

Philippians 1
For me to live is Christ!
What can this mean?

Philippians is one of the Prison Epistles. Paul is under house arrest, guarded by a soldier and in chains but able to receive visitors and communicate openly. Paul has been through three missionary journeys in Asia Minor and Greece (Acts 13-20). He has served the Spirit in Jerusalem and, through the purposes of God, is in Rome awaiting justice which is really God-opportunity. The Christian cannot expect justice (or fairness) from a pagan world, but, as Paul pursues the purposes of God in his circumstances, God is revealed in all that he engages, including his spirit agony for (his) young churches. [I will continue to use the sentence as the unit of commentary.]

Sentence 1 (1:1) Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ.

Paul (with his ministry assistant Timothy) introduces himself by the way he wants to be considered by others: as the slave of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has purchased him, owns him and tells him what he is to do (Acts 9:16). Paul does not set his own agenda. He is not his own. He is not free to do his own thing. He is the slave of Christ and he relishes this place in God. This means that whatever he suffers in the flesh is all part of a higher spirit calling. Nothing is lost in the Kingdom of God. Every event and experience is grist for the divine (mill)Will that is using Paul's readily available life, ability and circumstances for its ultimate purposes. Thus Paul tastes the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5).

Sentence 2 (1:2) To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers (bishops) and ministry agents (deacons): grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul has been in Philippi (Acts 16:12, 20:6). Paul's ideas of spirit oversight (Gk: episcopo) and service (Gk: diakonos) are described in 1Tim 3:1-13. The saints are the ones being sanctified (or made holy) in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: they are average (normal) believers. The greeting bestows the grace and peace of God (not man). People can be gracious and peaceful, but this is often a human fabrication. God's grace and peace are substance from heaven.

Sentence 3 (1:3-7) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partakers with me of grace.

On his second missionary journey, Paul came to Europe (Macedonia) and he preached first in Philippi. The first recorded convert was a woman called Lydia (Acts 16:11-15). So Paul has deep spirit memories of Philippi. He believes that God has started a good work in them and that He will complete it even up to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's great task was to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. This he has done under great suffering. He is bonded to those who responded to his preaching and he glorifies God in them. Sharing in the work (and weight) of the gospel makes them partakers with Paul of God's grace.

Sentence 4 (1:8) For God is my witness, how greatly I longed for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

Paul's yearning for fellow believers expands his capacity for feeling compassion, affection and the spirit fellowship that

believers can have for each other in Christ. This expansiveness in the spirit is a level to engage in with others that is created by Jesus Christ. Through His Passion, Jesus Christ has created this greater depth and capacity for experience. Jesus Christ has formed the experience in which we can walk. We are not inventing the Christian life as we go along. The Christian life is not evolving but is already created in all its dimensions, rewards and future.

Sentence 5 (1:9-11) And this I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Paul is praying for the saints: 1) That their love may abound and go on increasing being expressed in their increasing knowledge and ability to discern and perceive the true nature of things. 2) That they may test and prove (validate) those things that are excellent in life. 3) That they will be pure, sincere and not given to creating offence. Such a saint can stand blameless (without offence) in the Day of Jesus Christ. The judgement of God is complete, total and absolute. May we in that Day be found without offence, hearing Christ say 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.' (Mtt 25:21). The design of the Christian life is that we be filled with the fruits of doing the right thing, a righteousness chosen by Christ which leads to the glory and praise of God.

Sentence 6 (1:12-14) But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul by his courage, example and force of faith creates a space for the gospel against the forces of the Roman Empire even in the palace. The courage of the believer creates a spirit space where others can at least see the work of the faith. The embarrassment of chains (imprisonment) creates a platform for witness.

Sentence 7 (1:15-17) Some indeed preach Christ even for envy and strife and some also from good will: the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel.

The gospel tests the heart of the preacher. Some can preach out of pride, self-regard and envy for a spirit place. For these their ambition is for themselves. The effect of their preaching is to add affliction to those who are truly (sincerely) preaching the gospel. But others preach the gospel out of love and so fulfil their spirit purpose and destiny. Paul is appointed (his life is laid down, set) for the defence of the gospel.

Sentence 8 (1:18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.

God makes all things work together for good for those who love God and walk according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Where there is faith, God can turn defeat and loss into victory. Whatever the circumstances, Paul recognises that Jesus is being upheld (John 3:14; 12:32). Paul insists on rejoicing. Rejoicing is a spirit discipline.

Sentence 9 (1:19-20) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body whether in life or by death.

Paul believes that he will be delivered (rescued) by other people's prayer and the bountiful supply of the Holy Spirit. The intercessory prayers of others have remarkable effect in the Kingdom of God. God acts on the faith of others. God does not respond to need, but to faith. Paul knows that he will not be ashamed (proved wrong) for he is not ashamed of the gospel (Rom 1:16; 2Tim 1:8). With boldness he seeks that Jesus Christ be magnified in his body either by living or dying. Paul desires that the way he lives, even the very presentation (or evidence) of his body will point to Jesus Christ. His physical body is available for Christ; it is territory to be occupied and utilised by Christ. The pain, suffering, joy, excitement is to reveal the life and processes of Christ, not his own personal history or individual journey. Therefore he says

Sentence 10 (1:21) For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

What can this mean?

1. For me to live is to live for the purposes of Christ (in me).
2. Christ inspires (breathes into) my life His Spirit (Jn 20:22).
3. Living for me is to represent/ present Christ.
4. Living for me is representing Christ to the heavenlies.
5. I do not want anything in life but what Christ provides.
6. Christ is the measure/ extent/ container of my life.
7. I go nowhere without Christ; He is my boundary.
8. I will not be what Christ is not = I will be what Christ is.
9. Christ in me the hope of glory (Col 1:27).
10. My life is attaining the heights/ depths of Christ (Eph 3:18).
11. The Way of Christ is the Way of the Cross (1Cor 1:17, 2:2).
12. The follower of Jesus carries his own cross (Mk 8:34).
13. I will be with Him (Phil 3:20-21).
14. The Christ(ian) characteristics are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control (Gal 5:22).
15. The glorified Christ is in me; complete, absolute, final.
16. I am complete (filled up) in Him (Col 2:10).
17. In Christ I lack no good thing (Ps 34:10; Phil 4:19).
18. To live is to choose; therefore I choose Jesus Christ.
19. I am His slave, His property, His territory (Phil 1:1).
20. I am conformed to His image (Rom 8:29).
21. To possess Christ is to have His faith (Lk 18:8).
22. To possess Christ is to live in His inheritance (Col 3:24).
23. To possess Christ is to abide in his nature (Rom 8:28).
24. To possess Christ is to be found in His redemption (1Cor 1:30).
25. The life of Christ is in the Cross of Christ.
26. The Christian Life is the Crucified life (1Cor 2:2, Gal 5:24).
27. I come under the Christ discipline/ ordering/ lifestyle.
28. The Christ discipline is the Cross-carrying discipline.
29. I must set my face to cross carry (Lk 9:51).
30. I am seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
31. In Christ I am placed above principality and power (Eph 2:6).
32. In Christ I exercise His Spirit authority in me (Lk 9:1).
33. To be with Christ is gain when all else is rubbish (Phil 3:8).
34. To die is to be with Christ and beyond suffering (Jn 14:1-4).
35. To live for Christ is to suffer in this world ((2Cor 4:7-15).
36. This world is not a 'vale of tears' but a 'warfare of spirits'.
37. In Christ I share and complete His sufferings (Col 1:24)

38. For me to live is to claim/ magnify/ justify the Way of Christ.

39. My life can be a living proof of who Christ is.

40. For me to live is Christ, is to love His appearing (2Tim 4:8).

Sentence 11 (1:22) But if I live on in the flesh this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

The pressure of the earthly journey makes Paul uncertain as to where he wants to be.

Sentence 12 (1:23) For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Paul is certain of his experience of and place with Christ (Acts 9, 1Cor 15:8) which is obviously preferable.

Sentence 13 (1:24) Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

Paul's bonding to the saints constrains him.

Sentence 14 (1:25-26) And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Paul's concern is for their progress and joy in the faith.

Sentence 15 (1:27-28) Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel and not in any way terrified by your adversaries which is to them a proof of perdition but to you of salvation and that from God.

May we all adequately represent and present the gospel as steadfast and unafraid disciples (2Tim 1:7).

Sentence 16 (1:29-30) For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

To believe in Christ is to enter into the experience of Christ which is prepared for us to walk in. By this prepared experience we move through affliction and tribulation to glory.