
TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Another new day to magnify the Lord Jesus. Was that in your thoughts this morning, or has it been hard to guard your time with Him? It's okay, He knows. He sees. And He will bless your efforts to be in His word, even when! Today our main text is Philippians 1:21-22 and my prayer is that before the end of the day that Paul's statement may be your own.

Read Philippians 1:21-26 to set the context.

Paul's philosophy concerning life and death is summed up in this one statement,

“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

It's not a thought that we hear expressed too much in this day and age, even among believers. Note that he distinguishes a difference between living on in the flesh or not (v. 22, 24). Meaning, that either way he is still living, whether in the flesh or not, life exists. In Christ, his life will continue even when he has died physically, just as it will for all believers. He has a firm understanding that there is a spiritual life that will go on into eternity. He says, as far as I'm concerned, the purpose for living my life is Christ, but to die and be with Christ is even better.

What does it mean to live for Christ? Look up the following verses (some we have looked at already in our study so you should be familiar with them) and write down what they have to say about our old sin nature, and then also, what do they say about the new self:

OLD NATURE	vs	NEW SELF
Rom. 6:6-14		
Gal. 5:16-26		
Eph. 4:22-24		
Col. 3:1-11		

Positionally, at salvation, we are placed into Christ, described as a dot encompassed by a sphere. We are the dot, Christ is the sphere. At that point, our old nature, the old man is crucified. Of course, our experience is that we are still physically alive, and still have fleshly desires, sinful patterns and habits that we're used to having fulfilled, so we don't always live according to our position (in Christ). That takes participation on our part to submit to Christ's Spirit living in us.

Read the following and write down your thoughts?

Matthew 10:38-39

Mark 8:35-38

Paul says, as far as it concerns him, his purpose is to live for Christ. Paul chose to die to self and as he does that, Christ is able to live in him. The words in the text actually point out that Paul dies to himself constantly. He constantly crucifies the old sin nature and constantly puts on the new man. Is that your goal also? To constantly die to self so that Christ might live in and through you?

In "dying to self" it means that we are allowing God to use us as He will, not as we will. Each of us have a ministry and a purpose in this life, otherwise God would have called us home at salvation. As the saying goes, if you are still waking up and breathing in the morning, God has a plan for your day.

Read:

Romans 12:6-8 (and vs 9-21 give more to think about)

Ephesians 4:11-16

Romans 6:12-17

We have a choice to make. Either we let sin reign, or we allow Christ's Spirit to live in and through us. Paul says he chooses Christ to live in him.

Turn and look at John 15:1-5.

Most of us are familiar with the analogy Jesus uses here (v.5)

"I am the vine, you are the branches;
he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit,
for apart from me you can do nothing."

As new creatures, we are appointed to bear fruit because Christ is in us, and we in Him. His Spirit produces fruit, that's His job, so as we submit to Him, that fruit is a byproduct of our life in Him.

Look what happens though in John 15:2 when we don't produce the fruit He supplies:

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit,
He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes.
He prunes it so it will bear more fruit."

The text tells us that the "branch" He's referring to are believers, since it says, "Every branch IN ME" (emphasis mine). Christ is talking about believers who do not produce fruit. In other words, these are believers that are not living out the designed plan that God had for them, and just like an ambassador that is not doing his job out on foreign soil, the Ruler has every right and the authority to call him home. This is referred to as the sin unto death. When we do not fulfill the plan that God has for us, our Ruler has the option to bring us home.

For those doing their jobs, those bearing fruit, notice that there is still pruning that takes place. Pruning is cutting away the dead parts, useless pieces, trimming and shaping to gain the maximum growth and production. Warning: Pruning may be painful at times. But we need to remember, it is all for our well-being. Trust the Vine Dresser to know just how much to prune. He's a master at it.

So how do we bear fruit? **Circle the word that's repeated in verse 4.**

"Abide in Me, and I in you.

As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine,
so neither can you unless you abide in Me."

And here we are, full circle back to Paul's expression, "to live is Christ." The verse doesn't stop there though, does it? He ends it with, "to die is gain." We always hear everyone wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die, except Paul, he wouldn't have said that, would he? Paul's attitude was, if I live, I will constantly pursue living for Christ, and if I die? Well, then I have reached my goal because I am in His presence, and that is just so much better.

If the worst thing that can happen to a believer is that we die, well, we have nothing to fear. Then, why do we hold so tightly to the things of this world? Simply because the vine dresser is not finished with us yet, there is yet more pruning to do.

The purpose of the believers life is to glorify Christ. The purpose of the believers death is to glorify Christ.

Paul came to the rightful conclusion,

"For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain."

My hope is that as we grow in Christ, and in our faith, that we will share the same thought as Paul. He seemed to have it down, and knew the answer to having happiness in spite of his circumstances. He had joy, even when things were not as he'd hoped. May we be careful not to live for self, nor to live for man, but to live full out for Christ.

Perhaps there is something you need to give up to the Lord in that regard, some pruning that He'd like to do in your life. If so, here is the place and time to lay it down.

REVIEW

~ Paul's mindset was whether I live or die, it's all for Christ. Philippians 1:21-22

~ We must crucify the old man and put on the new self. Romans 6:6-14; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:22-24; Col. 3:1-11

~ If we are still living, God has a plan for us. Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-16

The only way to fulfill that plan is to abide in Him. John 15:1-5

~ Remember, our God does not call us to do anything that He Himself does not supply.

Trust Him, submit to Him and find the blessings of abiding in Him.

~ Extra points if you do a word study of "abide."