

To Live Is Christ

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Introduction.

- A. Human existence is filled with all sorts of questions, ranging from the simple to the profound. Our minds are such that they will ask what's for breakfast one minute and try to unravel the nature of infinity the next minute. Of all the questions of our lives, though, perhaps one of the most enduring asks, "Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? In short, what is the meaning of my life?"
- B. Folks have been chewing on this one for ages, and there are many different possible answers. The atheist who believes in the theory of evolution wants us to believe that life has no meaning, that we are all here as the result of a cosmic accident, and that we just scurry uselessly after things we think are important until Fate decides to squish us like a bug. Many religions of the East claim that the meaning of life is the search for consciousness, that we are to meditate on the unknowable until we achieve enlightenment. The answer that Christianity gives is quite different. Paul sums it up in Philippians 1:21—"To live is Christ; to die is gain."
- C. Now, that's all well and good, but what does it actually mean? If we believe that to live is Christ, what are our lives actually going to be like? This statement taken by itself is quite cryptic, but it begins to make more sense when we consider it in the light of God's word, particularly Paul's words in Philippians 3:7-14. Let's consider this passage, then, in an effort to figure out what Paul means when he says, "To live is Christ."

I. Counting All Things But Loss.

- A. According to Paul in Philippians 3, the first thing that "To live is Christ" involves is counting all things but loss. This is what he writes in Philippians 3:7-8. Here's what the context is saying: Before Paul became a Christian, from the perspective of the world, he had it all. He was every good thing that a Jew could possibly be.
- B. However, in order to become a Christian, Paul gave up everything that he held dear. Before he came to the Lord, he rejoiced in the esteem of his people. Now, they hate him. Before, he lived in the illusion that he could make himself righteous. Now, he's lost the illusion. He knows that all he is is a sinner. Not a good trade, right? Wrong. Paul looks at everything he gave up to be a Christian, and he says it's garbage. It's manure. It's worthless, because knowing and gaining Christ is worth so much.
- C. So what does all of this have to do with believing that to live is Christ? Simple. This attitude of surrendering everything to do the will of God is exactly what Jesus did. Look at Paul's words in Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus didn't just give up the passing joys of this world for God. He was the equal of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, but He surrendered it all in humility to His Father. Jesus never whined about it; He never complained about it. Jesus counted everything He had but loss in order to gain the approval of God.
- D. There are a couple of applications we need to take from this. First, we need to learn to see the things of the world for the garbage that they are. Of course, this is not as easy as it sounds. The same devil who convinced the Israelites in the wilderness that they were better off as slaves in Egypt is still trying to convince us that we are better off as slaves of sin. He's still trying to convince us that we'll be happier as sinners than as Christians. We need to learn to shut that whisper out. This is true first because if we listen to it and return to sin, we're likely to lose our souls, but it's also true because longing for the joys of the world will rob us of the joys of being a Christian. As the saying goes, there's no one on earth worse off than those who have just enough religion to make them miserable. We can't spend our days staring longingly out at the world of sin like a puppy in a pet-store window. There's nothing there. Let's learn to count those things but loss instead.
- E. The second thing we need to take from this idea is to learn to count all things but loss not just in an absolute but also in a comparative sense. Not everything Paul gave up was sinful. There was nothing inherently wrong, for instance, in Paul being a man whom the Jewish nation respected. Despite that, though, Paul was glad to give it up to know and to gain Jesus, and we need to have his attitude. One of the primary objectives of our Christian walk, indeed, is to know and to gain Jesus. We begin this process at baptism, but it must continue until we die. The greatest thing that we can do with our lives is to learn about Jesus, emulate Him, and even beyond that, take Him into our lives and into ourselves in the most profound way possible. This is where the joy of Christianity comes from: the joy of encountering Jesus, and next to that, all else IS loss.

II. Being Found Righteous in Him.

- A. Beyond this, "to live is Christ" means being found righteous in Him. This is the point that Paul makes in Philippians 3:9. Before, he trusted in his own righteousness according to the Law of Moses; now, he trusts in the righteousness that he has through Christ by faith. Romans 3:23-26 explains. Sometimes, we just read Romans 3:23 and stop there, but we really need to finish the next several verses to complete the thought.
- B. Here's what Paul is saying: Of ourselves, all of us are sinners. All of us have flunked out of spiritual righteousness class. However, we have been justified—counted as righteous, even though we aren't—by the

grace of God. This takes place through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That is to say, the way that God's grace appears in our lives is through Jesus buying us back from the death penalty of sin. Jesus did this by His blood when He was offered as a propitiation. In other words, justice demanded that we die for our sins, but to satisfy that demand, Jesus died in our place instead. However, all of this justification is only through faith. We must believe that the blood of Jesus can cleanse us before it will do so. Finally, we come to the reason why all this took place. God is perfectly just. His nature demands that we die for our sins.

However, He sent Christ to die in our place so that He could still be just, while justifying us through His blood.

- C. All of this ties into "To live is Christ" in two main ways. First, it stresses the importance of faith in Christ. Without Jesus, we quite simply DON'T live, because we are still dead in our trespasses and sins. Second, though, it tells us what our lives are really about. Jesus died so that we can live. Our death ended in Him, so His life must continue in us. These aren't our lives that we're living. They're Jesus' lives now, and His desires and His will must be reflected in everything that we do. If we follow this, to live truly is Christ.

III. Sharing in His Sufferings.

- A. Beyond that, though, if we say "To live is Christ" and mean it, our life will also include sharing in His sufferings. This is Paul's topic in Philippians 3:10. In this passage, Paul expresses his desire to know the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus and to be conformed to His death. Now, this sounds strangely to our ears. Paul here is actually declaring his desire to suffer and to die, because he thinks that's a part of knowing Jesus.
- B. So . . . what should we take from this? First, we need to recognize that it is simply not possible to live the life of Jesus without suffering and persecution, because that's what Jesus went through. Indeed, it was inevitable that Jesus suffer and be persecuted, simply because Jesus was so different. Jesus was not a shades-of-grey kind of guy. To His mind, you either did the will of the Father or you didn't. If you did, you were good; if you didn't, you were evil. Jesus demanded righteousness from everyone and condemned those who did not practice it. There was no room for compromise in His teaching or in His life. This meant that He went toe-to-toe with the hypocritical religious leaders of His day and told them exactly what He thought of them. That's why they killed Jesus—they didn't want to follow Him, and He wouldn't shut up. He was different.
- C. If we are His disciples today and we aren't being persecuted, why is that? Is it because where Jesus lived in an unrighteous age, we live in a righteous one, and we are surrounded by godly people who love truth? Or is it because we are surrounded by the unrighteous, but we choose to hide the truth rather than teach it? Where are our lights? On the lampstand, or under the bushel? I guarantee you, folks, that if we start teaching the truth like Jesus did, we will start suffering like Jesus did, and if we aren't willing to embrace that, we don't really want to be like Jesus. Look at Paul's description of his life in 2 Corinthians 4:8-11. The only way to let Jesus truly live within us is if we also carry His suffering and death around with us. None of us are where Jesus was, so let all of us determine to be better. Let's shine brighter each day, until we shine like Jesus. If we suffer persecution as a result, so what? That's what it means to live like Christ.

IV. Seeking His Resurrection.

- A. Finally, though, if we say "To live is Christ," it means that we are committed to seeking His resurrection. This is where Paul ends up in Philippians 3:11-14. Paul's message in this context is that despite the evil he has done, he is not destined to go to hell, yet despite the good he has done, is not destined to go to heaven. He recognizes instead that the way he lives from this point on will determine his eternal destination.
- B. Now, this idea of seeking the resurrection fits in with our theme in two ways. First, when we live in a way that seeks the resurrection, we have taken Christ for our objective, for the purpose of our lives. There are many different ways that heaven is described in Scripture, but perhaps the most meaningful is found back in Philippians 1, where Paul describes dying as "to depart and be with Christ." Heaven, then, is being with Jesus.
- C. So what's the big deal? Why is it so significant to be with Jesus? To start with, let's consider the way that humankind is drawn to greatness. Anybody ever had the chance to meet a celebrity, a famous athlete, a politician, or someone like that? We consider those meaningful experiences, something to look back on and remember, as though there is some magic aura that passes from them to us just because we talked to them for five minutes. Some people will pay tens of thousands of dollars for a baseball just because the right player hit it out of the park once. Well, if we react that way to someone who will be dead in a hundred years or less and forgotten in two hundred, what will it be like to finally meet Jesus? Jesus is the greatest human being ever to live, not just because of what He has done, but because of who He is. Every good trait that we have ever loved in anyone will be magnified a hundred times in Jesus. It would be amazing just to have the chance to have a short conversation with Jesus, but we can be with Him forever if we seek His resurrection.
- D. Second, though, only through our resurrection from the dead do we complete the journey of our lives in the footsteps of Jesus. Consider what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. Jesus is the firstfruits from the dead—the first of the crop of souls that God is going to harvest for eternal life. That's the resurrection that Jesus sought throughout His life. He lived perfectly so that, among other things, He would be resurrected.

Conclusion. If you want to live this Christ-centered life that Paul lived, come to the Lord today.