

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

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CHOICE

OF PAUL

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# THE BEST CHOICE OF PAUL

In [Philippians 1:21](#) Paul says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” In this verse there is a contrast between Christ and gain. Some may think that the gain here refers to Christ. Although in a sense it may refer to Christ, it refers to Christ in a different way, not to the Christ we experience by living Him. In a practical way, the gain in [verse 21](#) is the presence of Christ. When Paul said, “To die is gain,” he meant that to die is to enjoy Christ’s presence in a better way. In [verse 23](#) Paul says that his desire is to depart and to be with Christ. To be with Christ is a matter of degree, not of place. While Paul was desiring to be with Christ in a higher degree, he was already with Him continually. Through his physical death, he would be with Christ to a fuller extent than he enjoyed in this earthly life.

When Paul was in prison, he enjoyed Christ and experienced Him in two ways. One way was to enjoy the presence of Christ, and the other way was to live Christ. There is a vast difference between enjoying the presence of Christ and living Christ. For example, I may enjoy my wife’s

presence, but I cannot live her. By this we see that we may enjoy a person's presence without living that person. Paul not only enjoyed the Lord's presence, but he also lived Him. He knew that when he died he would have no further opportunity to live Christ, but he would enter into a higher enjoyment of the presence of Christ. Therefore, to die would be gain. What Paul valued was not only the presence of Christ, but also the opportunity to live Him.

The concept of practicing the presence of God is mainly an Old Testament concept, not a New Testament one. Yes, according to the New Testament, we may enjoy the Lord's presence on the one hand. But, on the other hand, we should practice living Him. We have not only the Lord's presence, but we also have His Person. Not only do we need to be in His presence; we also need to be one person with Him and live Him. To live Christ is a much deeper experience than simply to be in His presence. Living Him goes far beyond the enjoyment of His presence.

Do you intend just to practice the presence of Christ, or is it your desire also to live Christ? To live the Lord is even better than to be with the Lord. Yes, it is a gain to die and be with the Lord in a greater degree than on earth. But it is even

better to live Him while we are on earth. Probably you have thanked the Lord for His presence, but have you ever thanked Him for the experience of living Him? It is easy for us to thank the Lord for the sweetness and loveliness of His presence. Many have the habit of doing this. Sometimes when I am about to utter such a thanksgiving to the Lord, I have the conviction within that I am simply following an Old Testament practice. I am then reminded of my need to live Christ. [First Corinthians 6:17](#) says, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” We are one spirit with the Lord not only that we may enjoy His presence, but even more that we may live Him.

There certainly is a difference in [Philippians 1:21](#) between living Christ and gaining a greater degree of His presence. I can testify that my preference is to live Christ and not just to gain a greater degree of His presence.

## FRUIT FROM WORK

In [Philippians 1:22](#) Paul goes on to say, “But if to live in the flesh, this to me is fruit from work, and what I shall choose I cannot tell.” Paul’s use of the word fruit indicates that his work was actually his living. When Paul wrote to the Philippians,

he was living in prison; he was not working. This indicates that his living was his work. From such a living work, fruit would come forth. The fruit of this work was Christ lived out, magnified, and ministered to others. The fruit of Paul's work was thus the transfusion of Christ into others. Therefore, the fruit of work in [verse 22](#) is the issue, the result, of Paul's living in prison.

Paul's living work was to minister Christ to others and to transfuse the Christ he magnified into them. As far as Paul was concerned, to die was to gain, but to live was to carry on such a living and fruitful work. It was difficult for him to choose between the two. This was the reason he said, "What I shall choose I cannot tell." If you had to choose between the gain which comes from dying physically and the fruit which comes from a living work, what would be your choice? I would definitely prefer to live in the flesh in order to carry on the living work of magnifying Christ and transfusing Him into others.

## PAUL'S DESIRE TO BE WITH CHRIST

[Verse 23](#) says, "But I am constrained by the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for it rather is much better." When Paul wrote these words, he was in bonds suffering

mistreatment. Under those circumstances, we would expect him to long to be with Christ. Any believer in Paul's situation would have the same desire.

We have indicated that to be with Christ is a matter of degree, not of place. No doubt, Paul was with Christ in prison. The fact that he was already with Christ indicates that being with Christ is not a matter of place. But although Paul was with Christ to a certain degree, he desired to be with Him in a higher degree. Paul knew that as a result of physical death he would be with Christ to a greater extent than in his earthly life. For this reason, he could desire to depart and to be with Christ, regarding this as much better.

## **REMAINING FOR THE SAINTS' PROGRESS AND JOY**

In verse 24 Paul continues, "But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." The words "your sake" mean for the sake of the church. The apostle's consideration was not selfish, but was for the sake of the saints. He was absolutely occupied by the Lord with the church. Paul realized that the churches needed more of the ministry of Christ. For their sake, he would remain in order to minister Christ to them.

Paul was a person full of Christ. When he spoke, he spoke Christ. When he lived, he lived with Christ. When he worked, he worked with Christ and ministered Christ to the churches. For the sake of the church, he was willing to remain in the flesh that he might minister Christ to the saints.

Verse 25 says, “And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of the faith.” The faith here refers to what the saints believe in ([Jude 3](#); [2 Tim. 4:7](#)); progress, to the growth in life; and joy, to the enjoyment of Christ. Paul was willing to remain for the sake of the saints’ progress and joy of the faith.

It is possible to be a Christian for years without having any progress or joy, without growing in life and without enjoying the Lord. We need both the growth in life and the enjoyment of Christ. How about you? What can you say about your progress and your joy? Oh, we need the progress and the enjoyment!

Whether Paul was in prison or out of prison, he was a strong factor of the saints’ progress and joy. Because of him the churches could have the growth in life and could be filled with the enjoyment of Christ. This should also be true of us

today. But whether or not we are such factors of progress and joy depends on whether or not we magnify Christ by living Him. If we live Christ, He will surely be magnified in us. Then we will become factors to enable the saints to grow in life and enjoy the Lord.

## BOASTING IN CHRIST IN PAUL

In [Philippians 1:26](#) Paul says, “That your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence again with you.” This verse is not easy to understand. What does boasting refer to? The Greek word has a threefold meaning: boasting, rejoicing, and glorying. When we boast, we are glorying, and when we are glorying, we are rejoicing. Here Paul says that the saints’ “boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me.” It may be better to place “in me” before “in Christ Jesus,” since this arrangement corresponds more closely to Paul’s thought. Here Paul is saying that the believers may boast, rejoice, glory in Paul in Christ. Their boasting in Paul must be in Christ. It is rather easy to boast in Christ, but it is not so easy to boast in someone in Christ.

In this difficult verse lies a deep secret concerning the experience of Christ. If we would experience Christ, we, the believers, must be able

to boast, rejoice, and glory not only in Christ Himself, but also in someone in Christ. It was necessary for the saints in Philippi to boast in the Apostle Paul in Christ. This boasting is related to the crucial fact that what we receive of Christ is not received directly in Christ, but is received from the Head through other members of the Body. Hence, we receive spiritual blessing from the Head through another member. No doubt, Paul was a very important member of the Body. If he had been lost to the Body, the Body would have been deprived of a very important means of spiritual blessing.

Our physical body illustrates how members can be a means of supply to the Body. The arm, for example, is such a means of supply for the fingers. Apart from the arm as a means, the fingers cannot receive any supply from the head. As an important member of the Body of Christ, Paul was such a means of supply between us and the Head. If we did not have him, we would lack an important channel of supply.

None of us can boast, rejoice, and glory directly in the Head. Rather, we need to boast in Christ in and through a certain channel of supply. In [verse 26](#) Paul says, “That your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me.” The words

“in me” include the meaning of “through me,” but are not limited to this meaning. During the time of Paul’s imprisonment, Gentile believers, like those in Philippi, were boasting in Paul. Their boasting, rejoicing, glorying was not in the Judaistic preachers; it was in the Apostle Paul. They could boast in Paul because he magnified Christ and lived Christ to the uttermost. Because Paul lived Christ and magnified Him in this way, he could transfuse Christ into the saints and minister Christ to all the churches. Therefore, the saints had reason to boast in such an apostle. If Paul had died prematurely, their boasting in him would have been cut short. But as long as Paul continued to live, they were able to boast in him in Christ. Hence, in [verses 25 and 26](#) Paul said that he was confident that he would remain and continue with the saints for their progress and joy of the faith so that their boasting could abound in Christ Jesus in him through his presence with them again.

## CHANNELS FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

In these verses we see the very crucial point that in the Body life there is the urgent need of certain ones to function as channels of supply.

We need members like Paul. When such members die, the transfusion of Christ is in a very real sense interrupted. But as long as such ones are with us, the transfusion continues unabated, and we can boast in them in Christ.

It should matter to the church whether we live or die. But this depends on our living Christ, magnifying Christ, ministering Christ, and trans-fusing Christ from the depths of our being into that of the saints. If we experience Christ and enjoy Him in this way, it will make a difference to the church whether we remain or go to be with the Lord.

We have seen that we cannot boast directly in Christ as the Head. Rather, there need to be some members to function as channels through which others may enjoy Christ and grow in life. There is an urgent need for such means of supply. Even if there are only one or two in a particular country, many others will receive the supply of Christ. Because Paul was this kind of member, he chose to remain and continue with the saints for their progress and their joy in the faith so that they could glory in him in Christ. If the saints are to experience Christ, there is the need for someone to serve as such a channel. In certain countries there is no way for people to

experience Christ because there is not even one person in that country who truly lives Christ and magnifies Him. As a result, the believers there have no way to enjoy Christ. There is a great need for people like Paul. When Paul was alive, many could experience Christ and have the progress and joy in the faith.

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