**PAUL’S DILEMMA AND CONFIDENCE**

***For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*** ***22If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!*** ***23I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;*** ***24but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*** ***25******Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,26so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me***.

**Philippians 1:21-26 (NIV)**

Up until this point Paul’s primary concern has been with the advance of the gospel (through his imprisonment) and Christ being glorified (through his trial). Now he turns to a personal reflection. Although the apostle assumes he will go free, the final words of 1:20 (‘*now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death*’) raised the possibility of execution. What Paul now sets out to explain is his desire for Christ to be glorified, even if the verdict went against him. Because Christ is the single focus of his life, he wins in either case, whether released or executed.

‘*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain’*(1:21) or more literally ‘to live Christ to die gain.’ If Paul is released, as he expects (1:24-26), that means he will continue to be a man ‘in Christ,’ participating in Christ’s sufferings (3:10) and serving Him in the gospel. This doesn’t mean Paul is caught up in life after death. Instead, it gives heart and meaning to everything he is and does as a citizen of two worlds, his heavenly citizenship determining his earthly. Having been ‘taken hold of’ by Christ (3:12), Christ has become the singular pursuit of his life. Christ – crucified, exalted Lord, present by the Spirit, coming King; Christ, the One who as God ‘emptied himself’ and as man ‘humbled himself’ in dying on the cross, whom God has now given the ‘name above all names’ (2:6-11); Christ the One for whom Paul had ‘suffered the loss of all things’ in order to ‘gain’ Him and ‘know’ Him, both His resurrection power and participation in His sufferings (3:7-11): Christ the name that sums up for Paul the entire range of his new relationship with God: personal devotion, commitment, service, the gospel, ministry, communion, inspiration.

But Paul knew that if he was executed, he would have reached the goal of living; he would have ‘gained’ Christ (1:23). This isn’t a depression or an overwhelming wish to be free of pain. Paul’s future in terms of ‘life in the flesh’ might have been uncertain but his ultimate future was both certain and desired. Death had lost its sting. Because ‘*to live is Christ’* and only because of that, ‘*to die is gain*.’

‘*If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!* ’ (1:22). If he had a choice in the matter, Paul is saying, he would be caught between two outcomes: ‘*fruitful labor’* on the one hand and what is far better, ‘*to be with Christ.*’ A continued life means a continued ministry, an extension of his missionary labours and a greater opportunity to prove that Christ is his life. This is ‘f*ruitful* *labor*,’ a common term used by Paul for his missionary activity (Romans 15:18; 2 Corinthians 10:11; Philippians 2:30). The choice is between continuing his work (assuming a favourable verdict from the court), and the sealing of his testimony with his blood. If there was a choice involved, Paul would have found himself in a genuine quandary because each option, from its own perspective, had much to offer.

*‘I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far*’ (1:23). *‘I am torn between the two.’* Despite the strong verb, this is purely hypothetical. He is talking about being set free (‘life’) or executed (‘death’) and he has no choice in the final matter. Nevertheless, if he did have to choose, execution would mean realising his lifelong passion, ‘*to … be with Christ*.” Death provides the entrance gate to the immediate presence of Christ. The verb Paul uses for ‘*to depart’* was a military term meaning ‘to strike camp’ and was also used nautically for releasing a ship from its moorings. Although Paul lived as ‘*a man in Christ’* (2 Corinthians 12:2) here and now in intimate union and communion with Christ, he longed for full intimacy and fullness with the Saviour beyond death – something no one on earth could fully know. This future ‘being with Christ’ is ‘*better by far*,*’* literally ‘much rather better,’ a triple comparative meaning ‘by far the best.’

Paul’s wording denies either an unconscious state after death or a disciplinary purgatory. To ‘*depart’* meant *‘to be with Christ’* (1:23). While Paul uses the metaphor ‘sleep’ for Christians who have died (1 Thessalonians 4:14,16; 1 Corinthians 15:51,52), the clear implication here is that he expects to be consciously with Christ once his earthly life finished. To ‘*depart’* ( = to leave the body’) is ‘*to be with Christ’* (1:24). Death means heaven now, recognising the bodily resurrection still awaits us ‘at the end’ (1 Corinthians 15:24ff).

*‘But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body’* (1:24). Paul knows what he will consciously experience at death, which, in this hypothetical sentence, he would wish happened sooner than later. But he expects the opposite, to ‘remain in the body’ (literally ‘in the flesh’), which *‘is more necessary* *for you.’* He would prefer ‘death’ since that would be to his advantage (‘*better by far’*). He fully expects ‘*life*,’ since that would be to their advantage.

‘*Convinced of this, I know that* *I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your* *progress and joy in the faith,26**so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me’* (1:25,26)’ In verse 25 Paul picks up his conversation from verse 24 and gives the first, more immediate reason for his release: it is for the Philippians ‘*progress and joy in the faith.*’ In verse 26 he gives the ultimate reason: that his release and coming to them will cause their ‘*boasting in Christ’* to overflow.

His conviction is that ‘*I will remain, and I will continue with all of you.’* ‘*Remain’* clearly means ‘remain alive’ and ‘*continue’* means ‘staying with you’ (c.f. 1:24). This is ‘*more necessary for you’* (1:24) ‘*for your progress and joy in the faith’* (1:25). It is for their sakes that he expects to be released, specifically for their ‘*progress’* and ‘*joy*.’ These two words summarise his concern for them in this letter: ‘*progress’* refers to the character of their life in Christ and especially to their ‘advancing,’ to their moving forward. The second, ‘*joy*,*’* describes the quality of their experience of this same life. Both words are with regard to ‘*the faith*,’ meaning either their faith in Christ or more likely, the gospel.

In this letter this ‘*progress’* will include their *’contending as one man for the faith of the gospel’* (1:27) in the face of opposition. It will show as their love for one another increases (1:10: 2:2), as in humility they consider the needs of one another ahead of their own (2:3,4), as they ‘*do everything without complaining or arguing’* (2:14), and as they keep focussed on the future prize (3:14-21). This is what it will mean for them to ‘*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling’* (2:12).

Accompanying their ‘*progress’* will be ‘*joy*.’ This is now the fourth mention of joy in the letter. The first three (1:4,18 [X2]) had to do with Paul’s joy, first in the context of his thanksgiving and prayer for them, and the second in the context of opposition from fellow-believers. His concern here in 1:25 is with the joy that is theirs in the gospel itself.

‘*So that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me’* (1:26). If the first reason Paul is convinced that he will ‘*continue with all’* of them focusses on the Philippians themselves (their own progress and joy regarding the gospel), the ultimate reason for all of this (his release and their progress) is expressed in terms of how it affects Christ. Literally the wording is: ‘your grounds for glorifying will overflow in Christ Jesus in me.’ Paul’s coming to them (the ‘in me’ part) will cause their ‘glorifying/boasting’ to overflow, and all of this takes place ‘in Christ Jesus.’

The word for ‘*boasting’* (*kauchema*) means to boast or glory in something. Paul’s usage comes directly from Jeremiah 9:34,24 where the wise person doesn’t boast in wisdom, might or wealth, but ‘*in the Lord.*’ The word doesn’t mean to be conceited. Rather, it has to do with putting one’s full trust or confidence in something or someone. Boasting/glorying in the Lord is the ultimate evidence of genuine conversion. Here the boasting is in Christ.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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