

To Live Is Christ

"For to me to live is Christ ..." – Philippians 1:21

Paul said some many memorable things throughout the course of his many letters. This declaration may be among the most remarkable even by his standards. Paul was writing to comfort the Philippians. Why would they need comforting? They were distressed over the fact that he was imprisoned in Rome. Paul was the one who was incarcerated, but his concern was over the grief and any fear that his crisis might cause for others. How does a man step outside of his own problems enough to overlook his own serious trials to the point that he is more troubled by what others are going through in his behalf?

Something was giving Paul's life a greater sense of meaning than his unpleasant circumstance could take away. In fact, earlier in the letter, he had explained to his friends how his imprisonment had actually served to advance the gospel. He had suggested that whether God had in mind for him to live or to die, he was at peace. Obviously, we must attribute Paul's posture under fire to his standing in Christ. Having said that, let us focus on the phrase, "For me to live is Christ ..."

Was Paul just sharing a point of view that reflected his own experience, or is to think of one's life as somehow "equivalent to Christ" a perspective that he expects could be the birthright of every Christian? I believe the latter would clearly be Paul's preference for us, but, if that is the case, how many believers today really own that claim? Can you honestly say, "For me to live is Christ" and, if you can, what do you mean by that? How would you explain it if asked?

Some people have a very well defined "philosophy of life." To others, any notion of a stewardship over life is simply lost on them. They just exist or they frivolously squander away the hours, days, weeks and years. But, for most of us who live between those two extremes, our lives would typically be defined in terms of our families, our friends, our jobs, our dreams, our homes, our activities, *etc.* After all, if all of these were taken from us in one sweeping disaster, much as they were in the case of Job, the quality of our lives would be traumatically impacted whether or not we continued to breath in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide or exhibit any of the other chemical evidences of being alive.

What was it that caused Paul to feel and to know, "*For me to live is Christ*"?

It began when Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road. He was in route to that town to persecute every Christian on whom he could lay his hands. But, by grace, Paul was led into the city where he learned the way of the Lord and believed the gospel. It didn't stop there. From that moment forward, every previous evidence of a meaningful life that he had ever exhibited paled in comparison to knowing Christ. He had fallen in love with this Jesus, Who gave His blood for one who had previously been an enemy of God in the most literal sense.

Over time, Paul came to understand that apart from Jesus, there is no life. That's strong language, given all the precious affections that life holds for us. He came to understand that Jesus satisfies all that life causes us to long after – the intellectual pursuits of meaning as well as our emotional needs are abundantly gratified in Jesus.

Finally, Paul's new view of life, which he found in Jesus, assured him that everything we detect with our physical senses is temporal and fleeting. A fuller, grander, healthier life awaits us. Paul had come to recognize that the world is in a great state of conflict between the kingdom of heaven and this realm of evil. One day Jesus would return, rout the forces of evil and establish His kingdom in it fullness. Paul knew that he was destined for that. When he wrote to the Philippians, it truly made him no difference whether or not this life was coming to an end. For him to live was Christ.

Can you make that same claim with any degree of integrity; "For me to live is Christ"?

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