

## **Philippians 1 pt. 5 v.19-30**

**Life, death, striving for the faith of the gospel, suffering.**

V.19-20 - connected w/ v. 18 -- Paul rejoices because in every way Christ is preached AND, IN V.19 because he is confident that even though his circumstances are currently his own imprisonment he is certain of his own deliverance.

This sentence has been called “one of the more complex sentences in the Pauline corpus.”<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly some scholars believe that Paul intentionally borrowed language from Job 13:16 here in verse 19 which would make his language much more impactful and dramatic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 138.

<sup>2</sup> “Paul's first clause is in fact a verbatim borrowing from Job 13:16 (LXX); LXX Septuagint...” Fee, 130

LXX: ...τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν...(Job 13:16)

GNT: ...τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν...(Phil 1:19)

It would call to mind the sufferings of righteous Job as a divinely elected representative of God the Father in the face of tremendous adversity and a vitriolic accuser.

And don't we love to compare ourselves to Job!

The encouraging part for us is that Paul likely kept this view in his own mind, hoping in the providence, sovereignty, and provision of God both through the Holy Spirit and through the prayers of the saints.

AND, more than just hope Paul held on to an “earnest expectation.” He believed, expected that he would be vindicated justly by God. This is where we must point out the textual issue of the term “deliverance” from v. 19.

The term used is σωτηρίαν (*soterian*) which holds within its semantic range the idea of, “deliverance, preservation, w. focus on physical aspect; [and also] salvation, w. focus on transcendent aspects...”<sup>3</sup>

Some believe that Paul is either referring only to his physical release and others believe that Paul is referring only to his once and for all spiritual salvation.

Could it be possible that Paul holds both of these ideas in his head at the same time? I believe so.

It is certainly possible that Paul is speaking only of his physical deliverance but the sense we get from what we are going through here is that Paul isn't overly concerned with his physical circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 985.

In fact, that is the sense we get from the majority of Paul's writing.

He endured much hardship. And, inasmuch as he was able to continue to preach the gospel in light of his circumstances he was content to do so.

Paul even committed to continued boldness in order to magnify Christ in his own body come what may -- life or death. He was placing himself firmly under God's hand trusting in His sovereignty.

We must also take a moment to reflect upon the idea of "magnifying Christ." That is certainly our desire!

Whatever circumstances await Paul he boldly proceeds to enlarge Jesus and bring Christ into greater focus rather than bringing his own self and own desires into greater focus.

This is an attitude shared by the faithful and is maybe best encapsulated in the proclamation of John the Baptist: [Jhn 3:30 NKJV] 30 "He must increase, but I [must] decrease."

Paul even realizes that death is a very real possibility which brings us to the quite famous and theologically rich declaration found in v. 21.

V.21 "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Oh, how far do we have to go Lord to learn this lesson? How much must we mature before we grasp this truth? -- even as we look toward our example Christ who bore the cross to Calvary.

Even this truth "to live is Christ," is no guarantee of comfortable living. How much of Christ's life was marked by comfort and abundance? Remember what Isaiah wrote of the messiah: "...we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted." (Isa 53:4)

And yet, those who magnify Christ are a benefit to this world each day we wake up with breath in our lungs. Because of the message we bear - the gospel - the chance for reconciliation and new life.

The NLT read “For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.” (Phil 1:21)

Let that thought blow your mind. Paul is saying that he sees dying and being with Jesus as a greater blessing than continuing to live. So was Paul some kind of suicidal crazy-person?

We must take care to balance this idea with the entirety of scripture and with Paul’s rejoicing in v. 18 and the further joy and faith that we see in our text.

Christians aren't called to be some fatalistic morose cult with a death wish. Rather, we find peace in understanding that what we experience here is not the standard of eternal beauty and completion but a fallen creation! Those things that are most beautiful to us in this life are still fractured and marred by sin.

Paul explains his thinking further in the following verses.

V.22-24 The dilemma of a life of labor and being with the Lord.

We get the sense that Paul is conflicted. Now, we should say that even as Paul indicates that this is confounding to him - the pull of desire between laboring for the Lord in this life and longing to see Jesus in eternity - that he doesn't actually get to choose.

Some translators and commentators have proposed that Paul is trying to communicate the idea that he, "he dares not venture to

decide between the alternatives, but the choice must be left to the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

Paul has already given us that idea in v.20 “...Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.”

But consider that in his captivity he has had much time to consider the very real possibility of death and his own mortality while facing a government that is less than enthusiastic about the gospel.

Blessedly, we see that Paul’s focus and attention is on Christ no matter what. If he survives then he is able to continue to labor for Jesus’ sake. If he dies then he gets to be with the Lord!

This is a much different perspective than the universal notion of self-preservation built into every human's DNA.

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<sup>4</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 33.

This willingness to face death head on is only something that becomes ingrained within us as we are grasped by the Holy Spirit and God plants the insatiable desire for the furtherance of the kingdom within our spirit!

Paul is not focused on continuing to exist on planet earth for his own betterment but for others - and specifically he understands that the Philippians would benefit from his continued service to them.

V.25-26 We really feel Paul's deep love and affection for the Philippians here even in the midst of his hardship.

We see Paul's faith on display as well. Even though there is some uncertainty he is confident that the Lord will neither abandon him nor will the Lord abandon the church; but will work all things out

for His own good pleasure - caring for His people as we magnify His name.

Remarkably, Paul was released from his captivity - some believe around the year 62 AD because, “the Jews who had accused him...didn’t press their case before the emperor.”<sup>5</sup>

So we find that Paul’s words were not in vain - he was not wrong to trust, hope, expect that he would see the Philippians again and that he would be able to build them up in their faith.

Additionally, from the perspective of the Philippians this informs our understanding of Christian living today.

We need teachers. We need people to build us up. It is necessary for us to receive instruction in the faith both by God’s word and by personal example.

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<sup>5</sup> Derek G. Jeter, “Historical Background of Paul’s Final Imprisonment,” Insight for Living (August 2017). <https://insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/historical-background-of-paul-s-final-imprisonment>

As Paul writes to the Ephesians: [Eph 4:11-12 NKJV] 11 And He Himself gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

As Paul expected to further serve them and help them grow in their faith that continuation of their mutual faith was to be marked by progress and joy!

That's such a timely reminder! And why shouldn't we rejoice!?  
Whether by life or death Christ is magnified! People are saved!  
Lives are changed! The Kingdom of God advances! That is reason to rejoice!

V.27-28 Paul's exhortation to the church

Given his current circumstances Paul found it necessary to pass on these instructions to who? Pagans? Unbelievers? No - the church! We need these reminders! We are hearing so many messages that it is good and right for us to be reminded of our calling and purpose.

Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ!

We should now note that in these verses (19-30) Paul mentions Christ seven times by name and two more times using the personal pronoun "Him"!

Do you see the centrality of Paul's belief and message? It is Christ!

Christ is the one who shall ensure Paul's deliverance both in an immediate and future/eschatological sense.

Christ is the one who will be magnified by life or death.

Christ is why Paul desires to live and why he desires to depart this life.

Christ is the reason why the Philippians can rejoice.

And here in v. 27 Christ is the impetus for right conduct.

Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Not because by our conduct we win Christ's affection - He loved us when we were sinners. (Rom 5:6) He loves us still when we fall short.

Our conduct becomes worthy of the gospel of Christ because by the gospel our very lives are re-shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ!

As Paul desires to hear of their affairs we have to understand that information travelled a lot slower in the first century. With no internet, phone, electricity, etc. -- information travelled by people either in written form as these epistles or by verbal report.

One could go ages not knowing the affairs of those they cared about. Paul's desire was that the way the Philippians interacted with one another and the world would attest to their faith.

Don't we love it when we hear that other believers are still committed to the Lord and are still living out lives of service in obedience to Jesus!? Yes, of course! Conversely it breaks our hearts to hear of those dear loved ones who have abandoned the faith or fallen away.

John writes about this feeling: [3Jo 1:3-4 NKJV] 3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth [that is] in

you, just as you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Furthermore, the Philippian church was urged to demonstrate unity: one spirit, one mind, all focused on contending for the gospel.

This is so applicable today in a world where the church has become known more for our infighting and doctrinal differences than a unity of spirit, mind, and togetherness as we contend for the faith of the gospel.

*“With one common purpose* may be expressed in some languages as “by all intending the same way,” “by all of you having the same goal in mind,” or “by all of you wanting to do the same.””<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 40.

Now, we must also bring attention to this term “striving.” So often we as believers say that we don’t want to strive in ministry because we attach to that term the idea of striving or pursuing something according to our fleshly desires.

BUT, we must acknowledge that as believers we are to contend earnestly for the faith (Jde 3), to fight the good fight (1 Tim 6:12), to wage the good warfare (1 Tim 1:18) for the gospel -- not for personal gain or ancillary agendas that are loosely associated with the gospel -- but we must contend for the clear, unadulterated, good news of Jesus Christ itself!

Don’t get twisted up in confusing the gospel, or the faith, with something else. Never believe the lie that by convincing unbelieving, unreconciled humans, to live morally acceptable lives we have won! It is not so!

Man's greatest need is not good behavior, but reconciliation through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is that gospel that shapes our behavior.

Paul goes on to tell the Philippians that as they live out their lives in a way that was certainly in stark contrast to their cultural context that they should do so unafraid. The reality for them was that their faith was not unopposed.<sup>7</sup>

Their steadfast faith and peace in Christ - unshakeable faith - was to be the very visible proof of eternity. For the unbeliever the steadfastness of the faithful was proof of future destruction. For the believer this unshakeable faith was proof of eternal salvation.

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<sup>7</sup> Fee, 167.

Matthew Henry helps us understand this verse when he writes:

“...it is a good sign...when we are enabled in a right manner to suffer for the cause of Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

V.29-30 Paul reminds them of the reality of the faith - suffering.

“...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Tim 3:12)

Suffering is part of the Christian life. And as we see here in verse 29 it has been granted - allowed by God that the Philippians be given over to suffering.

BDAG reads, “you have (graciously) been granted the privilege of suffering for Christ...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2323.

<sup>9</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1078.

And we say, "I don't want to suffer!" But to believe in Christ, to share in His likeness, to understand who He is involves suffering.

AND, I find Paul's word choice incredibly interesting given his earlier allusion to Job in v. 19 because remember in Job's life God granted Job to suffer as well.

Sometimes we feel like suffering is divine punishment. Sometimes it is. But not always. Sometimes suffering is the result of sharing fully in the life of Jesus - as Paul writes later in this epistle:

[Phl 3:10 NKJV] "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..."

These things go together: the power of Christ's resurrection and sharing in His sufferings. And those who are Christ's are blessed to suffer for His name sake.

[1Pe 4:13 NKJV] 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

After all, as we consider suffering we must ask ourselves, what does it mean to take up one's cross at the invitation of Christ?

(Matt 16:24, Mar 8:34, Luk 9:23)

Finally in v. 30 Paul demonstrates an understanding of their mutual hardship. Remember Paul had been arrested, beaten with many stripes, and imprisoned by the Romans in Philippi! (Acts 16)

Now Paul finds himself again very literally imprisoned by the Roman government. So its no wonder then that the Philippians had a hard time with their Roman countrymen.

Gordon Fee writes,

“...it seems very likely that the (Roman) citizens of Philippi, who would have honored the emperor at every public gathering, were putting special pressure on the Philippian believers; their allegiance had now been given to another [Lord]..., Jesus, who had himself been executed at the hands of the empire. The present context, in which Paul asserts that they are undergoing “the same struggle” he is now engaged in—as a prisoner of the empire—”<sup>10</sup>

If we ever feel like the government we live under isn't supportive or friendly to our faith we can take heart!

That same conflict was endured by Christ, by Paul, by the Philippians, by many many other first century churches even into

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<sup>10</sup> Fee, 167.

our present age and all by God's design -- and, may I suggest He has graciously granted His church to be in those places and times on purpose -- so that we might strive together for the faith of the gospel. May Jesus Christ be magnified forevermore. Amen.