

<b>Book:</b>	<i>Philippians</i>
<b>Series:</b>	<i>Rejoice in the Lord!</i>
<b>Lesson 5:</b>	<i>Facing the Unknown with Purpose</i>
<b>Text:</b>	Philippians 1:18b-26
<b>Date:</b>	September 22, 2013 (SF) October 6, 2013 (ABF)

*Colonial Hills*  
**ABF**  
*Baptist Church*

### Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

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<b>Next Lesson:</b>	Philippians 1:27-30



### TEACHING TIP

Continuing the idea from lesson 4 that Paul combatted challenges with a godly perspective, notice the perspective that he took in verses 18b-26 that allowed him to push through the unknowns:

- V. 19 — spiritual (he saw what was going on behind the scenes)
- V. 21 — worshipful (he loved Jesus with his entire being)
- V. 24 — productive (he was always concerned with bringing forth fruit)
- V. 25 — servant (he was focused on helping others spiritually)
- V. 18 — joyful (he always had a reason to choose joy)

Consider watching the following video to challenge your own heart with the two points of this lesson — [vimeo.com/38033654](https://vimeo.com/38033654).

### INTRODUCTION

**Illustration:** The story is told of a young man who was applying for a job in a New England factory. Asking for the owner, he found himself in the presence of a nervous, fidgety man who looked hopelessly depressed. “The only vacancy here,” he told the applicant, “is a vice-presidency. The man that takes the job must shoulder all my cares.”

“That’s a tough job,” said the applicant. “What’s the salary?”

“I’ll pay you ten thousand a year if you will really take over all my worries.”

“Where is the ten thousand coming from?” asked the applicant, suspiciously.

“That, my friend,” replied the owner, “is your first worry.”<sup>1</sup>

Life has so many unknown, and like that owner, we tend to worry about almost all of them. Anxiety and depression continue to be silent killers in our land, and the symptoms and side-effects of those issues are all around us.

Friend, how do *you* respond when life is difficult? Last week, we looked at the theme of challenges in Philippians 1:12-18 and learned that we needed to develop a godly perspective when confronted with them. In 1:18b-26, we build on that theme as we consider the unknowns of life. Paul doesn’t know whether he will be released or remain incarcerated, whether he will live or die, whether he will be able to visit the Philippian believers or not. Yes, Paul faced every unknown the same way—he pushed forward with his life-purpose, always unmoved, always on point. Indeed, he models an important lesson for us—*when faced with unknowns, believers must return to their purpose.*

We can get so sidetracked by what we *don’t know* in a situation, that we fail to recognize what we *do know* and what we *should do*. For Paul, the purpose of life was boiled down into two key goals, and he pursued those whether or not he knew what was ahead. When faced with unknowns, Paul returned to his purpose, and discovered that God gives great confidence to those who maintain a purpose-driven perspective, even when life maintains its question-marks!

Throughout this lesson, we’ll consider the two key life-purposes that drove Paul.

### TO EXALT AND ENJOY CHRIST (vv. 20-23)

Paul encompasses both aspects of this when he writes, “It is my eager expectation and hope that...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” (vv. 20-21). This is exactly what the ancient theologians echoed when they asked, “What is the chief end of man?” Their answer? “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul wants to exalt Christ. The word “honor” (Gk. *megaluno*) means “to cause to be held in greater esteem through praise or deeds: exalt, glorify, magnify, speak highly of.”<sup>3</sup> Like a telescope that takes what appears to be small (like a star) and enlarges it so that its great size is impressed upon the viewer, Paul wanted to make the One who was insignificant to so many much bigger in their thinking and living. He did this by preaching and practicing the gospel, thereby magnifying who Jesus is and what He has done.

Paul also wanted to enjoy Christ. “To me,” he said, “To live is Christ” (v. 21). Two verses later he employs a double superlative and states, “[To] be with Christ...is far better” (v. 23). Paul practiced what he preached in Colossians 3:1-4. He never got over the fact that he had “been raised with Christ” and that his “life is hidden with Christ in God.” He knew that “Christ...[was his] life,” and therefore He chose to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is.” As a result, He knew nothing of the vanity bemoaned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes, for He lived above the sun (not “under the sun”) in a heavenly communion. We too often “set [our] minds on things...that are on earth,” like the ancient inscription reads in the ruins of Carthage: “To laugh, to hunt, to bathe, to game—that is life.”<sup>4</sup> Paul enjoyed the Christ “in [whose] presence there is fullness of joy, [and] at [whose] right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). Without a doubt, it is such joy that he experiences in verse 18 (cf. John 15:11; 16:22, 24).

We exalt and enjoy people all the time. How do we do that with our sports heroes? With our friends?

As we look closer at these first four verses, let’s consider several dimensions of this first purpose.

**1. *The sureness of exalting and enjoying Christ (vv. 19-20) — God's promise***

Paul declares in verse 19, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” It is unlikely that Paul had in mind here his physical deliverance, for he expresses uncertainty as to whether he would live or die (v. 20). Rather, he refers to a spiritual deliverance that would enable him to exalt God in life and in death.

That spiritual deliverance in Paul's mind is apparent when we consider the following factors. First, Paul uses the Greek word *soteria* here, which is commonly rendered “salvation” throughout the New Testament, referring to Christ's spiritual work on our behalf which climaxes in eternal deliverance. Carson comments, “The assurance of *deliverance* is of the kind described in 2 Tim. 4:18, ‘The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom’”<sup>5</sup> (cf. Romans 5:9). Secondly, it is likely that Paul has the Septuagint translation of Job 13:(15-)-16 in mind here, for the Greek parallel is exact: “Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to His face. This will be my salvation [lit. “this will turn out for my deliverance”], that the godless shall not come before Him.” In his trial, Paul is claiming the same hope as Job—spiritual deliverance and vindication, when physical salvation seemed questionable.

Thirdly, Paul has already been thinking of spiritual deliverance, for he affirmed in 1:6 that “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (cf. 2:13). He now echoes that same confidence (“I know”<sup>6</sup>) here in verse 19. Finally, the very wording of verse 19 (that “this *will turn out for* my deliverance”) suggests a spiritual purpose underlying the challenge Paul is facing. Silva explains,

*It is not merely that he will be delivered, but that his adversity will result in his deliverance....The basis for Paul's encouragement is not merely that things will turn out all right in spite of the problems, but that the problems themselves assist us in our Christian experience [e.g., similar to 1:12 in which the problems actually “served to advance the gospel”].<sup>7</sup>*

How this spiritual “deliverance” relates to his purpose of exalting and enjoying Christ is seen in the next verse. He “knows...that this will turn out for [his] deliverance” (v. 19), “as it is my eager expectation and hope...that Christ will be [exalted]” (v. 20). That word “as” is better translated “according to” or “in accordance with.” Paul's confidence of “deliverance” accorded with, agreed with, and conformed to His desire that Christ would be exalted through him. In other words, complementing his goal of exalting Christ (v. 20) was God's enabling him to do so (v. 19). Thus, he describes this first purpose as his “eager expectation and hope” (i.e., confidence<sup>8</sup>), for if God provided “deliverance” than he was sure that he would be enabled to exalt and enjoy Christ “whether by life or by death.”<sup>9</sup>

The unknown and uncontrolled parts of life often sidetrack us from our great purpose to exalt Jesus Christ. When we walk merely by sight, those enigmas give us all the reason we need to be excused from our divine purpose. Indeed, challenging situations are just that—they challenge our commitment to exalt and enjoy Christ and make it more difficult to do so. Paul was sure, however, that God's purpose for Him could still be fulfilled, even when his flesh sought relief and his mind offered him excuses. His confidence was grounded in God's promise of a spiritual and eternal deliverance, even now being accomplished through his trial. Therefore, in “life” he was enabled to chose exalting and enjoying Christ, and in “death” he would experience the climax of that purpose. How, then, Paul seems to be suggesting, could this purpose possibly be unfulfilled?

**Application:** Motyer begins our application here,

*The Christian need never fear the outcome of events. Life brings (as we say) its daily pressures. Many of them are unexpected; often they seem uncalled-for; from time to time they are traceable to the malignity of wicked people....But God is over all, and there is no point in believing in a sovereign God if he can be tumbled off the throne by human or satanic agency! Philippians 1:6 tells us about this God, beginning, completing, and purposing to finish his good work in and for us. Romans 8:28 tells us about our personal history in which 'in everything God works for good'. Paul takes and accepts this great and comforting truth in a precise and unpleasant period of his life.<sup>10</sup>*

Believer, we must claim the truth of the entire context of Romans 8:28-30. God is working “all things” together “for good...according to His purpose,” which is that we would “be conformed to the image of His Son” that He might receive glory (i.e., “be the firstborn among many brothers”). Do you feel weak in your resolve or insufficient in your ability to accomplish such a Christ-centered purpose? Do you despise the challenges you’re facing and see them as unconquerable obstacles that defy your purpose? That is not at all the perspective or the plan of God. He intends for your struggle in some way to result in and accomplish your deliverance, thereby enabling you to exalt and enjoy Christ in new ways. So, meditate on the promises of God, on His covenant of deliverance, on stories of His accomplishments in the face of overwhelming difficulty, on the glories that await those who do not falter. Ask Him to accomplish His paradoxical purpose of using your physical weakness and difficulty to deliver you from spiritual weakness and difficulty. Be assured, believer, that God’s spiritual deliverance through Jesus Christ both guarantees and will enable your accomplishment of this grand purpose to exalt and enjoy Christ.

Let’s conclude this point with two questions—one question of review and one question of response.

*Question of Review* — How can we be assured with “eager expectation and hope” that Christ will be exalted and enjoyed in our lives or in our deaths? Our confidence rests in the promise of God to accomplish spiritual deliverance in the midst of our physical adversity, which deliverance enables us to actively accomplish this purpose.

*Question of Response* — What sinful thoughts, perspectives, or distractions do you need deliverance from in the midst of your physical suffering in order for Christ to be exalted and enjoyed by you? What promises of God do you need to rehearse (2 Peter 1:12-13; 3:1-2) in order to assure your confidence in God’s enabling deliverance? Turn from those sinful responses to the deliverance that God has promised, so that Christ might be “[magnified] in [your] body, whether by life or by death.”

## **2. *The strength for exalting and enjoying Christ (v. 19) —the believers’ prayers & the Spirit’s provision***

The middle part of verse 19 describes how God’s deliverance was mediated to Paul. He knew that his present circumstances would give way to “deliverance” “through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” This, then, was the means by which Paul would experience Christ’s deliverance and be strengthened to fulfill His purpose of exalting and enjoying Jesus.

Paul himself had prayed for God’s work within these believers (vv. 4, 9-11), and now he is soliciting their similar prayers on his behalf. They both need their challenges to “turn out for their deliverance” so that they are spiritually equipped to exalt and enjoy Christ, and so they both need to be praying that way for each other. Several other biblical texts (in addition to the emphasis already discovered in Philippians 1:4, 9-11, 19) draw this connection between an

individual's spiritual deliverance and the prayers of his brothers and sisters for such deliverance.

2 Corinthians 1:10-11 — *[God] delivered us from so great a peril of death...and He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.*

Romans 15:30-31 — *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea.*

Ephesians 6:18-20 — *Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:25) — *Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men....But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one....May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ."*

Back in our verse, the way these two phrases are connected suggests that the latter (i.e., the "help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ") is in response to the former (i.e., "your prayers"). James states that "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (5:16). Our passage indicates just how much! Paul rejoices that the answer to the Philippian believers' prayers was "the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

This word "help" (or "supply") is used only a handful of times throughout the New Testament in its verb and noun forms. In Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19, it refers to the mutual "support" the body renders to itself. The word itself was drawn from the Athenian drama festivals in which wealthy sponsors (Gk. *choregi*; "help" is *epichoregia*) would generously fund the expenses of the drama choruses.<sup>11</sup> This passage depicts the Spirit as our *choregos* or sponsor who lavishly supplies the praying believer with whatever spiritual resources are needed in a particular situation.

Scripture teaches that God not only grants "us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) through the ministry of the Spirit, but also gives us the Spirit Himself as our supply. Jesus encouraged us, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13; cf. Galatians 3:5).

He is called here "the Spirit of Jesus Christ," because the generously supply of the provision and presence of the Holy Spirit in us was secured for us by the saving work of Jesus Christ. Jesus also prayed for the "help of the Spirit" for His people (John 14:16-17), and we should do so as well. "As Paul sat in Roman custody he was confident that as the Philippians prayed, fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ would be poured into his heart, empowering him for every trial and securing his ultimate deliverance."<sup>12</sup>

**Application:** There is both mystery and a challenge in this verse. Regarding mystery, in 1:3-11, we saw that God will "bring...to completion" the "good work" He started, and yet Paul prayed that He would do so; here, Paul knows that his deliverance is guaranteed by God, and yet in some way it depends upon the prayers of these believers. How God's work and ours relate to each other is sometimes difficult for us to understand, but the presence of such

mystery doesn't negate the challenge of this passage—we must pray for the spiritual deliverance of one another, so that even in the midst of physical pressure we might accomplish our purpose of exalting and enjoying Christ.

Consider a couple commentators who drive home this application:

*We have an obligation to put one another's spiritual growth in the very forefront of our prayers, and to take the responsibility very seriously. Paul even sensitively suggests that the sufficient supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ for my brother or sister in Christ depends directly on my prayer for them, and that failing my prayer the supply will dry up also.*<sup>13</sup>

*The point to note here, however, is that even Paul's personal growth—his sanctification—does not take place in isolation from the support of the church. It is indeed a sobering thought that our spiritual relationship with God is not a purely individualistic concern; we are dependent on the Spirit's power in answer to the intercessory prayers of God's people....The godly Ignatius, early bishop of Antioch, learned this lesson well, as we can tell from his comment to the church in Philadelphia as he was on his way to martyrdom: "your prayer will perfect me."*<sup>14</sup>

What believers in your local church are you being impressed to start praying for on a regular basis, asking God to perfect His character within them (vv. 9-11) and spiritually deliver them through the Spirit's help (v. 19)? How will you go about doing that? Using Galatians 5:22-23, what aspects of God's deliverance do you need to start praying for them, in order that Christ might be exalted and enjoyed in their life?

### **3. *The spirit of exalting and enjoying Christ (v. 20) — unashamed power***

Paul's confidence was that through the deliverance of God, he would magnify Christ without any "shame," but "with full courage" even in suffering. The previous two points naturally form the foundation for this one. Since we are assured of God's promised spiritual deliverance in the midst of physical challenges, since such deliverance enables us to accomplish our purpose, since the prayers of believers for us are answered by the abundant supply of the Holy Spirit—then we have confidence that God's purpose will be accomplished in us with unashamed power (cf. the connection between "the power of His resurrection" and "the fellowship of His sufferings" in 3:10-11, KJV).

That is the point of the passive voice of the verb—"Christ will be honored," not "I will honor Christ." "The apostle was not relying on his own courage, but on the action of the Holy Spirit who would produce this result in response to the prayers of Paul and the Philippians."<sup>15</sup> Paul's confidence here rests on such promissory passages as Romans 10:11, 1 Peter 1:5, and Jude 24.

So, while some would rush to the applications of "You should magnify Christ," "You should not be ashamed," and "You should have full courage," we are wise to recognize that Paul isn't directly making that application. Instead, because He is claiming God's promise of deliverance in answer to the prayers of His people and through the help of His Spirit, Paul confidently affirms that he "*will not*" be ashamed and that "*Christ will be honored in [his] body*" (italics added for emphasis). So, this is simply a continuation of the sureness of our first point, begun in verse 19.

**Illustration:** We see this dynamic vividly play out in the life of another servant of God, even when that servant was not thinking as confidently as Paul. In Jeremiah 1:17, God warns Jeremiah, saying, “Do not be dismayed by [those who fight against you (v. 19)], lest I dismay you before them.” In Jeremiah 20, we read an account of such a fight against Jeremiah at the hands of Pashhur. After that conflict, Jeremiah begins to complain against God and seemingly demonstrate “dismay” before His enemies (vv. 7-8). We read this complaint, and expect to see God “dismay” Jeremiah, as He promised. Instead, in verse 9 we read, “If I say, ‘I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name’ [i.e., “I’m throwing in the towel, I will not do what You’ve called me to, I am choosing to be dismayed and ashamed before Your enemies”], there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” Jeremiah is experiencing the gracious power of God to keep him from being ashamed, even when Jeremiah himself is acting ashamed.

Praise God that what He starts, He really does finish (1:6)! Paul so believed in that truth, that with God as His deliverer and helper (v. 19), He was confident that God’s purpose *would be* fulfilled in His life and that Christ *would be* unashamedly and boldly magnified. Jeremiah colorfully illustrates what Paul undoubtedly experienced at times—even when we feel ashamed and are tempted to stay there, discouraged by the fear of man, defeated by our own failures, and disillusioned by the difficulty of God’s calling, our gracious God will deliver us *through* our challenges and enable us to magnify Him with unashamed power.

Now, with that understanding grounding our perspective, we intuitively know that we must cooperate. We must avoid shame and choose boldness.<sup>16</sup> Yes, we must pray for unashamed power (Acts 4:29), even as we claim God’s

promise to answer that. But, we then must cooperate with God’s work within us by unashamedly and boldly pursuing Christ. Paul didn’t wait until He felt unashamed and bold before he worked to exalt and enjoy Christ. He knew that in Christ, he only had deliverance (v. 19), and so there was nothing to be ashamed of and everything to be bold about (cf. Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 3:12; 10:8; 1 Peter 3:16; 4:16), even in the midst of suffering. Therefore, Paul sought to live in such a way that he would not be put to shame in how Christian confession here and now. Living in this way, then, he also ensured (as will we) that he would “have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

Finally, tying back into our overarching theme of “rejoicing in the Lord,” we discover both back in verse 18b and in Romans 5:3-5, that pursuing Christ in such unashamed power even in suffering results in the grounding of our joy.

*We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

**Application:** What is sapping you of power, robbing you of joy, and filling you with shame in your pursuit of Jesus Christ? What do you need to “purify” in your life (cf. 1 John 2:28-3:3), in order that with unashamed power exalt and enjoy Jesus? How do you need to change your thinking in order that your spirit in pursuing Christ might be one of unashamed power, even when challenged?

4. ***The scope of exalting and enjoying Christ (v. 20) — a consuming passion***

Two phrases express Paul’s understanding of the scope or extent of his exalting and enjoying Jesus. First, “now as always” indicates that this was something Paul had made plans to do. It didn’t happen accidentally or haphazardly (although even when we aren’t working out our own salvation very diligently, Christ is still working in us—1:6; 2:13). It was something that Paul had worked at, something he habitually thought about, something he regularly planned to accomplish. Because of that, it was something that had become characteristic of his life. People knew that he was “legit,” that what he was concerned about now had “always” been his concern.

**Illustration:** When describing a recent believer who undeniably radiates the life of Christ, we sometimes say, “So-and-so didn’t just get saved; he *really* got saved.” That odd way of describing the individual simply acknowledges what Paul affirms of himself here—that ever since day 1 of his life in Christ, he has been devoted to exalting and enjoying Christ.

The second phrase is “whether by life or by death.” Paul simply expresses that to the very extremes of human existence, his ambition was that Christ would be enlarged for people. Clearly, then, Paul’s consuming passion was that whether he was living or dying, Christ would be exalted.

Our church has recently seen Christ enlarged in death. In whose “life” have you seen Christ magnified?

**Application:** Is exalting and enjoying Christ the habitual practice of your life? How might you evaluate whether it is or not?

5. ***The sphere of exalting and enjoying Christ (v. 20) — our person***

The phrase, “in my body,” describes the sphere in which Paul exalted Jesus. “In effect he confidently said, ‘My body will be the theatre in which Christ’s glory is displayed’ (Ellicott).”<sup>17</sup> We cannot overlook the raw physicality of this expression (cf. Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:19). “Paul knew that Christian commitment cannot happen apart from the body. In fact, Christian growth requires a focus on the body as the vehicle of expression of the true person....The person is intimately connected to the body, and Paul easily localized Christian commitment in the physical parts of his body.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, this expression helpfully returns to our Christian living a necessary concern for the external manifestation. For Paul, this was very literal (2 Corinthians 4:10).

**Application:** Do you merely talk about exalting and enjoying Christ, or do you actually do it “in [your] body,” by how you think, what you say, how you live?

6. ***The secret of exalting and enjoying Christ (vv. 21, 23) — our priority***

In verse 21, Paul gets to the heart of this purpose statement by showing how exalting Christ and enjoying Christ relate to each other. He is confident that “Christ will be [magnified] in [his] body,” because, he says, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Simply put, then, we could say based on Paul’s example here, that Christ is exalted when He is enjoyed.

The language of verses 21 and 23 betray the loving affection this apostle had for His Lord (cf. 3:7-14). MacArthur remarks,



*Paul fully understood that wealth, power, influence, possessions, prestige, social standing, good health, business or professional success, and all other such things are transitory. Many acknowledge that truth, but not many live as if it is true. Few can say with Paul's utter sincerity to me, 'To live is Christ and to die is gain.'*

*The apostle's very being was wrapped up in his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He trusted, loved, served, witnessed for, and in every way was devoted to and dependent on Him. His only hope, his only purpose, his only reason to live was Christ. He traveled for Christ, preached for Christ, and was persecuted and imprisoned for Christ. Ultimately, he would die for Christ. But even death, by God's marvelous grace, was ultimately for Paul's eternal gain.<sup>19</sup>*

**Illustration:** Lou Holtz once said, "There will be one thing that will dominate your life. I strongly suggest it be something you can be proud of." While this is noble advice, it's insufficient. Many people live dominated by something they can be proud of—career, family, hobbies, community, etc.—but death can give them no more of those things.

Paul, however, lived for something (indeed Someone) that death would give him more of (v. 23; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:8), and so death was actually "gain" (v. 21). For Paul, if "Christ was his life," then death held no fear, no shame, no sense of disappointment. Instead, the sequel to his full and satisfied life would simply be a full and satisfied death, enjoying Christ "unveiled" (cf. 2 Corinthians 3-4) for all of eternity.

So, what is the secret to exalting Christ? Verses 21 and 23 teach us that Christ will be exalted inasmuch as He is enjoyed. Or, in the words of a contemporary Jesus-

follower, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."<sup>20</sup>

**Application:** "Philippians 1:21 becomes a valuable test of our lives. 'For to me to live is \_\_\_\_\_ and to die is \_\_\_\_\_.' Fill in the blanks yourself. 'For to me to live is *money* and to die is *to leave it all behind.*' 'For to me to live is *fame* and to die is *to be forgotten.*' 'For to me to live is *power* and to die is *to lose it all.*'"<sup>21</sup>

If Jesus Christ is not at the center of those blanks, then you will never face the unknowns with confidence. The unknowns and challenges of life are the very tools that God uses to deepen our satisfaction in Christ (cf. 3:7-11). Are you "tasting and seeing that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8)?

We must cultivate a relationship with Christ. We must become His disciples following Him constantly in order to know Him, love Him, and enjoy Him. We must do the spiritual math with Paul, by faith, and whatever gain we have, count it as loss for the sake of Christ, because of the surpassing worth<sup>22</sup> of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (3:7-8). Christ has made us His own; now, we must make Him our own (3:12). Never stop straining, never stop pressing, never stop holding on to Christ (3:13-14, 16).

**Transition:** In the midst of life's unknowns, we should seek to make Christ known. That is the first purpose to which we should return when faced with the obscure uncertainties of life. Paul models a second purpose for us in verses 24-26.

## TO HELP AND HEARTEN CHRISTIANS (vv. 24-26)

In Philippians 2:20-21, Paul draws an unmistakable connection between seeking the interests of Jesus Christ and being genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. He illustrates that connection here. Paul is infatuated with Christ, heaven-bent on enjoying and exalting Him, and yet he begins to realize that that path will first lead him through ministry to others. Thus, while he states initially that he doesn't know what he prefers (i.e., "which I shall choose I cannot tell," v. 22)—dying and being with Christ, or living and helping fellow Christians—he almost immediately lands on the side of ministry to people. So, part of the way in which we fulfill the first purpose is by fulfilling this second purpose.

According to verses 24-25, Paul he was "convinced" that "remaining in the flesh" "on the account" of the Philippian believers was "more necessary." Knowing that, he discerned that God's will would be for him to "remain and continue with you all" (i.e., his love was "in knowledge and all discernment," v. 9), and he gladly submitted to it. He didn't follow his heart, demand that he deserved something, or fight for his preferences; rather, he willingly sacrificed them for the benefit and needs of others, even when the decision "pressed him hard" or "distressed/torched" (lit. cf. Luke 12:50) him.

Paul desired to serve his fellow-believers in the following ways, which would indeed be "fruitful labor" (v. 22):

### 1. *Progress (i.e., grow) in the faith (v. 25) — help*

Paul wanted to help the gospel "progress" within them, the same way it was "advancing" (same word) among the imperial guard. He wanted gospel fruit back in Philippi! He wanted to see the gospel "bearing fruit and increasing" (Colossians 1:6) within them. He wanted to engage in ministry among them that would cultivate such growth (1 Timothy 3:16-17).

### 2. *Rejoice in the faith (v. 25) — hearten*

Paul wanted to help the Philippian believers have the same perspective on life and challenges that he had (cf. vv. 12-18), so that, like him, they could chose joy (v. 18).

### 3. *Glory in Christ (v. 26) — honor*

Paul's desire for this "fruitful labor" (v. 22) among the Philippians was certainly not self-serving. Rather, his motivation was grounded in His desire to exalt and enjoy Jesus. He says that his motivation in ministering to them was "so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again." In this way, then, Christ would indeed be magnified in his body (cf. Galatians 1:24), and the Philippian believers would be engaged themselves in exalting and enjoying Jesus.

**Application:** Paul made the conscious choice to exalt and enjoy Christ by helping and heartening people. Have you? Even when it's difficult, can you affirm to your brothers and sisters that you will "remain and continue with them for their progress and joy in the faith"?

Many of us aren't even thinking about "longing to be with Christ," because we're too focused on idols and too unconcerned about people. In contrast, Paul could bring to mind certain faces and specific names that were causing his stay on earth to be a little longer than He would have desired. Paul saw everything about life through the lens of gospel-ministry. If he wasn't dead yet, it was because there were other people that God wanted him to help and hearten. Fellow-believer, who are those people in your life? Who is God making you "remain and continue with"? Are you doing so, "for their progress and joy in the faith"? Or have you been so distracted and so disengaged that you haven't contributed at all to their deliverance (v. 19)? God has not left you here to become a better athlete, a more successful businessman, a more accomplished student, the world's best mom, etc. God desires for your priority on Him to be expressed in your priority on people.

## CONCLUSION

When faced with unknowns, believers must return to their purpose—exalting and enjoying Jesus, and helping and heartening Christians. Such a purpose-driven perspective is the pathway to confidence, peace, and joy even when life is a question-mark.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism

<sup>3</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 623.

<sup>4</sup> Hastings, ed., *The Speaker's Bible*, Vol. 16, p. 38. Quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 59.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994). Also, “Paul viewed salvation as having several aspects—past (Eph 2:8), present (Philippians 2:12), and future (Rom 13:11). Here the

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present and future aspects may be fused into one as the apostle looks to the unfolding of his Christian life and his ultimate hope of standing unashamed both before human judges and before his Lord (cf. v. 20)” (Homer A. Kent Jr., “Philippians,” ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981], 114).

<sup>6</sup> “*Oida* (**know**) means to know something with certainty” (John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 2001], 72).

<sup>7</sup> Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> The word for “eager expectation” literally refers to stretching the neck, as if someone is straining to see something. Like its only other usage in Romans 8:19, this expectant hope is grounded in what God has promised.

<sup>9</sup> For a wonderful biblical parallel, consider Psalm 34:4-7. In that passage, David meditates, “I sought the Lord, and He answered me and delivered me from *all* my fears.... This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of *all* his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and *delivers* them” (italics added for emphasis). David writes this, although he still faced many a physical difficulty, but his confidence in God’s promise of a spiritual and eternal deliverance provided him with an “eager expectation and hope” that God would still be exalted (Psalm 34:1-3) and enjoyed (Psalm 34:8-10).

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 84.

<sup>11</sup> “The word *epichorēgō*, *add*, is a fascinating one. It is a vivid metaphor drawn from the Athenian drama festivals, in which a rich individual, called the *chorēgos*, since he paid the expenses of the chorus, joined with the poet and the state in putting on the plays. This could be an expensive business, and yet *chorēgí* vied with one another in the generosity of their equipment and training of the choruses. Thus the word came to mean generous and costly co-operation” (Michael Green, vol. 18, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], 86).

<sup>12</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 57.

<sup>13</sup> Motyer, 85.

<sup>14</sup> Silva, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Kent Jr., 114.

<sup>16</sup> “First, it is a determination to keep his conscience clear—that *I shall not be at all ashamed* (verse 20). Second, he is determined to maintain a plain, full testimony with confidence and courage. The word which rsv translates as *courage* (*parrēsia*) means boldness of speech as often as it means confidence of demeanour, and on a number of occasions is best served, as here, by allowing both senses to play their part” (Motyer, 86).

<sup>17</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 32. Quoted in Hughes, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 84.

<sup>19</sup> MacArthur, 76–77.

<sup>20</sup> John Piper and Desiring God Ministries

<sup>21</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> **Illustration:** When you have tasted or used the “real thing,” it’s hard to settle for the cheap, imitation products.