

PHILIPPIANS (Lesson 3)

Paul: A Classic Example of How to Live – Part 2

Read: Philippians 1:10-21

In the previous lesson, we learn that Paul wanted to go to Rome as a preacher in order to testify of his faith before the emperor Nero. Instead, he wound up in Rome as a prisoner. He was a Roman citizen with every right to appeal to Caesar and await an audience before him.

Instead, he was illegally arrested in Jerusalem, misrepresented before the court, incorrectly identified as an Egyptian renegade, entangled in the red tape of political machinery, and finally granted a trip across the Mediterranean, only to encounter a storm and be shipwrecked. When he finally arrived in Rome, he was incarcerated and virtually forgotten for two years. Yet we see a man who wrote his friends the most joyous letter in the entire New Testament.

Hopeful, Regardless of Uncertainties

For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (Philippians 1:19-20)

Those are the words of a man whose image was secure and whose reputation was not in need of being protected, massaged, or defended. His mind was firmly fixed on essentials, so much so that nothing brought him anxiety. "Whether by life or by death," his focus was concentrated. He concerned himself only with things that mattered. That thought alone provides an excellent filtering system, enabling us to separate what is essential from what is not.

Paul was hopeful, regardless of the uncertainties he faced. His quiet confidence is revealed in such phrases as "this shall turn out" and "my earnest expectation." In other words, what he was experiencing was not the end, and things would turn out exactly as God directed. That brought the man a rush of mind-calming peace. And what may have temporarily brought him pain and discomfort would ultimately result in "Christ exalted in my body?" That gave him hope.

Sandwiched between those two statements was his determination not to feel uneasy or ashamed: "I shall not be put to shame in anything!" That brought him confidence. Refusing to be crippled by other people's words, refusing to submerge himself in self-pity, and refusing to take criticism and attacks personally, Paul remained strong, positive, and sure. How could he be so strong? No question about that answer. The man was contented because Christ was central. He says, **"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."** (Philippians 1:21)

COLLECTIVE

This is a well-known verse in the Bible. We have heard it frequently and quoted it often. Ask yourself this question:

What do you live for? Do you live for money, fame, power and influence, or possessions?

When money is our objective, we live in fear of losing it, which makes us paranoid and suspicious. When fame is our aim, we become competitive lest others upstage us, which makes us envious. When power and influence drive us, we become self-serving and strong-willed, which makes us arrogant. And when possessions become our god, we become materialistic, thinking enough is never enough, which makes us greedy. All these pursuits fly in the face of contentment and joy. Only Christ can satisfy – whether we have or don't have, whether we are known or unknown, whether we live or die.

The Living Bible states: "For to me, living means opportunities for Christ, and dying--well, that's better yet!" The Modern English Version says: "For living to me means simply 'Christ'; and if I die I should merely gain more of Him." And The Good News Bible says: "For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more."

What is the sum and substance of all this? The secret of living is the same as the secret of joy: Both revolve around the centrality of Jesus Christ. In other words, the pursuit of happiness is the cultivation of a Christ-centered. Christ-controlled life.

When Christ becomes our central focus and our reason for existence, contentment replaces our anxiety as well as our fears and insecurities. Three things happen when we focus on Christ:

- 1) He broadens the dimensions of our circumstances. This gives us new confidence. Chains that once bound and irritated us no longer seem so irksome. Our limitations become a challenge rather than a chore.
- 2) He delivers us from preoccupation with others. This causes our contentment level to rise. Other people's opinions, motives, and criticisms no longer seem all that important. What a wonderful deliverance!
- 3) He calms our fears regarding ourselves and our future. This provides a burst of fresh hope on a daily basis. Once fear is removed, it isn't long before we begin to have joy again. How quickly peace fills the vacuum when we focus on Christ.

Reflection & discussion:

- 1) ***When Christ is central, He broadens the dimensions of our circumstances. How might you begin to view your present situation as an opportunity to impact others for Christ?***

COLLECTIVE

- 2) *When Christ is central, He delivers us from a preoccupation with others. What person or group of people have become an unhealthy object of your focus and your thoughts? What can you do to surrender that focus to Christ?***

- 3) *When Christ is central, He calms our fears regarding ourselves and our future. What aspects of your circumstances or your future are causing you anxiety or fear? What steps can you take to allow the Lord to deliver you from those concerns?***