life. If your purpose is wrong, your direction will be wrong. If your purpose is vague or fuzzy, your direction will be fuzzy. If you don't know your purpose, you'll just be swept along by the currents of our age, doing what seems to bring you happiness. It is crucial that you be clear and correct in answering the question, "What are you living for?" As the story of the young man and Mr. Gladstone illustrates, the correct answer to that question must include some thought about the fact of death and what lies beyond. It must also include consideration of the un-

certainty of life, so that whenever death may come, it doesn't thwart your purpose.

The Apostle Paul was clear and focused on his purpose. I believe that the purpose for which he lived is the only purpose that takes eternity into account, so that whether we live a long life or whether it is cut short, that purpose will be fulfilled. In short, Paul's purpose is, "For to me, to live is Christ" (1:21).

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out (*The Life of Joy* [Baker], pp. 85, 86), that sentence is not only a statement of the apostle's true experience, but also it is a standard of judgment which confronts us with the most thorough test of our Christian faith we will ever encounter. Every person who professes Christ as Savior must grapple with the question, "Can I honestly say, 'For me, to live is Christ?'" If I can say, "Yes," then I have also answered that fundamental question, "What about death and what lies beyond?" It will be gain for me.

If for me, to live is Christ, then for me to die will be gain.

Paul's purpose statement means,

1. Every Christian should aim at being able to say truthfully, "For me, to live is Christ."

Can you truthfully say that? Can I? We need to be honest in examining our lives before the Lord. To bring this purpose into focus, we need to answer two questions: *What does it mean to "live Christ"?* and, *How do we "live Christ"?*

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "LIVE CHRIST"?

- A. To "live Christ" means to live in union with Christ, so that He becomes my all in all.

The concept of being "in Christ" was vital to Paul's understanding of what it means to be a Christian. He addresses this letter "to all the saints *in Christ Jesus* who are in Philippi" (1:1). The instant a person truly believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, he is joined organically in a living, real union with Christ the Head as a member of His body, the church. To be "in Christ" means that all that is true of Christ is true of the believer. As Paul writes (Rom. 6:10, 11), "For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to

be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." The believer is in union with Christ.

While that is our true standing before God, we must grow in our experience of the reality of that standing, so that in our daily lives, we live in *fellowship with Christ*, communing with Him and depending on Him for everything. It means growing to *know Christ* intimately (Phil. 3:10). It means growing to *love Christ* with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). It means submitting all of my thoughts, emotions, words, and deeds to the *lordship of Christ*, so that I seek to please Him in all respects (Col. 1:10). It means growing to experience Christ as my "*all in all*" (Eph. 1:23; Col. 3:11). Every aspect of life must be centered around the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorious *person of Christ*, and nothing less, *is* the Christian life.

Of course, our experience of "living Christ" is a process that is never fully realized in this life. As Paul says (Phil. 3:12), "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Even the most godly Christians have times when Christ seems distant and the soul is dull and sluggish. In this life we never reach a point where we are not tempted by sin, where we do not have to battle the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16). But, each of us who are truly children of God will have as our focus to live in an experiential way the fact of our union with Christ, so that He becomes our all in all.

In 1991 I was struggling with the issue of how psychology and Christianity fit together (if at all). I previously believed that the best insights of psychology could be integrated with Christianity ("all truth is God's truth"). In my devotional reading, I came across the chapter, "Christ is All," in J. C. Ryle's classic, *Holiness* [James Clarke & Co.]. Ryle hammers from every direction the practical truth that Christ is all for the believer, both in salvation and in sanctification.

As I read that chapter, it came into focus for me that one of the main problems with psychology (even the "Christian version") is that it undermines the all-sufficiency of Christ for the believer. It is saying that Christ is not enough to meet the needs of our soul, that we must add worldly wisdom. About the same time, John

MacArthur's book, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* [Word] came out, and it clinched the point for me. Christ really is all we need. We must grow to know experientially what it means to "live Christ."

B. To "live Christ" means to exalt Christ through everything we do.

"... that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (1:20). This is just another way of stating the great goal of the Christian life, which is to glorify God by everything we are and do. To glorify God, in common language, means to make God look good, as He truly is.

We may think, "Christ is the Almighty God, Creator of the universe. How can I possibly exalt or glorify Him?" Think of Him as being a distant star. It may be more brilliant than our own sun, but to the human eye, it is just a dim speck in the night sky. To many in this world, Christ is that way. He is the very splendor of God, brighter than a million suns. But the world doesn't see Him that way. The believer is to be a telescope to bring the truth about Christ into view for the unbeliever. Through us, and especially through how we handle trials, Christ is magnified to a skeptical, unbelieving world.

In view of Paul's circumstances, it is remarkable that his main focus was not on getting released from prison, but rather on exalting Christ. Whether he lived or died wasn't the issue; all that mattered to Paul was that he exalted Christ. In verse 19, he says, "I know that this [situation] will turn out for my deliverance." The word "deliverance" is, literally, "salvation." Some interpret this to mean that Paul was hopeful of being released from prison. But verse 20 precludes this view, because Paul acknowledges that he may well be executed.

Paul's words in verse 19 are verbatim from the Greek Old Testament of Job 13:16. In that context, Job was on trial by his "friends," and he wanted to be "saved" from being found to be a hypocrite, that is, he wanted to be vindicated. In the same way, Paul is saying that as the Philippians prayed for him and as God's Spirit enabled him, he would be delivered from denying Christ and disgracing the gospel at his trial before Caesar. Thus he would be vindicated in the ultimate court, before God, by exalting Christ,

even through martyrdom if need be. The only cause for shame to Paul would be not to hear “well done” from Christ when he stood before Him.

Verse 26 does not mean that the Philippians would exalt Paul. It should read, “So that your reason for boasting [or, exulting] may abound in Christ Jesus in connection with me through my coming to you.” Paul means that if their prayers are answered by Paul being released so that he can be with them, they will boast in Christ, not in Paul.

Note (1:20) that the way we exalt Christ is through our *bodies*. This is a comprehensive and practical concept. It means that we may either exalt Christ or bring shame to His name by our attitudes, our words, and our behavior. How do you use your eyes? A lustful glance at a woman or even at a sexy picture does not exalt Christ. How do you use your ears? Do you listen to music that defiles you or music that exalts Christ? Do you listen to gossip or slander? How do you use your tongue? Your hands? Your feet? Your countenance? Do you use your body in purity or for sensuality? What about your personal appearance? Do you dress to be seductive or to attract attention to yourself? Or, do you exalt Christ? To “live Christ” means to exalt Him through everything we do.

- C. To “live Christ” means to die to selfish desires in order to live to serve others for Jesus’ sake.

Paul’s desire was to check out. He really wanted to depart and be with Christ. But, he also realized that the Philippians and others needed his ministry. So he was willing to deny his desires for the sake of serving others for Christ’s sake. Of course, the final decision as to whether Paul lived or died rested with the Lord. But Paul was willing to live on in fruitful service if that’s what the Lord wanted for him to do. Paul’s focus suggests two applications:

First, if you’re not denying self in order to serve Christ, you are not “living Christ”; you’re living for self. Many people today have the notion that Christ is there to serve me, rather than that I am to serve Christ. They think the church is here to meet their needs, and if it doesn’t they drop out of church or try to find one that better meets their needs. We need to get back to the biblical truth, that we have been saved to serve Christ. If everyone who attends this church

had this mind-set, we'd have a waiting list to teach Sunday School! What a radical thought!

Second, Christians should challenge the American notion of retirement. The idea that when you finally reach a point where you don't have to work, you're free to live for self and pleasure is contrary to Scripture. Any time the Lord gives us we are to manage for Him, seeking first His kingdom and righteousness. As long as He gives us health and strength, we should ask, "How can I serve Him?" Being freed from a job should mean that you're free to spend more time furthering the Lord's work. Give your time to the church or to a mission. Consider going to a foreign country to help out in the cause of Christ. Charles Simeon, a British preacher of the past century, worked long and hard for Christ. Late in life he said, "I cannot but run with all my might, for I am close to the goal" (cited by H. C. G. Moule, *Philippian Studies* [CLC], p. 75).

Thus, to "live Christ" means to live in union with Him, so that He is my all in all; to exalt Him in all I do; and, to die to self so as to serve Him.

HOW DO WE "LIVE CHRIST"?

I trust that the question has been answered for the most part by the answer to the first question. We "live Christ" by daily fellowship with Him, by seeking to exalt Him, by dying to self in order to serve Him. But also,

A. We "live Christ" by making that our constant aim.

Paul clearly was determined to "live Christ" as his sole aim. He expresses it elsewhere in slightly differing terms, but with the same idea: "I do all things for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:23); "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7); "... one thing I do: ... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13, 14). Christ was Paul's constant aim.

As Christians, we need honestly to evaluate our lives in light of this aim. It's easy to fall into living for good things, but not for the best. God graciously blesses us with our families, friends, homes, possessions, work, leisure enjoyments. But if we're not careful, these good *things* become the things for which we're living. Even those of us in vocational ministry can begin living for our

ministries. We need to keep asking ourselves, "What if this thing (person, activity) were taken from me?" Certainly, it would be difficult if, like Job, I lost my children, my health, and my possessions. But if I'm truly living for Christ, I will be able to come through any tragedy without despair, because He can't be taken from me. So I must constantly evaluate my life by asking, "Is Christ at the center? Is He my all in all?"

- B. We "live Christ" through prayer and the provision of the Holy Spirit.

Paul was a man of prayer, but he also freely solicited the prayers of others for him (1:19). We tend to think of Paul as being naturally bold, but he often asked for prayer that he would be bold in his witness, because he knew that he was weak (see Eph. 1:19, 20; Col. 4:3, 4; 2 Thess. 3:1, 2). To "live Christ" we need much prayer!

But also, Paul needed "the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (1:19). The Christian life is impossible to live in the power of the flesh. We must walk by the Spirit every day, depending on Him for His strength. Why does Paul here say, "the Spirit of Jesus Christ"? He may mean, the Spirit who was given to us by Christ. Or, he may be describing the Spirit in this way because Jesus, in facing His trial and execution, bore faithful witness by relying on the Spirit. Paul was facing possible execution and wanted to be a faithful witness. This same Spirit is available to us so that we can "live Christ" in every situation, no matter how difficult. Living Christ must be our aim.

- 2. If we have sought to "live Christ," then to die will be gain.

Next week I'll deal more with the subject of how death will be gain for the believer. For now I'll make just a few comments. Note that for Paul, to go on living or to die is not a choice between the lesser of two evils. Paul didn't view life as a difficult trial to be endured, with death being a difficult thing as well, but at least a release. Rather, he viewed life as a progressive joy with Christ and death as even greater joy, because he would see Christ face to face and be with Him for eternity.

So a Christian has the best of both worlds! Even if we suffer now, we have Christ to strengthen, sustain, comfort, and encourage us. If Christ is real to our soul, what more could we want? And, the instant we die we are present with the Lord for all eternity, freed from all sin and pain and death! Sure, it is sad for those left behind. We miss our loved ones who have gone to be with Christ. But we have God's promise, that if "Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:14-17). If we have sought to "live Christ," then dying will be gain because we'll be with Him! We can't lose!

Conclusion

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice asks the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." "I don't much care where--" says Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," says the Cat. "You're sure to get *somewhere*--if you only walk long enough."

Where do you want to get to? If you want to get to heaven, then you need to consider the question, "What am I living for?" Complete the sentence: "For me, to live is ____." What? Money? Success? Happiness? Pleasure? Fun? Good times? Family? Self? If your answer is any of the above, then to die will be a terrible loss, not a gain. But if, with Paul, you can honestly say as you evaluate your life, "For me, to live is Christ," then you can also say with all the confidence of God's Word behind you, "to die is gain!"

Discussion Questions

1. Honestly complete the sentence: For me, to live is _____?
2. Is it overly simplistic to say, "Christ is all we need for our emotional and psychological wholeness"?
3. What are some of the implications of "exalting Christ" through our bodies?
4. Agree/disagree: If you aren't serving Christ, you're living for self?

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