

Philippians 2021 - Part 3

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[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 1, we've not made it out of chapter 1 as yet, verses 19 through to 26. Okay, so Philippians chapter 1, beginning at verse 19, now hear God's word.

Let me just say actually that verse 19, depending on how your Bible is divided, it actually starts with 18b, where Paul continues with the rejoicing.

So I'll begin in verse 18, just so you can get the flow. In verse 18 he says, What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, 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 the full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For 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. My desire is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

[1 : 53] Convicted of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and your 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.

Several years ago, maybe 10, maybe 15 years ago, there became a popular phrase within Christian circles to say that everything is about Jesus. It is about Jesus. Everything is about Jesus.

But it almost became a little catchphrase to determine whether or not a person was genuine. And when you put a person on the spot, perhaps when they are complaining about things, or they are, you know, things aren't the way that they ought to be in the church, or a number of other things, you say, well, you know everything's about Jesus.

It is able to stop us in our tracks. That's right, Barry. You do it again, you're excommunicated. In grace, in love, with compassion.

And never be allowed back again. Put me off my train of thought. I'm almost tempted to pray, Father, forgive me for what I'm about to do.

[3 : 23] So the phrase, in Christ Jesus, or everything is about Christ Jesus, is something that we say, but when it actually comes to the crunch, it gets to the very heart of whether or not we are denying ourself and living for Christ, or whether or not we are living for ourself.

And that is the section that Paul has just come out of. The contrast between Paul who lives a self-denial life and those who live according with self-ambition. In other words, these people tend to speak as though it revolves around them.

And so when you listen to people address certain issues, and the main issue is always coming back to them at some point, the problem is often to do with a lack of self-denial.

Even if there's a genuine issue there, often it is a lack of self-denial. Now this is going to be even more important because as we get into the letter of Philippians, especially towards the end, there are two women in particular who cannot get on.

And the answer, of course, to them not getting on is, well, deny yourself and put Christ first, and you'll be remarkable how that will resolve itself incredibly quickly.

[4 : 40] And why do I address these things as we begin? Well, we've just come out of a section where it would be very tempting to think that a person going to prison for something that he did not do, in other words, he's put in prison, not for a crime that he has committed, that the circumstance of that prison would have changed his attitude towards Christ and would have changed his attitude towards the people that he serves.

I mean, how often have you, through the conditions of life, had your mind shaped and your heart shaped where you have been changed by the circumstance? And the question is, should we be changed by circumstances?

Now, if God is behind the circumstances, he is clearly teaching us something. But if it's simply the case that we are present within a fallen world and we are changed by them, and that change leads us away from Christ so that we don't think like Christ or live like Christ, then the question is, should we ever be changed by the circumstance?

Paul considers his imprisonment as an opportunity for advancing the gospel. It is not something that he comes in saying, it should never have happened to me.

I am in prison unlawfully. Or I am in prison and I shouldn't be. His whole demeanor and attitude towards being in prison is, hang on a minute, this is an opportunity that I would not have had if I was free.

[6 : 11] The fact that I am in prison gives me an opportunity that I would not have had if I were free from prison. Now, of course, not many of us have that type of attitude, and that attitude is only ever arrived at when you consider the things of God above your own self.

Now Paul gets onto the section where he realized that whether he lives or dies, it's all about Jesus. That whether you live or die, it's all about Jesus.

If he dies, he has a personal benefit. If he lives, you have a personal benefit. If Paul dies, it benefits him. If Paul lives, it benefits you.

And this is what Paul is saying to the church. So which would you choose? Would you choose to be with Christ? Or would you choose to serve Christ?

And that's the tension that Paul has. The tension that Paul does not have is, shall I do my own thing or shall I do the God-honoring thing?

[7 : 17] That's not his tension. The tension that Paul has is, should I die and go to be with Christ or should I live and serve Christ? And I know what it feels like to get out of bed in the morning and not feel like serving Jesus.

I'm tired. You're getting nowhere. You're fed up. And the moment those attitudes creep in, the next thing you do is, what am I going to do?

What am I going to do today? What shall I do for me? And therefore, you begin to realize that the moments those thoughts creep into your head, you are far, far, far, far away from being able to say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Well, you may be able to say to die is gain because that would be true. But you could not say, for me to live is Christ. And so this whole section here revolves around this first half of the statement because no one's going to argue with the second half.

If everyone dies in Christ, it is gain. But it is not true that if everyone lives the Christian life, it is Christ. Christ, that's not always the case, as we see in the latter part of the letter.

[8 : 36] And so we have to think about who it is that Christ is. Well, in simple terms, Christ is the one who came from the Father not to be served, but to serve.

And what he is serving is the will of God towards the people. And of course, as you know, throughout the Gospels, you know, many, many people turned away from Jesus. In fact, even when it got to the point of the cross, they all deserted him.

But he was serving them even though they didn't appreciate or necessarily understand his service because it was according to the word of God, the will of God, not according to theirs.

They very much wanted a political kingdom where they had a king on earth that could throw out the Romans and establish heaven on earth ahead of time. That'll come.

That will come. But not yet. People need to be saved. So your whole life is going to deal with this one key issue, and that is the circumstances of life will either cause you to become a certain type of person, or they will be seen as opportunities to become the person that God wants you to be and do the things that God wants you to do.

[9 : 49] And so Paul turns our attention from circumstances to living. In other words, if circumstances are an opportunity to serve the purposes of God, now, he says, your life should be a life that serves the purposes of God.

So what is it to live? What is it for you to live? Is it tablets? I've got to wake up, I've got to take my tablets.

I've got to live with this, I've got to live with that, I've got to live with this burden, I've got to live with that burden. And all of that's true. And it may never, ever go away. For some people, life just does not get any better.

It just doesn't get any better. Some people are born in hard times, they live through hard times, and they will die in hard times. For some people, life just does not get any better.

And so what have you actually got to say to a person like that? What have you actually got to offer them? Well, it must be that to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

[11 : 11] So what's the summary? Well, let's look at verse 18b. Paul says that he continues to rejoice, and then in verse 19, he explains why. The reason he's rejoicing is, number one, because his imprisonment is an opportunity for advancing the gospel, it's not a problem.

Number two, the church are praying for Paul so that at some point, by the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, it'll turn out for his deliverance. So Paul is also very hopeful in the fact that he will get out of this prison and be able to visit them again.

And Paul expects, verse 20, after hoping that he will be led out of prison, that he will be able to continue to serve Christ and honor Christ in everything that he does, whether that's in prison or out of prison.

In other words, his whole life is wrapped up with the motivation to honor Christ in life and in death. He wants to honor Christ.

And so for Paul to live really is Christ, and for Paul to die really is gain, because he either serves Christ and lives, or he dies and goes to be with Christ. If he continues in the flesh, that is, continue in this earthly life, then it is for the benefit of serving Jesus.

[12 : 32] It is for the benefit of serving others, but he cannot decide which one he wants to choose. The conflict is clear, and this is what Paul is explaining.

The tension that I feel is, it is more necessary for me to stay here with you and proclaim the gospel and see you advance in Christ Jesus, and to expend that fruitful labor towards you, but for me, it's better if I go and be with Christ.

So which shall I choose? Should I be with Christ down here so that I can serve you, or should I be with Christ up there where it's better for me? And that's the tension point that he has.

If the choice was really his, he is saying, I don't know which one I would choose. The reason why staying behind is necessary, the reason why God keeps you alive.

Think about this. If it is better for all of you to be with Christ right now than it is to live, all right, that's what Paul's saying, to die is gain. If it's better for every single one of you to die and be with Christ, if that's better, truly better for you, then why does God keep you here?

[13 : 49] Because that is truly better for others through you. And this is what Paul was saying, for me to stay alive is actually for the benefit of others.

For me to die, it serves myself. And this is the very thing that he's arguing about. It's not about me. It's about serving Christ. So we all can argue and make the point that it is better to die and be with Christ right here, right now.

But it's not better for others. Because they need the maturity that Paul brings so that they can make progress in the faith and rejoice in the same way he does even if they themselves end up in prison.

And this is what Paul is saying. So Paul knows if he goes, it benefits himself, but if he stays, it benefits those in the church here at Philippi and other churches.

So the choice is clear. Which one do I have? Which one do I want? Because I'm with Christ either way. I either die and go and be with Christ or I live and serve Christ.

[14 : 58] And that's the tension point that he has. And just to restate, the tension point is not do I do my own thing or do I serve God as it is for many of us?

The tension point is do I serve Christ while I'm alive or do I die and go and be with him? Well, let's look at the rejoicing aspect of why a man who is in prison would actually find it appropriate to rejoice.

If I was in prison, I'd probably be thinking what I did to get in there. I don't think I would purposely put myself in prison. At least I would hope not. And I'd probably be thinking, well, when am I going to get out?

But, and then I'd have to say, well, hang on a minute. If I'm truly a Christian and I'm truly going to appreciate that God could have placed me here to advance the gospel, then I look at the whole situation differently.

I may not want to leave until everyone in the prison that I am with has heard the gospel. In other words, my whole attitude changes depending on how I see things and from whose point of view.

[16 : 08] And so I begin to rejoice, not because I'm in prison, but I begin to rejoice at the opportunity that God has given me here so that the gospel can be advanced and so that other people can hear the gospel and come to faith.

And in many ways, that is a fruitful labor towards people who have never heard the gospel. Just go and tell them about Jesus. And so the rejoicing that Paul has, seems, it would seem, comes from not only the circumstances as opportunities, but also the purposes that he has in life.

In other words, what purpose do you actually serve? And I'm not getting into sort of modern psychology where it says people find their identity in what they do and if they can no longer do it anymore, they don't feel as great as what they're used to.

Or they find their identity in a particular person and when that person no longer loves them or likes them, they are filled down and dismissed.

You know, the ego is a terrible thing, isn't it? You know, we know that there's no such thing as self-esteem. I mean, even some of the top psychologists around the world now have ruled that out.

[17 : 34] Atheistic psychologists are ruling out. Ego. You know what ego is? Ego is a balloon that lives inside of you and everyone, every time someone says something great about you, you get inflated.

And if you are not filling that up constantly, it deflates and it deflates and it deflates and so you look for another sense of approval. Why do you think social media works?

Why do you think they put the thumbs up and the thumbs down on those pages? Why do you think that works? Well, because it ties in to what is known as memetic rivalry, that we love the approval of others.

In fact, Peter Thiel, this is a side note but I'll just drop it in. Peter Thiel who is one of the main financial backers of Facebook actually studied memetic rivalry under Rennie Girard.

And this is where this idea come from. Let's build a platform where people, where we feed into people's need for approval and it'll take off. And sure enough, it did.

[18 : 46] And so when we actually come to the Christian faith and we begin to understand what we're being asked to do when we live a life of self-denial and then rejoice in that, that's almost, well it is, counter-cultural to the world that we actually live within.

The purpose of life is to serve God. And any other purpose you have, however fulfilling it is, will not give you the type of rejoicing that Paul mentions here.

to serve others as Christ serves others, to use your life not to be served, not to get something, but to give something, is not only tiring and sometimes it's in an environment where it is completely unrecognized and not thanked, but God sees it all.

And for that reason, we rejoice because at the end of the day, our life is meaningful, it is purposeful, and it is beyond the deathbed. Now this is continued by Paul's words where he says that if I stay, then I benefit you.

The fruitful labor that I have is so that you can make progress, verse 25, and have joy in the faith. In other words, he recognizes that not all Christians are in the same position that he is in, and Christians need to be moved on to a place where they can recognize that their ultimate joy is in God himself, that it's not about you, it's all about Jesus.

[20 : 31] And so as I said before, it may be entirely possible for you to say to die is gain, but it may not be entirely possible for you to say honestly before God for me to live is Christ, because that's the tension point here for every single one of us.

I no longer in Christ get to look after myself. I no longer in Christ get to choose what I want to do in the future. I no longer in Christ get to choose a number of different things that I would very much like to choose.

And sometimes within the ministry, and this is not always recognized by others, and I'm not just saying this to make the point, but just to address the point more widely, that when you're in the ministry, you have far less choices than perhaps what others might have.

And sometimes God uses the circumstances to keep you in a position like prison where you'd much rather be somewhere else, but the circumstances won't allow it. Because God is so organized the circumstances in such a way where you have to stay there serving God, because that's what he wants you to do, even when you perhaps don't want to do it.

So you begin to realize that your life is very much not, sorry, very much in the control of God and not your own. And this is something to rejoice over, not to be sad over.

[22 : 04] This is something to rejoice in, not to be sad over. But that tension point for me to live is Christ is the tension point. To die is gain. I mean, how many of us, like David, go, oh, for a wings of a dove.

No, get me out of here. You have a bad day and you just want to go and do something else and live somewhere else and even be someone else. It's like the child at home who wishes they could be like their dad or like someone else that's older that has a nice job and a nice car and a nice house and has to pay lots of bills.

And then the person who is actually older who has all of those things is wondering what it would like to be back at school again. We all want to be someone else and somewhere else. None of us are really rejoicing because we're missing out on the purpose that God has given us.

And so that self-denial is not really a sense of self-denial. It is rather something quite different. So what does it mean for me to live as Christ? And there are only two points so this is the second one.

What does that actually mean? Well, hopefully you should know by now that to die is gain and that doesn't need addressing any further. But what does it mean for you to live as Christ?

[23 : 23] Paul cannot be simply speaking about his motivation. He has to be saying more than just motivation. When you actually look at how God created man, he created man in the image and likeness of God.

And of course, there is a difference between the image and likeness of God and it's a difference that we are meant to understand. In other words, man was created on earth to reflect God in heaven.

That was Adam's position on earth. That Adam was created with righteousness, with holiness, with understanding, with uprightness.

In fact, Solomon in Ecclesiastes says that in the very beginning, man was made upright. But of course, he fell into sin. But man was created with righteousness, knowledge, and holiness.

And so he reflected God on earth and was to take dominion over everything. And of course, through the generations that would follow from him, God would be reflected in the future generations as well.

[24 : 25] But Adam also had to work the land. He had to till the ground. He had to go and do some work. And this, of course, also reflected God. Because God works.

But then man fell into sin. And when man fell into sin, he no longer reflected God, not only in his attributes.

No longer was he righteous. No longer was he knowledgeable, having the knowledge of God fully. And no longer was he holy. And no longer did he work in a way that honored God.

In fact, we tend to think that when man fell into sin, that when we think the image was destroyed, that it was just these moral attributes. But actually, when man fell into sin, because part of that image is working, work no longer became a position or a point where people served God by serving others.

It became fallen so that people through work only served themselves. Everything was affected. And therefore, when Paul says, for me to live is Christ, he's not simply addressing his motivation.

[25 : 34] He must be addressing the fact that in Christ, he is a new creation. That in Christ, he is being renewed in the image and likeness of God. And in fact, in Ephesians 4.24, it says this, that the new man created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

There's the image of God, true righteousness and holiness. Colossians 3.10, this man is to put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge of God after the image of its creator.

Therefore, we're able to conclude that what does it actually mean to be made in the image of God? It means righteousness, holiness, and the knowledge of God. And therefore, when Paul says, for me to live is Christ, he's not just expressing his motivation.

He's expressing that this is the only way to reflect God on earth, who came not to be served, but to serve. And so his work is not self-centered work like it is after the fall, but his work now serves the purposes of God.

Therefore, he's able to say, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For me to stay is to benefit you, for me to go is to benefit me.

[26 : 56] And that may look like a selfish thing to do, benefit me, but he's going to be with Christ. That's hardly selfish. And so God keeps Paul where he is for the benefit of others, to reflect God on earth and to be the image towards other people.

And so whether Paul lives or dies, it's all about Jesus. It's all about Christ. Well, here's the exhortation as we close. You're going to have to make decisions every single day of your life, and some of those decisions are going to be harder than others.

But in that decision is the image of God. Will your decision reflect the righteousness, holiness, and the knowledge of God, and then be witnessed in how and what you do in this world?

Or will it be a reflection of you, that is the remaining you, that still wants your own way and have not really given yourself wholly over to God, where God is able to take control of your whole life and determine what happens with it.

When Donald MacLeod told me that I'm in no position to look after myself, I felt like telling him that he was wrong. But seeing that he was a professor for a number of years in theology, I had no place to tell him that he was wrong, especially with a good track record that he has.

[28 : 22] But can you imagine being told that it's no longer your business to look after yourself? It's God's. Your business is to serve him.

Well, that cuts at the very heart, I think, of men, perhaps more than women. Because men then have to wrestle with the fact that in God's word it tells us we have to provide, we have to look after, we have to support.

And so we constantly leave with the tension where how much of this depends on me and how much of it depends on God. Well, for men out there, let me remind you, it is not your business.

It is God's business to look after you and through you he will look after your family as he looks after them in the same way. Sometimes we think it must have been easier for Paul because he didn't have the wife or the children.

Right? Easier. Or maybe he had less to think about in that area. But it's not as if he didn't think about it at all because he's speaking to men who have wives and who have children.

[29 : 27] All of this comes down to whether or not we are being renewed in the knowledge of God. Whether or not our knowledge is of God adequate at a level whereby we can see the world the way that God wants us to see it.

To be made in the image of God means that we are less self-centered and more Christ-centered. It's all about Jesus. and therefore Paul is not struggling with should I serve myself or should I serve Christ?

He's struggling with whether he should stay or whether he should go. Either way whether in life or in death it's all about Jesus. So you need to recognize this morning as you sit here that you are the Lord's creation and you are created recreated in his image which means righteousness holiness and the knowledge of him.

And with that you are to put to death yourself so that you can say with an absolute clear conscience for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Amen.