

CIT: Paul's greatest desire was for Christ to be magnified by faithful gospel proclamation and church edification, regardless the cost.

CPS: Christian, your life's great obsession should be for Christ to be made famous through your gospel witness and investment in the church.

In the early 90s there was a movie called "City Slickers." For those of you who remember it, that was about 30 years ago. In the movie there is a line that is almost standard for comedies. Billy Crystal's character is talking about how crazy the cattle drive boss is, the boss who is about to lead him and his friends on an adventure experience of driving cattle. As he is talking about how crazy the boss is, his friends get really big eyes. Crystal asks, "He's standing behind me, isn't he?" When this line is used in these movies, it becomes clear that the characters saying it would not have said the things they were saying if they knew they were in the presence of the other person.

In this season we are in, everyone seems to have a position on politics, on epidemiology, on who is proper authority, and people are very eager to share their views on these matters. I understand why? But what if our governor, or our president, were to invite you personally to share your thoughts on these highly pressing matters, would you share them in the same way? Would you continue to hold them? More importantly, would that be all you do? Would there be nothing else you share? As I have been reading positions people hold, positions that even differ within this church, I keep hoping that what we say and how we say it are anchored in the good news of Christ Jesus and in the full revelation of Scripture. Regarding that hypothetical situation, it wasn't hypothetical for Paul in today's passage. Paul was about to have a final Roman verdict rendered for him, one that would result in either release from prison or result in death. He was there because he kept making a statement in the social media outlets of his day. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead according to Scripture. Paul was now going to appear before either Caesar or another high-ranking Roman official. Would Paul persist in making the same statement he made in the public squares of Judea, Asia Minor, and Macedonia? He's now going before the highest ranking human being in any government during his day. Would he have the same message with the same boldness?

Philippians 1:18c-26

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and

continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

1) Making Christ Jesus famous should be our joyful **obsession**. (18c-20)

Is that wording too strong for you? Understand that I'm not talking about mindless fanaticism. If you want to see that kind of fanaticism, go watch people NFL draft watching videos. Paul was highly educated, sound in his reasoning, able to relate to those in high positions of authority and to those that were the least privileged in a city. When confronted for why he believed as he did, he was able to present arguments from Scripture and theology that a multitude of PhD dissertations have been written on. When I say that Paul was obsessed with making known the fame of Christ Jesus, it is because Paul rightly believed that Jesus was Lord and God with proof being hinged on the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus is the resurrected Messiah, he changes the lives of all who come to know him. In coming to know him and delight in Him, his followers must proclaim the truth of the gospel.

a. Paul was in this situation because of Christ and for the glory of Christ

Because Paul proclaimed the gospel and because the Spirit of God led him to consistent obedience to Jesus, he would not deny and stop spreading the fame of Christ the Lord.

But now Paul appeals to the Philippians to pray for him in a similar manner to how he has been praying for them. He wants them to pray for his deliverance, or as some translations have, his salvation. There are a few basic views as to what this deliverance could mean. One view is that Paul is asking for deliverance from prison, but the following verses go against that idea. Another view is that Paul is focused on the final judgment before God, but that view doesn't seem to line up. The third view is that Paul is focused on bearing testimony before God but the salvation he is hoping for is a testimony before Caesar with integrity. Read vs. 20 with me again.

What Paul desired was not release from prison or salvation from death. He wanted to proclaim the gospel to the emperor (or other high authority) freely and boldly. He actually quotes Job in v. 19. Like Job, Paul's not concerned with the judgment of other mere mortals, even those considered great. His concern is twofold: 1) God is His judge and 2) He desired to deliver his testimony with integrity and faithfulness.

Christian, you are to live for the fame of Christ. His new life should dwell in you by the Spirit of God who leads you to proclaim this good news in all aspects of life, to proclaim this gospel to your neighbors for their salvation, and display this new life through your transformed character in love.

To be consistent like Paul in this regard, we need the prayer of fellow believers to follow through in being gospel witnesses. Your prayers don't twist God's arm. God reaches out and calls forth your prayers on behalf of your fellow believers. He wants to use your prayers in the lives of your fellow believers. Pray for our church's people to proclaim the gospel in boldness, in love, and with integrity. Pray that God would work in all of us by the Holy Spirit to be such witnesses and that people would come to faith in Christ. One tool that you can use for such prayers is

www.blesseveryhome.com. So far, our church has 14 people signed up to be lights to their communities, to pray for 40 neighbors. Since those 14 have signed up, 250 households have been prayed for. But there are less than a handful of those household that have had gospel conversations with people of our church. Frankly, that's too low. May I be so bold as to say that one reason that we are not sharing the gospel more is that we are not praying for one another in our gospel outreach. Please check out www.blesseveryhome.com and whether you use that tool or not, we need you to pray for our church to share the gospel with boldness.

Perhaps you are concerned about how people will receive you in your effort to share the gospel.

God is greater than the great of this world; we should honor Him before them.

Paul knew he was innocent of any wrongdoing in sharing the gospel. He also knew that God is the ultimate authority in his situation. The One Paul saw himself as standing before in his tribunal is the Lord God, not Caesar. First, Caesar can only render judgment God allows and directs for God's purposes. Second, the judgment that Paul really cared about was whether God approved of him and his faithfulness to proclaim Christ. Care more about what God thinks of you than what others think of you.

2) For you to live should be Christ and to die gain. Is it true about you?

Paul uses this great life motto to start a comparison of his two outcomes. Paul made a beautiful, bold, and succinct life statement for himself as a model for the church at Philippi.

The theme for this sermon series through Philippians is Humble and United for the Gospel. If we held up the banners of humility and unity but not gospel, those banners would be pointless. It is the gospel that leads us to humble unity, and it is the gospel that leads us to press toward humble unity. To live is Christ.

Paul didn't even use a word that we translate "is." For him to live was simply "Christ." To live—Christ. This doesn't appear to be an existential statement but a mission statement. If I am to live after Caesar or some other high-ranking Roman authority gives his verdict, then I am going to go about declaring Jesus's fame and renown. Period. We'll discuss in a little bit how Paul was going to do that. To live is Christ. To die is gain.

Let's clarify what Paul meant by death being gain. You should only declare death to be gain if you have submitted your life to Christ. Paul is not promoting a martyr victim complex but a true martyr life. The word martyr actually means witness. It is often associated with death because so many faithful witnesses have testified to Jesus even at the greatest cost. So on't go out looking to die. Go out looking to live for Christ. Paul is just about to argue before the Philippians why you should go out looking to live for Christ.

But once our part in Christ's mission is over, we get to be with Christ without hindrance, if we truly belong to him. This statement is able to be voiced by those who are living for Christ. This doesn't mean that you need to be like a lion roaring. I know of a dear sister in Christ who went

home to be with the Lord this past week. She served Christ through serving her church and the children of that church, consistently finding ways to point those little ones to Jesus without ever complaining, even as she endured two different rounds of cancer. She was reserved in many ways but not reserved in hospitality, love, and teaching little ones about Jesus and why he had to come, die on the cross, and raise again. For her in her last days when the cancer was taking away her energy and abilities, did she know that it would be better for her personally to just go home and be with Christ? Yes, but she also knew it was more beneficial to use her remaining days to encourage her husband and son and encourage her church family, for the sake of honoring Christ.

- 3) Choose to spend your life encouraging fellow believers in gospel living and gospel outreach. (23–26)

Paul had different options before him. He knew that he could appeal to the God of the whole universe to give him one of the two options. He knew that he could sway his trial with Caesar in different ways.

Option 1 was to deny Christ and just be set free from Roman imprisonment. That option was off the table for Paul. As a follower of Christ, that option is off the table for you as well. But make sure that what you say and do lines up with the truth of Christ.

Option 2 was to acknowledge Christ as Lord in such a way that influenced Caesar to call for his execution. Option 2 would mean that Paul would then get to be with Christ in an unhindered way sooner. For him personally, it would be “much more better.” BTW, Paul’s issue is not with the human body. We are supposed to live as physical and spiritual beings who worship the Lord with our spirit and body. Paul is acknowledging that God wants us to hope for what is still to come and so does not give us the fullness of relationship in the here and now. Paul is saying, I’m looking forward to that next step of enjoying Christ more. So, option 2 may carry personal experiential benefits but not benefit the rest of the church.

Option 3 was to declare the truth of Christ and appeal to Caesar to believe, neither denying the gospel nor intentionally insulting him. Option 3 would postpone his expected time of walking closer with Jesus but would open the door for further maturation and care of the church. Paul valued the faith and growth of his fellow believers over his own personal benefits. So he writes that he wants to be the reason the Philippians boast in Christ. Paul is not being arrogant. He is taking a realistic view of his track record. Jesus had met him on the Damascus road, called him to such ministry, and had led him throughout the Mediterranean region planting and maturing churches. If you were to take an honest evaluation of your life, could you say that you have been an encouragement to the church, that you have been a reason for others to boast all the more in Christ? If the answer is yes, praise God, stay humble, and keep doing it. If the answer is no, then appeal to the Judge over the universe to lead you into repentance, to lead you into service, to lead you to enjoy Christ all the more as you care for his church.

You have some options before you. First, if you have never come to faith in Christ and experienced the new life that the God of the Universe brings, then God is putting before you the choice of new life or remaining in spiritual death.

If you are a professing believer Christ, you need to question what your life obsession and pursuit are. Is your life motto, “To live is personal gain, to die is to lose it all”? Or is your life motto, “To live is Christ, to die is gain”? If you can say that along with Paul, you’re not worried if Jesus is standing behind you when you make your statement. If to live is Christ, it is because He is always before you. Live your life constantly before the Lord of all with his fame being your one obsession. May you go about your day and week in love, truth, wisdom, and integrity as witnesses for Christ.