

You Win Either Way

Philippians 1:19-26

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February 1-2, 2025

This week, Tim Challies wrote a provocative post called, “If I Could Change Anything about the Modern Church.” That title got my attention.

There is one thing churches used to do that they no longer do, and I often wish we could recover it. So, if I could change anything about the modern church, perhaps it would be this: I would return the graveyard to the churchyard.

It used to be customary for churches to have a graveyard...people who once worshipped inside are now buried outside. In this way, there was an ongoing link between...the congregants in heaven and the congregants on earth. Imagine that as you arrived at church to worship God on a Sunday morning, you first walked past the graves of friends who had served the church faithfully before going to their rest...

Imagine if there was an empty plot that was waiting for you, a spot in which you would be laid...How would it change your worship if you were constantly confronted with the reality of death in this way yet also comforted by the proximity and the nearness of those who had gone before? How would it change your understanding of the church if the living and the dead maintained such a close distance? How would it change the way you prepare your heart to worship and prepare yourself to die? Speaking personally, I think it would be deeply moving and spiritually comforting. It would be a blessing to worship where my people are buried and to be buried where my people worship.

As I read and studied Philippians 1:19-26 in preparation for the sermon today, I couldn't stop thinking about a man named Gerber Hackett. Gerber and his wife Donna were members of our previous church. When Gerber entered hospice care, I went to his home and read this passage to him.

“Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by

death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. [At this point, Gerber shouted out: “That’s the horns of my dilemma. I want to go and be with Jesus, but I don’t want to leave Donna Mae!”] My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

When I was done reading, Gerber suddenly broke out into a song: “*Ready to go, ready to stay...ready to do His will.*” With tears in my eyes, I prayed for him. We talked a little more and then he put his head back, closed his eyes and started singing another song:

*This world is not my home; I’m just a passing through,
My treasure and my hopes are all beyond the blue.*

Gerber was right. This world is not our home. What he was really saying was that he was in a no-lose situation because he knew he would win either way. When it was his time to die, he would get to be with Jesus. Until that happened, he was still with Jesus right where he was, and he was able to spend time with his wife.

Here’s our main idea: *You win either way when you live God’s way.*

As we pick up the last phrase of verse 18, we see again how Paul was on a journey to joy: “**Yes, and I will rejoice.**” Verse 19 begins with the word, “**for,**” which is a conjunction, which makes me think of the Schoolhouse Rock jingle, “*Conjunction junction, what’s your function?*” You’re welcome for the earworm! The function of “**for**” here is to explain the reason for his rejoicing.

I’m going to borrow another pastor’s outline of this passage because I like how it captures the flow.

1. Paul’s confidence. Verse 19 tells us that Paul was joyful in part because of the prayers of God’s people and the provision of the Holy Spirit: “**For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.**” It gave him great comfort to know that Christians were praying for him because when they prayed, the Holy Spirit provided care and

comfort to Paul. The word **“help”** refers to *“sufficient supply of all that is necessary”* and has to do with generous giving.

The word **“deliverance”** can mean rescue from grave danger and can also refer to salvation. Whatever the precise meaning, Paul knew what he was going through was just temporary. The phrase, **“this will turn out for my deliverance”** is a quotation from the Greek translation of Job 13:16.

Don't miss the connection between how prayer leads to provision. As someone has said, *“Prayer on earth leads to power in heaven.”* This past week, we had some challenging health issues with two of our grandchildren in Virginia. On Tuesday, I shared an update with the deacons during our meeting. They could tell I was struggling, so they sent me home early. Before I left, they prayed for me and our family, which was exactly what I needed. On Wednesday, I saw the leader of one of our Go Team partners at a coffee shop, and she prayed for the situation as well. Those prayers meant the world to me.

Ultimately Paul was confident about his deliverance because he had given Christ first place in his life. We see this in verse 20: **“As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”** The phrase, **“eager expectation”** is vivid and refers to an Olympic runner straining forward to reach the finish line.

Because Paul's focus was on the future, he was able to look past his present circumstances. Because he lived for what was to come, he knew he would not be ashamed. This is fleshed out in 1 John 2:28: **“And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming.”** I can't imagine anything more terrifying than to be ashamed before the Lord when He returns. To learn more about this, copies of the *Ready or Not* booklet are available in the lobbies.

Paul craves **“full courage”** so **“Christ will be honored”** in his body, whether he lives or dies. It's been said that courage is fear that has said its prayers. The word **“honored”** means *“to magnify, to make great, to enlarge, to make glorious.”* Warren Wiersbe writes, *“Christians are to be like microscopes, taking that which is small and making it big; and we should be like telescopes, taking that which is far away and making it near.”*

I'll never forget hearing a missionary from Kenya tell me years ago that his job was to "*make Jesus famous.*" Speaking of Kenya, Edgewood Go Team partners Bobby and Lisa Bechtel report 54 new believers were baptized in the Indian Ocean last weekend! Baptism is a wonderful way to magnify Jesus! Our next baptisms will be in three weeks!

When people look at you, do they see the greatness and glory of Christ, or do they see you? Are you making Him bigger or smaller by how you're living? Psalm 34:3 says, "***Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.***" Paul believed he could magnify the Lord through his life or through his death because of three decisions he had made.

- He had put his faith in Christ.
- He walked in fellowship with Christ.
- He determined to follow Christ.

You win either way when you live God's way.

2. Paul's confession. Verse 21 is Paul's personal mission statement: "***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.***" Let's repeat it together. Once again, we see the conjunction "***for***" (we won't sing the song this time), which shows this verse explains or expands what comes before.

Before we move on, how would you honestly complete this sentence? "For to me, to live is _____." No one can leave that sentence blank because everyone is living for something. Is it a relationship with someone? Is it your job? Could it be a hobby, a possession, retirement, a sport? What are you living for right now? Your answer to that question will determine the direction and destiny of your life.

In the original, it reads this way: "***For to me to live Christ, to die gain.***" Life is Christ. His person, purposes, and plans are preeminent to Paul. When Paul says, "***to me***" he is emphatically saying, "*Whatever life may be to you, this is what it is to me.*" We might say it like this: "*As far as I'm concerned...*"

Can you honestly say, "*For to me, to live is Christ?*"

- Is Christ your total life?
- Has Christ transformed your life?

- Does Christ transcend your life?

In Colossians 3:3-4, he says it this way: ***“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”*** Is He your life? We could ask the question this way: *Is Christ prominent in your life, or is He preeminent?*

Think of the prepositions that express relationship. Believers live *in* Christ...*with* Christ...*for* Christ...*by* Christ...*through* Christ...and *from* Christ. Jesus was, and is, the beginning, the middle, and the end of life. He is truly the Alpha and Omega, and every letter in between.

The essence of Paul’s life can only be explained by Christ. Christ was the purpose of his life, the whole reason for his existence. He was committed to kingdom causes because Christ was his King. I think of what Jim Elliot wrote in his journal before being martyred in Ecuador: *“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*

Let’s be honest. Most of us don’t think of death as gain. In fact, we often refer to someone who has died like this: *“We lost so-and-so.”* To quote Pastor Ed, *“No one is lost if you know where they are!”*

I like what EBC member Donna Castens posted about Philippians 1:21: *“When I was growing up this Scripture led me to understand that it’s not what we gain but what we give that measures the worth of the life we live. So, it’s imperative that I live for Christ so I can also spend eternity with Him.”*

The word **“gain”** refers to “profit” or interest on money. When living is Christ, then dying is all dividends! In Greek, the word *gain* is always more of the same thing. If to live is Christ, then to die would be more of Christ because we will be with Him forever.

Some of you know that Pastor Kyle’s great grandfather was the well-known evangelist John R. Rice. More than 100 years ago, he preached in Waxahachie, Texas. As was his custom, Dr. Rice preached hard against sin, especially calling out the bootleggers who were bringing illegal liquor into the small town. Eventually the town officials decided the troublesome evangelist must be silenced so they sent a message for him to stop preaching or they would kill him. He simply smiled and said, *“You can’t threaten me with Heaven!”*

If Paul were to answer the common question, “*How are you doing?*” I think he would have said, “*Life is wonderful...and it’s gonna get better!*” To Paul, death wouldn’t put him in an earthly cemetery; it would usher him into a heavenly sanctuary.

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3. Paul’s conflict. Paul’s conundrum is stated in verse 22: “***If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.***” Henry James said, “*The best use of life is to invest it in something that will outlast it.*” Only two things in life will last forever: The Word of God and people. Let’s make sure to build our lives around those two things.

In verse 23, he writes: “***I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.***” The phrase “***hard pressed***” means, “*pressed together*” and is translated in the KJV as, “*I’m in a straight betwixt two.*”

Whether Nero cut off his head, or whether he lived and returned to Philippi to give everyone a bear hug, it didn’t matter. Either way, Paul saw it as a win. His dilemma is between delaying or departing, but his deepest desire is to “***depart.***”

The word “***departed***” is rich in meaning and was used in four ways.

- **Setting a prisoner free.**
- **Removing a yoke from an ox.**
- **Pulling up a ship’s anchor.** When the believer dies, he or she leaves this world and sets sail for the shores of Heaven.
- **Taking down a tent.** The Bible refers to our bodies as tents which are portable, frail, and fragile. As a tentmaker, Paul referred to his earthly body as a tent in 2 Corinthians 5:1: “***For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.***” At death, our tent is destroyed and we move on to our permanent residence. 2 Corinthians 5:2 says, “***For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.***” Some of us have tents that are leaning, the stakes have started to come out, and they’re flapping in the wind, just about ready to blow away.

Notice that Paul desired to depart “***and be with Christ.***” This means that there is no such thing as “soul sleep” or a place of probation called purgatory. When a believer dies, he is ushered immediately into the presence of Christ. That’s what

Jesus said to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43: ***“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:8 makes the same point: ***“Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”***

I have been told there is a headstone in a cemetery in Montgomery, Alabama, which reads:

*Under the clover, and under the trees
Here lies the body of Jonathan Pease.
Pease ain't here, only the pod,
Pease shelled out and went home to God.*

One translation captures the end of Philippians 1:23 like this, ***“very much better.”***

- The word ***“very”*** means, *“many, much, a multitude.”*
- ***“Much”*** means, *“more than, better than something else.”*
- ***“Better”*** refers to, *“stronger, more excellent.”*

Paul stacks two adjectives and an adverb on top of each other to emphasize to die and be with Christ is much better and more excellent. It's MUCH, MORE, BETTER IN EVERY WAY!

Paul is thinking of the amazing “death benefits” for the believer: *“Death is not something I am afraid of because I will PROFIT if I die. It will be far better for me if I die than if I live.”*

When living is Christ, then dying is gain! Born again believers come out ahead when they're dead! That's why Revelation 14:13 says: ***“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”*** That's because we're not really dead when we die. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 11:25-26: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** When believers die, they've just changed their address!

The Bible says we will live forever in one of two destinations – either in a place of terrible torment called Hell, or in a place of eternal joy called Heaven.

If you know Jesus through the new birth, *you win either way*. Alexander MacLaren describes how death can be gain.

- **We lose everything we don't need** – the world, the flesh, and the devil. We lose our trials, troubles, tears, and fears.
- **We keep everything that matters** – our relationship with Christ, our personality, our identity, our fruit.
- **We gain what we never had before** – Heaven, rewards, the presence of God, fellowship with other believers.

However,

- If for me to live is money, then to die is to leave it all behind.
- If for me to live is fame, then to die is to be forgotten.
- If for me to live is pleasure, then to die is to miss all the fun.
- If for me to live is ambition, then to die is to become insignificant.
- If for me to live is possessions, then to die is to have them all rust and fade away.

That reminds me of a young business owner who was opening a new branch office, and a friend decided to send a floral arrangement for the grand opening. Due to a mix-up at the florist, the card that was attached said, *“Rest in peace.”* After calling to complain, the florist said, *“Look at it this way – somewhere some flowers were delivered for a funeral with a card that said, ‘Good luck in your new location!’”*

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4. Paul's conviction. It's only when we're ready to die can we really live. Those who are most prepared to depart are most prepared to delay. Paul was ready to set sail and yet was willing to wait according to verse 24: ***“But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”***

By the way, if you've ever contemplated suicide and think it would just be better to take your life, remember this verse. It is necessary for you to stay to serve the Savior and to serve others. Your time of death is His call, not yours. Death for the Christian is never pictured in Scripture as a way to get out of the worst of life. As someone has said, *“It is an improvement on the best...to us, life and death often look like two evils of which we know not which is worse. To Paul, they looked like two immense blessings, of which he knew not which was better.”*

As much as Paul wanted to go to heaven, he concluded with these words in verses 25-26: ***“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”***

Paul’s purpose was the ***“progress and joy”*** of others. Paul is saying, “I win either way!”

- If I die, that’s gain for me!
- If I live, that’s gain for you!

Ray Pritchard says it like this: *“There are only two philosophies of life. You can say with the Apostle Paul, ‘For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain’ or you can say with the world, ‘For to me to live is self and to die is loss.’ You can never say, ‘To die is gain’ unless you can also say ‘For to me to live is Christ.’ If you cannot say, ‘To live is Christ,’ how can you be sure that ‘to die is gain?’ If you are afraid to die, perhaps it’s because you don’t know Jesus.”*

After watching reports about the deadly crash between a plane and a helicopter near Reagan airport in Washington, D.C. Wednesday night, I wrote down some thoughts and posted them on Facebook. I entitled it, “Every Soul Matters.” Here’s part of what I said.

I’m struck by how fragile life is and am grateful for how first responders did everything they could to rescue people. Watching them stand at attention when a body was recovered brought me to tears. The reporter was so moved by this act of respect that he asked for a moment of silence on the air.

Our intense response to tragedy reminds us that every single person matters because everyone is made in the image of God as we read in Genesis 1:27: ***“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”***

Athletes and architects are important to God, as are the preborn and politicians. Military members matter, as do fast food workers. Grandparents and children have value, as do college students and pilots. Whether someone dies in the water or in the womb, in a collapsed building, because of a heart attack, or in an accident, they have worth, value, and dignity. The famous celebrity and the forgotten

homeless addict are both valuable to God. Whether an individual has Downs Syndrome, is the president of a company, has dementia, a disability, a disease, or a mental health issue, he or she matters to God and must therefore matter to us.

Both the poor and the rich are significant to God because He is their Maker according to Proverbs 22:2: ***“The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the Maker of them all.”***

People matter not because of what they do, where they live, the position they hold, or the possessions they may have, but because of WHO they are, a human being made in the image of God.

Every person has a soul, or more accurately, IS a soul.

It’s fascinating that in aviation, the word “souls” is used to refer to the total number of people on board an aircraft, including passengers and crew. The word “souls” carries a sense of respect and gravity, reflecting the loss of human life in the event of a crash, with historical roots in maritime terminology where “lost souls” described sailors who perished at sea.

As such, we must do everything in our power to rescue every human life as stated in Proverbs 24:11: ***“Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.”***

Jesus searches for the ONE because that ONE straying soul matters to Him: ***“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost ONE of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the ONE that is lost, until he finds it?”*** (Luke 15:4)

Jesus is the ultimate rescuer for YOU, because YOU matter to Him. He came to save lost souls. Turn to Him in repentance and receive the rescue from sins YOU have been longing for: ***“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*** (Luke 19:10)

He loves YOU, He died in your place, He rose on the third day, He ascended to Heaven, and He is coming again.

He did it all for YOU because YOU are lost without Him. YOU matter to Him. Let the Redeemer rescue YOU.

Before it's too late.

I close with some additional lyrics from the song my friend Gerber sang, "*This World is Not My Home.*"

*Over in glory land, there is no dying there,
The saints are shouting victory and singing everywhere,
I hear the voice of them that's gone on before,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.*

*They're all expecting me, that's one thing I know,
I fixed it up with Jesus, a long time ago.
I know He'll take me through, though I am weak and poor,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.*

Have you fixed it up with Jesus? That's the ultimate question. Are you ready to do that right now? If so, you could say this prayer with me.

*"Lord Jesus, for too long I've kept You out of my life. I want to live for You so I can be with You when I die. I **admit** that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I've been living. I **believe** and gratefully receive You as my Risen Savior. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I **confess** that You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and that You rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I want to cross over from death to life. I ask You now by faith to come into my life so that to me to live will be Christ and to die will be gain. Amen."*

Communion

If you're engaging in the lobby or the Family Room, you could make your way to the worship center for communion. 1 Corinthians 11:28 says we're not to take communion flippantly: "**Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**" The bread represents His body, and the cup is a reminder of His blood which paid the ransom price for our forgiveness and freedom.

Confession Time

We practice open communion, which means you don't need to be an Edgewood member to participate, but you do need to be a born-again believer.

Our deacons and pastors will distribute the trays by passing them down each row. When the tray comes to you, simply lift a cup straight out. You'll notice there are two cups stacked together. Give a little twist and hold one in each hand until everyone is served so we can partake together.

BTW, all the bread is gluten free, and we use grape juice instead of wine.

Distribution of Elements

Forever family, before we take the bread, let's focus on these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: ***"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"***

Before we drink from the cup, consider these words from 1 Corinthians 11:25-26: ***"In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."***

New Members

Merle and Linda Norberg (Saturday)
Chuck and Evelyn Lane (Sunday at 9)