

## Paul Speaks of His Possible Release

### Philippians 1:19-26

Philippians 1:19-26: *“For I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, **20** according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. **21** For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **22** But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. **23** For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. **24** Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. **25** And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, **26** that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”*

### Background Notes

In verse 19, Paul said, *“For I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”* What did Paul mean by the word “salvation?” He certainly couldn’t have meant the salvation of his soul, because Paul was already saved.

Some translations of the Bible use the word “deliverance” rather than the word “salvation” in verse 19. The Greek word is very much like the English word for salvation, and it can be translated either way. We can talk about our souls as having been “saved” or “delivered” from sin. We can talk about being “saved” or “delivered” from a hard situation. My students were “saved” or “delivered” from a test last week, because I decided not to give it!

Probably the apostle Paul was speaking of salvation or deliverance from some kind of trial or hardship. What would that hardship be? One very real possibility is that he was talking about his deliverance from prison. Remember, Paul was a prisoner in Rome at this time - under house arrest, and chained to a Roman guard. Read about it in Acts 28.

Paul was awaiting trial, so he may have been referring to his deliverance from prison. In view of what he said in verses 25-26, Paul was confident that he would be delivered from prison, because he would be needed to help the Philippian believers make further progress in their faith. *“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”*

In verse 26, Paul anticipated the joy and rejoicing and praise to the Lord that would take place at his release, and at his visit with his fellow believers in Philippi. What an answer to prayer! Later epistles reveal that Paul was released from this first Roman imprisonment, and did resume his missionary travels, and did visit Philippi. 1 Timothy was written after this letter to the Philippians, and in it Paul wrote to Timothy, *“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia” (1:3)*. Philippi was located in Macedonia, so this verse indicates that Paul was released from prison and was able to visit Philippi. In fact, Paul may have written the letter of 1 Timothy from Philippi.

However, let’s go back to verse 19, and another possible meaning for Paul’s “salvation” or “deliverance.” Remember, Paul had not faced trial yet, and he was concerned that he would be delivered from bringing shame upon the name of Christ. He earnestly expected and hoped that he would have sufficient courage, so that Christ would be exalted, whether by his life or by his death. *“According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (v20)*.

Paul didn’t want to flinch, or compromise, or deny Christ in any way - even if he were to be tortured at the hands of the Romans. Paul confident expected that he would be “saved from,” or “delivered from,” or “preserved from” any failure to honor Christ, either by his life or by his death. This may have been Paul’s primary thought when he used the word “salvation” or “deliverance,” but we can’t be sure.

In any case, notice that it would be the combination of the prayers of the Philippians and the operation of the Holy Spirit that would bring about Paul’s salvation or deliverance. That’s the very same way God works today. In His sovereign ways He uses difficult circumstances, He answers prayers of the saints, and the Holy Spirit is at work in every situation to bring about God’s will.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. For the spiritual Christian, to live is Christ.

Notice that the title of our Doctrinal Point does not say, “For the Christian, to live is Christ.” Why? Because the bottom-line for every Christian, unfortunately, is not *“to live is Christ.”* It *should* be the goal of all believers, and for the *spiritual* Christian, it is.

Do you want to give yourself a simple “spirituality test,” to see if you’re spiritual? Sum up in one word your bottom line for living. Is it your happiness? Is it your home? Is the one word pleasure, or money, or family? Is it success, or recreation, or travel? Is it to be pain-free? ***Or is it “Christ”?*** For the spiritual Christian, ***the one word is “Christ”!***

All the other one-word goals that I mentioned have their proper place, but the bottom line for the spiritual Christian is Christ. The apostle Paul could say, *“for me to live is Christ.”* Everything that Paul did somehow tied in to that overall purpose. Paul never did anything just for his own sheer pleasure, or for his personal happiness or material gain. Most of us don’t even come close to the spirituality of the apostle Paul. But if we want to be spiritual Christians, our aim should increasingly be *“for to me, to live is Christ.”*

Recently, Paul Westphal was fired as head coach of the Phoenix Suns. Paul Westphal is a Christian, and he has been a great testimony on and off the court. He has always made it clear that for him, basketball is not the most important thing in life. His bottom line is Christ, and the Christian faith. The fact that bottom line for him is not basketball may have cost him his job - but from his viewpoint, so what? Basketball is not the bottom line!

For the spiritual Christian, to live is Christ.

## **2. For the spiritual Christian, to die is gain.**

Paul could say, *“for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”* What did he mean by *“to die is gain?”* Paul knew that if his trial in Rome resulted in his death, he would instantly go to be with the Lord! By the way, there’s no idea of “soul sleep” here, is there? Sleep is never used in the Bible for the soul or spirit, only for the body. When a Christian dies, he or she is *“absent from the body, and present with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:8).

And what could be better? This prospect was so appealing to the apostle Paul that he said if the choice to live or die were up to him, he honestly wouldn’t know which to choose. Clearly he preferred to die, because it would be far better to be with Christ! But he reluctantly concluded that maybe he should stay around a few more years because he was still needed on earth! Verses 22-24: *“Yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”* How different from the attitude of many Christians!

What is your attitude toward death? For the spiritual Christian, to die is gain. I’ll never forget the testimony of one of my aunts who died of cancer several years ago. A wonderful Christian woman, she refused to go through expensive cancer treatments, money that the family did not have. Her attitude was that the Lord could heal her in answer to our prayers, but if not, she was ready to go. “To die is gain!” She went joyfully into the presence of the Lord. What a testimony!

For the spiritual Christian, to die is gain.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Are you ready and willing to die?

If the Lord were to choose this week to take your life, would you be ready and willing? If you're not a Christian, your answer should be "no" - because you're *not* ready. You need to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ died for your sins. Until you acknowledge that fact, and commit yourself to Him as your personal Savior, you're not ready to die. The good news is that you can become a Christian today by receiving Christ as your personal Savior.

If you are a Christian, you should be able to say, "Yes, I am willing to die this week, if that's God's will for me." Can you say that? One of our staff members at Emmaus Bible College, Liz James, went to be with the Lord a week ago. Liz was only twenty-nine, but she was ready and willing to die. In the course of her illness over the past year, many times Liz made it clear that if it was God's will to take her Home to Heaven, she was ready and willing to die. *"For me... to die is gain."*

This is a serious question. Are you ready and willing to die?

### 2. Did you ever think of your life as a lens?

A lens focuses and magnifies. Paul desired that *"Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death"* (v20). Paul wanted his body and his life to be a "lens" for Christ. When people looked at his life, Paul wanted them to see Jesus Christ, and not Paul.

Did you ever think of your life as a lens? Maybe another way to phrase it would be to ask, "Is your life a 'Bible' or a 'libel'?" A 'libel' is a statement that wrongfully defames a person, or unjustly causes people to have an unfavorable impression about a person.

Are our lives like open 'Bibles,' where people can see a truthful picture of Jesus Christ? Or are they like 'libels,' that cause people to have an unfavorable impression of Jesus Christ? Is it possible that they see a distorted image of Christ because we are "faulty lenses"?

What about our conversations? What about the ways we choose to spend most of our spare time? What about our dress? What about our mannerisms? What about what our reading materials? Our lifestyle as believers is a lens that will either magnify or distort Jesus Christ for everyone around us.

Let's not treat this question lightly. Did you ever think of your life as a lens?