

Dying and Living

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1:21-30)

A wild pecan tree grows in the woods, its harvest is most abundant, but the little pecans it produces have such hard shells that no one wants them. Then the branches of the tree are cut away; in their places are budded some tender shoots of a different kind of pecan tree. These shoots grow and again an abundant harvest is reaped. But this time the harvest is of choice pecans, that sell high on the market. The roots and the trunk of the tree can say “we still live, but we live through our new branches and our new fruit.” In the same way a man once lived in the wilderness of the world, he bore much fruit, but none of it was acceptable to God. The fruit and works of that man were cut away, and in their place was grafted a new life; the old works were gone, and new works were borne that were pleasing unto God. This man still lived, but he lived through Christ.



This simple and beautiful illustration introduces us to a wonderful lesson. In the words of the text above, Paul tells us about this new life. In short, he gives us the Christian's secret of a new life. In our study we shall notice the Christian's secret of death, and his secret of life. The two are so intertwined that it is difficult to separate one from the other.

The secret of dying (Philippians 1:21-26)

One has fittingly remarked that if you take Christ out of verse 21 you have: “For me to live is to die.” Paul didn't leave out Christ. Let us look closely at these verses.

Philippians 1:21,22 — His chief desire was to be with Christ (See **2Corinthians 5:6-8**). His experience of being caught up unto the third heaven had simply whetted his spiritual appetite (**2Corinthians 11:2-4**). Still, his desire to save others caused him to hesitate.

Philippians 1:23 — Here is Paul's conception of death. *Hard-pressed* or *strait* means to be torn, as ship at anchor whipped wind. *Depart*, has three meanings: (a) To change one's state as when a chemical is dissolved in water. When we die we do not cease to exist, but our state is completely changed. (b) The lifting of an anchor when ships are about to leave the harbor. When the vessel disappears over the horizon, it is not lost. So, when we lift an anchor of hope (**Hebrews 6:19**). (c) The striking of a tent when a journey is resumed after a night's rest. So, a Christian strikes the tent of this life to go into a better world at death (**2Corinthians 5:1**).

Philippians 1:24-26 — Paul was still thinking of others. He knew that by remaining he could watch for the church, and prevent her apostasy for a time (See **Acts 20:29,30**). He knew, by divine guidance, that he would live for a while.

A summation of this secret of dying is this: To live is to live for Christ, to die is to go and be with him. So in life or in death we are happy in Christ.

The secret of living (Philippians 1:27-30)

Paul is teaching that the Christian not only has a new view of death, but also of life. It is an unworldly view, one that obligates us to make the most of life in view of the fleetness of time and the coming of eternity.

Philippians 1:27a — Our *conduct* or *conversation*—our manner of life should be a clothing that adorns the man and the doctrine of the Lord at all times (**Titus 2:10**). Christianity not only improves the individual, but it improves society as a whole.

Philippians 1:27b — Here he suggests that Christians stand fast and strive together. *Stand* has reference to spiritual posture, *strive* to spiritual action. *Stand* and *strive* are dependent on our togetherness in Christ. Stand together, work together, hope together.

Philippians 1:28 — Christians should be courageous and fearless. The word *alarmed* or affrighted is the same word used of a horse that becomes scared at the starting line, and bolts to one side or the other and is out of the race. The Christian's courage and faithfulness will be sign of defeat for their enemies.

Christianity has often been termed a life of contrasts (**Philippians 1:29**). How can suffering be a gift? (See **2Timothy 2:12**; **1Peter 3:14**; **Acts 5:4**). Christianity grew more rapidly in the ways of suffering than at any other time.

You cannot discover the secrets of living and dying without becoming a part of Christ. Fellow Christians, live more fully and more completely for Christ. Give yourselves so unreservedly for him and to him that you can say with the apostle, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain."

[These ideas and illustrations are adapted from material presented in 1961 by Jimmy Wood.]