

To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain

By David Feddes

There are many things to be thankful for in life, but even if there were only two, they would be the two supreme things: to live is Christ, to die is gain. To be alive in the Lord Jesus Christ is cause for great thanksgiving, and even greater cause for thanksgiving is to know that what lies beyond this life is something even better. So let's listen to what the apostle Paul writes, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in Philippians 1:20-26.

²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. (Philippians 1:20-26).

To live is Christ, to die is gain. You could summarize the whole book of Philippians with those two statements: to live is Christ, to die is gain. You could summarize what it means to be a Christian, the entire Christian life, with those two statements: to live is Christ, to die is gain.

If you have your roots deep in those two realities, then nothing can shake you. You'll be like the apostle. You say, "I'm confident that I'm going to have sufficient courage so that Christ will be exalted whether by my life or by my death." Those are the two options: I'm either alive in Christ, or I'm dead and have departed this world and gone to be with Christ. Either way, it's wonderful.

In fact, I'd be better off dead. Now if you hear somebody say, "I'd be better off dead," you might assume they must be miserable. But the apostle Paul saw this life as something that's bursting with joy. Later on he says to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always." This is the guy who sang in the Philippian jail after a beating, rejoicing always because he knew that his life was fruitful labor. He knew that Christ was his life, and he loved being alive. Even so, he said, "But to die is gain. Then I'll be closer to Christ than I've ever been, and that is a huge gain."

If we don't have that kind of courage and that kind of joy, then it's probable that we still have a lot of growing to do in understanding and embracing the reality of these two statements. If for me to live is not Christ, if my life is not all wrapped up in the Lord Jesus Christ, then I'm not going to have the joy and contentment and courage that the apostle wrote about.

And if I'm not so sure that death is gain, if I dread leaving this life, if I can't imagine that there's something better beyond this, if all I'm looking forward to is, "I hope that I can walk my daughter down the aisle at her wedding. I hope that I can see my grandchildren. I hope this, and I hope that..." Those are all things that naturally we might want in this life. "I hope that I'll be healthy to a good old age." If we're hoping for things only in this life but not looking forward to what lies beyond it, we're going to be chronically scared of dying. We're going to spend most of

our living running scared. If you're not ready to die, you're not really ready to live. And so we need to hear what God is saying to us: the reality that living is Christ and dying is gain.

To live is Christ

- Live in his life; act by his action
- Think his thoughts; shine his light
- Aid others' progress and joy
- Know Christ better and better
- Love, knowledge, insight, purity, joy, peace, courage, contentment

To live is Christ. What did that mean for the apostle? You can summarize so much of Philippians in that statement. To live is Christ means that I live by his life in me. He's the one who makes me alive in him. **I live by his life. I act by his action.**

At the beginning of Philippians the apostle says that "he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:6). That's a mighty fine verse to know when you've just made profession of faith. He who started a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day Jesus comes again. God is at work in us, and he's going to complete what he started.

A little later the apostle says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act for his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13). It's not just you trying to do what pleases God. It's God working in you that gives you that desire and the strength to do that in the first place.

And then near the end of Philippians the apostle says, "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

That's what it means to have Christ's life in you, to live by his life and to act by his action. He's going to complete what he began. He's at work in you to will and to act, to want and to do things. And he's the one who's going to supply everything you need out of the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

To live is Christ. If you're depending on your own resources, you're not going to be able to do that. But when Christ is in you, living and working in you, then you can.

When Christ is in you, you **think his thoughts and shine his light**. If for you to live is Christ, it means that you have the very mind of Jesus, and his thoughts are thinking their way into your thoughts. "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). We have the mind of the Spirit: "The mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

Paul makes the statement "We have the mind of Christ," but also gives an order: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." He says in Philippians 2, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-

minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus [literally: Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:1-11).

Now have that mind. You've already got Christ in you. Now have that mind. Let that mind dominate whatever other thoughts are going through your mind so that you're considering others, prioritizing them above yourself, giving yourself for them just the way Jesus has given himself for us. This is not just having Jesus as your example, although he is, but it's actually having Jesus inside you, and his mind thinking inside you, and his attitude shaping your attitude because he's in you.

Then shine with his light. The apostle says, "Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Philippians 2:14-16). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He also said, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). How are you the light? Because he's in you, and his light shines in you. When Christ is in you, you more and more shine. Instead of being a griper, a grumbler, and a complainer, you instead are shining with the light of contentment and joy in the Lord Jesus Christ. So live in his life, act by his action, think his thoughts, shine his light, because Christ is in you, the hope of glory.

"To live is Christ" includes to **aid others' progress and joy**. It is to be thinking of others and committing your life to serving them. Paul says, "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me" (Philippians 1:20-26).

He says it's better to go and be with Christ, but it's more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Why is it so important that he remain in the body? He says, so that I can help your progress in the faith and your joy in the faith, and so that your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow because I'm still here and blessing you. If you're a Christian, why are you still here on this planet? Departing and being with Christ would be far better for you personally, so the reason you're still here is so that you can bring joy to others and bring blessing to others and help them

in their progress in the faith and help them in their growth. Otherwise, you're just taking up air. God leaves us here on earth because to live is Christ.

There is one other reason why God might leave us here a while longer, and that is because we're not ready. We're not ready to say, "Dying is gain." We're not ready to be with him in eternity because we're still not with him here in this life. In that case, God leaves us here to give us more time to repent and be saved and receive eternal life.

But if we do have Christ, and he has us, then to live is Christ. The whole point of it is not that you're looking out for your own pleasure, your own enjoyment, your own selfish gain, because you would have more gain if you just went to be with Christ, if he just took you right now out of this world. He's leaving you here because, as the apostle said, "It is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (Philippians 1:24).

If you have children, you're here to bless them. If you have parents, you're here to bless them. If there are people in your circle of friends, look at the ways you can bless them. If there are enemies, look at the way you can pray for them and bless them. God's purpose for leaving a believer to continue living on earth is so that you can help people come to know Jesus, progress in their faith, and have joy. You get joy from bringing joy to others.

Here's another aspect of "to live is Christ": to know Christ better and better. The apostle says, "I want to know Christ" (Philippians 3:10). To live is Christ. So even if it's not time for me to go out of this world, my time in this life is to get to know him better and better and better.

Paul says, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (Philippians 3:7-9).

Paul knows that it is not his goodness that makes him right in God's sight. It is the goodness of Jesus credited to him, the righteousness that's from God and is by faith. But he doesn't stop there. Christ has come into his life, and he has been drawn into Christ's life. It's a wonderful truth of the gospel that our standing with God depends completely on what Jesus has already done, that when God takes our sins and nails them to the cross of Jesus and takes Jesus' goodness and credits all of his righteousness to us, then we are completely right with God forever. We don't keep checking our bank account to see whether we have stored up enough of our own merit. We have more than enough because Christ has been credited to us.

And yet, you don't say, "I am sure glad I have a fabulous fire insurance policy. I have Jesus, and his perfection is credited to me, and I'm not going to hell. Now, back to business as usual." No. That's not how it works. You receive Christ's justifying righteousness if you're united to him. Without Christ, you're not justified by faith, because you don't have him. But once you have Christ by faith, then the rest of your life is gaining more and more of Christ.

What does the apostle say right after he says, "I have a righteousness that's not my own but through faith in Jesus Christ"? He says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:10-14).

So "to live is Christ" is to say, "I know Christ some, but not nearly as well as I would like to." And so Jesus leaves me on this earth partly to bring blessing to others, but partly so that I can be growing every day in my knowledge of him, becoming more and more like Jesus in the things I suffer and go through, so that I can be more and more like Jesus in the life he brings and in the resurrection power that he brings.

When you live a life like that, then you have all of these blessings: **Love, knowledge, insight, purity, joy, peace, courage, contentment.**

When you have Christ, you have what the apostle prays for the Philippians: "This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11). This love, this knowledge, this insight, this purity—that's Paul's prayer for Christians.

Near the end of the letter, and he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4-7).

Rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejoice in him always. Whatever else is going wrong, rejoice in the Lord always. Paul doesn't just give a pep talk, "Be happy all the time and get a more positive attitude." He says, rejoice *in the Lord*.

Then he says, don't be anxious. Present your requests to God with thanksgiving. And what happens then? The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. The joy of the Lord! The peace of the Lord, knowing where you stand with him!

There's also the courage of the Lord: "I know that now as always I'm going to have sufficient courage so that Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

And then contentment. Being satisfied. The apostle says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry,

whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:11-13).

That last little snippet is very popular: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." And it deserves to be popular. Sometimes it's quoted by athletes pursuing a championship, or by someone aiming for a lofty goal. But the context is, "I can be content no matter what happens." If I lose the game, I can lose graciously. If I go through a hard time, I can shed some tears, and yet I can still be content in Christ. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

It does not guarantee that tomorrow is going to be easy or that everything is going to go the way you hoped. The apostle says, I know what it's like to have plenty. And let's face it, sometimes you need special grace from God to stay close to Jesus when you have plenty. When everything's going your way, it's sometimes very hard to keep focused on the Lord, because you get focused on all that other stuff that you get so wrapped up in. We can be thankful when we have plenty if we recognize and thank God as the source of it all. However, Paul also knows what it is to be in want and still to be content, because he has Christ.

That's the key to life: to live is Christ. And so I urge each of you to consider again, is Paul's goal your goal? I want to know Christ, I want to know the power of his resurrection already working in me right now, and when I go through sufferings, I want to know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. And I want to be like Christ in bringing light and joy to others. And if he's using me in that way, if it's fruitful labor, then I'm going to be content.

"If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me... I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me" (Philippians 1:22, 25-26).

Don't just take up oxygen. Don't just eat food and exist and have some pleasant sensations and maybe some not-so-pleasant sensations, and then check out of this life. Live fruitful labor, bringing joy and progress to others. To live is Christ.

It's hard to live the Christ-life unless you know the second part as well: to die is gain. You need to know, "Jesus has got me. I can glorify him in my body, whether I'm alive or whether I'm dead. Either way, I want what's going to glorify him the most. If him leaving me in this life and on this planet and in this body is what's going to advance his cause and bring him the most glory, then so be it. If him taking me out of this life is what is going to most glorify him in the way that I face my death, then so be it. But either way, to live is Christ, to die is gain. I want Christ to be glorified in my body, whether by life or by death."

Fake news about departed souls

- "Their soul is asleep."
- "Their spirit is still with us."
- "Heaven gained another angel."
- "They deserve to go to heaven."

When we think about what comes after death and leaving this life, there's a lot of fake news going around. So it's important that we consider some different headlines of the fake news about departed souls.

One is the idea of soul sleep, the idea that when a Christian dies, they are no longer conscious or aware of anything. **"Their soul is asleep."** When Jesus comes again and raises the dead, then they will wake up in their new and glorious body. But in between the time of their death and the time of Jesus' return, they are literally out of it, just sleeping.

Now, the Bible does speak of death as falling asleep, but it says that because it's like your body falling asleep. When you die, your body becomes inert and inactive like it does when you sleep. When you die, your body "sleeps," but this does not mean that you're no longer conscious of anything in your soul.

"To depart and be with Christ is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). To be with Christ, to be aware of him, to be in his presence--that is joyful experience, not unconscious sleep. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Souls of believers after death are not sleeping; they are consciously experiencing paradise.

So it is false to say that you're just out of it and not aware of anything between the time of your death and the time of being raised to new life when Jesus comes again. Some people believe and teach soul sleep, but it's fake news.

Here's another piece of fake news: **"Their spirit is still with us."** No, it's not. It may comfort some to think that your departed loved one is still hovering about nearby somewhere, but they have departed. "To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). It's not hanging out with your best buds back on earth.

The spirit departs. Sometimes you see movies where the spirit of someone who has died comes back and communicates and says things they should have said while they were still alive but didn't, and now they've got another chance and they're back as a ghost, or on a "field of dreams," or in some other setting. "We didn't have the right relationship in life, but now we can make up for it with the ghost returning." No, you can't.

If you want to love somebody and tell them that you love them, say it now. You don't count on a return trip from the beyond in order to say something or do something. If you have unfinished business, now is the time to live for Christ. Now is the time to say what needs saying and do what needs doing, because your spirit will not be with others after you depart.

They may have memories of you, good things you did for them and kind words you said to them. Those things will live on in their memories. But your spirit won't still be with them.

The apostle Paul knew that if he was to be of help, he had to do it now. We can thank God that he got stuck in jail quite a few times, because otherwise he would have been so busy planting churches and doing other things that we wouldn't have nearly as much of the New Testament. He wrote Philippians from a Roman jail.

Pilgrim's Progress was written by John Bunyan from a jail. Some of the greatest writings in the world have been written from jail. But the main thing is, they wrote them, and those writings are still with us. The spirit of the departed is gone, but if you do things in this life, that's your only chance. So evaluate: What are you doing in this life? What still needs doing? And then make the most of the time you have.

If there is somebody you love who's departed, don't try to communicate with the spirits of the dead. Some bereaved people become desperate to hear from somebody on the other side. The Bible very strongly warns against trying to communicate with the spirits of the dead. We don't pray to dead saints. We don't ask for insights from dead loved ones. We don't ask for them to pay us a visit. We have to rely on the comfort of God, on the comfort of Jesus, when we've lost somebody. Because the dead person is gone—not forever, we'll be reunited if we're both believers—but the separation is there, and once they are gone, we can't make up for opportunities we missed.

I could be gone tomorrow. You could be gone tomorrow. I won't have a chance to do more to show love to somebody once I'm taken out of this world, and they won't be there to receive it if God takes them out of this world. This means that we've got to make our lives count right now in the relationships that we have.

Another piece of fake news: "**Heaven gained another angel.**" No, it didn't. God made hosts of angels. He made archangels, cherubim, seraphim, different ranks and levels of authorities and powers. He made many angels, and you ain't one of them, and you never will be. When a believer dies, heaven does not gain another angel. Heaven gains a human soul when a person who follows Jesus Christ goes to be with him in glory.

When we go to be with Christ and later when our bodies are raised, we don't become angels. We become exalted above angels. Christ became a human; he didn't become an angel. "Don't you know that you will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). So we don't become an angel. We get a huge promotion, from being lower than the angels, to being exalted to an authority where we sit with Christ on his throne. But you don't become an angel. You remain human.

There is one verse in the Bible where Jesus said that in the resurrection, people won't marry or be given in marriage, but they'll be like the angels (Matthew 22:30). They'll be like the angels in the sense that in heaven you won't have family life and marriage in quite the same way that you did during this life. Instead, you will be like the angels in that respect, that no longer will it be the family ties that are the closest for you. You'll still know and love family members, but that family will be broadened, and the institution of marriage itself will give way to something much better. We don't know what that "much better" is or looks like, but we do know that we're going to be like the angels only in that respect. Jesus was talking about what happens with marriage, not about us actually becoming angels. You don't become Michael or Gabriel or some other great archangel. You'll still be you: the wonderful, exalted you-in-Christ that God meant you to be.

Maybe the worst fake news is when it's said of somebody who has departed, "**They deserve to go to heaven.**" That statement comes from false teaching that heaven is based on what you've

earned, what you've deserved. If the balance on the scale shows that the good outweighed the bad, then you go to heaven; if not, you go to hell. Hardly anybody thinks their own bad outweighs their good. But the truth is that if going to heaven depends on being good enough, none of us will go to heaven. The Bible teaches that without Christ, hell is the only option.

We go to heaven based on Christ, not on what we deserve. When you get to the judgment seat of Christ, don't ask for what you deserve. Ask for what Christ deserves and for what he gives you.

So don't believe fake news. Don't believe, "Their soul is asleep." Don't believe, "Their spirit is still with us." Don't believe, "Heaven gained another angel." Above all, don't believe the horrible lie, "They deserve to go to heaven." Jesus is the only way.

To die is gain

- Body asleep; soul awake
- Escorted by angels to Paradise
- At home with Christ
- Enjoy saints and angels
- Joys beyond earthly words
- Await body like Christ's body

To die is gain. What happens when you die? The apostle says "to depart and be with Christ... is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). To be with Christ is the main joy of heaven.

But what happens? **Your body is asleep, but your soul is awake.** When you die, your body is like it's sleeping. It is totally unconscious, it lies there, without breath, without heartbeat, and soon decays. Your body is gone for the time being, but your soul is wide awake.

What happens with that soul when you belong to Jesus? It is **escorted by angels to Paradise.** Scripture says that the angels escort the soul of the blessed to the realm of the blessed (Luke 16:22). When you died, you may have been unconscious when it happened, or the last thing you may have seen was some doctors or a car hurtling toward you or whatever. But the next thing you see are the angels of God. They take your soul, they take your spirit, and they give you an angel escort. Angels are ministering servants that God sends for his people, and that is one of their great ministries, to bring the spirit or soul of the blessed into the presence of Jesus, to Paradise, without delay.

When you die, you will be **at home with Christ.** You remember what Jesus said to the criminal who was crucified next to him. The criminal said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). He didn't say, "Today you'll be sleeping in soul sleep until a far-off time." He didn't say, "Today you'll be in purgatory, and maybe someday you'll get out and be in paradise." He said, "**Today** you will be with me in paradise." That's Jesus' promise. And that's what the apostle is echoing. He says that as soon as he departs this life, he's going to be with Christ, and that's better by far.

To be at home with Jesus. To be at home with the one who bled and died for your salvation. To be at home with the one who made all the worlds and designed everything about you, who knew all the days ordained for you and had them in his book before even one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16). You're at home with him, and you can enjoy him. If your life's desire has been to know Christ better and better, then at last you're going to be there in his presence, enjoying him in perfect holiness and joy forever and ever.

No more are you going to have a soul that's cold 80 percent of the time. Sometimes you feel so far from Christ. I know I do. So often I feel distant, so often I feel lukewarm, so often the things of God can even feel unreal to me. That's part of walking through this life by faith, not by sight. But there, in Paradise, we don't walk by faith, we will walk by sight, because then we're in the very presence of Jesus.

When you're there, you'll also **enjoy saints and angels**. When we come to the heavenly Jerusalem, we've come to "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). We can enjoy the company of those who have gone before us, of parents who have gone before us, of children who have gone before us, of friends, of people whom we didn't even know in earlier eras of church history—those missionaries who first carried the gospel to the lands that eventually brought it to us, those heroes of faith that we didn't even know about. We'll get to know them and rejoice that they are there, and that we are there with them.

We can rejoice in the presence of the angels, and they will be rejoicing over us. The Bible says there is joy in the presence of the angels whenever one sinner on earth repents (Luke 15:10). What do you think the joy is when redeemed sinners actually get to the gates of glory and their soul enters in to be with Christ? There will be joy in the presence of the angels.

The joy above all joys is not just the reunion with people or angels, but being with Jesus himself. "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). "He will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

In Jesus' presence, there will be **joys beyond earthly words**. The apostle Paul said that God took him to heaven. He didn't know whether it was in the body or just his spirit going to heaven. This happened even before he died. There Paul saw things there that were inexpressible, that could not be told in words (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Think of Lazarus, the friend of Jesus who died and then Jesus brought him back to life. I'm sure his sisters were glad to see him back. I'm not so sure Lazarus was glad to be back. At any rate, we don't have any information from Lazarus about what he did or didn't experience between the time of his death and the time Jesus called him out of the tomb. There are things no one can tell others about. There are joys beyond earthly words.

Paul did not go into any detail about what he experienced in his visit to heaven, but he did say, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). That's what we're told by a man who had been to heaven and back. Five times Paul was whipped with 39 lashes, three times he was beaten with rods. He was in at least three shipwrecks. He lived in constant danger. He spent years in various prisons (2 Corinthians

11:24-28). Eventually Paul was executed. Considering all those sufferings, Paul said they're not worth comparing to the glory. He could not put into words the glory he experienced in his visit to heaven, but how great that glory must have been! To die is gain.

We can be confident that if we're absent from the body, we're at home with the Lord, and it is better than what we experience in this life. But this still is not the final state. This is what theologians call "the intermediate state," the time between our death and resurrection. After we die and go to be with Christ, we still **await a body like Christ's body**. It will be wonderful for our souls to be with Christ between our death and our bodily resurrection, but it will be even more wonderful when Jesus comes again and raises our bodies to life. Our souls will receive their transformed, glorified bodies, and the whole creation will be made anew. Heaven will come to earth, and all things on earth will be as God intended them to be.

Four stages

- Gut is god; headed for hell
- To live is Christ: fruitful labor
- To die is gain: present heaven
- Resurrection: heaven on earth, body like Jesus' glorious body

There are four stages that a person can go through.

One is an awful stage that even now some people are stuck in: **their gut is their god, and they are headed for hell**. The apostle Paul puts it this way: "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears: many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19). That is the perfect summary of life without Christ. The gut is god: your appetites, urges, desires, and wants are what reign over you. They mean everything for you. And your destiny is destruction: you're on that road to hell. Your mind is entirely on earthly things. Some of the earthly things might not even be bad in themselves. The problem is that you're totally caught up in what you can see around you, never in the life of Christ or what is beyond you.

When Christ redeems you from that, then you're brought into the stage. You become spiritually alive. **To live is Christ: fruitful labor**. It's peace and joy in the Lord. It is knowing the love that surpasses knowledge, the peace that surpasses understanding, the joy unspeakable and full of glory. God gives us the Holy Spirit, and so we get a down payment, a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

Some people have had an experience or a taste of God so powerful that it changes their whole life. Some are called mystics; others are Christians who have just had amazing encounters with God. It happens in this life that they get a down payment, a seal on themselves, an assurance from the Holy Spirit. Every believer receives the Holy Spirit, who teaches us to call "Abba, Father." And so to live is Christ.

Then comes the next stage: **To die is gain: the present heaven.** This is the intermediate state, where your body dies and your soul goes to be with Jesus. That can be hard to imagine, maybe even hard to get excited about. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5, "I don't want to be found naked." By that he meant, I don't want to be without a body. I was meant to have a soul and a body. I can't imagine what it's like to be without a body. But then Paul goes on to say that being with Christ is still going to be better, even if I'm with Christ in heaven for a while without a body. I'm still there as a soul or spirit, enjoying his presence.

The final stage is **resurrection, heaven on earth, a body like Jesus' glorious body.** When Jesus comes again and brings heaven to earth, and the earth is made new, the earth becomes God's dwelling place, which is to say, it becomes heaven. The whole creation, the animal creation, God's people are all raised glorious. That's our final destiny: to have glorious resurrection bodies, not just to be spirits in Jesus' presence but to be embodied people on earth, where heaven has come to earth and the meek inherit the earth.

"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). This parallels Paul's words in Philippians 1: "To depart and be with Christ... is better by far."

In the meantime, what do we do? "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (2 Corinthians 5:9). Paul's goal was that "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

"If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:8). There are only two situations in which Jesus has to be everything: when you're alive and when you're dead. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Prayer

Father, we pray that so much more of your life will flood ours, that we may know you, Lord Jesus, better and better, and in knowing you better become more like you, and in becoming more like you, bring blessing and joy and courage and wisdom and truth to others. Lord, prepare us more and more for that day when we see you face to face, so that we won't be meeting a stranger, so we won't meet someone whom we hardly know, but rather our blessed friend and brother and Lord and Savior.

May our life be Christ, and may our dying be gain. Comfort our hearts in the loss of loved ones who have gone to be with you. Strengthen our hearts to live for you in the time that you still give us. And in all of it, Lord Jesus, may you be exalted, whether by our life or by our death. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain
By David Feddes
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²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST
TO DIE IS GAIN

To live is Christ

- Live in his life; act by his action
- Think his thoughts; shine his light
- Aid others' progress and joy
- Know Christ better and better
- Love, knowledge, insight, purity, joy, peace, courage, contentment

Fruitful labor

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me... I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST
TO DIE IS GAIN

Fake news about departed souls

- "Their soul is asleep."
- "Their spirit is still with us."
- "Heaven gained another angel."
- "They deserve to go to heaven."

To die is gain

- Body asleep; soul awake
- Escorted by angels to Paradise
- At home with Christ
- Enjoy saints and angels
- Joys beyond earthly words

- Await body like Christ's body

Four stages

- Gut is god; headed for hell
- To live is Christ: fruitful labor
- To die is gain: present heaven
- Resurrection: heaven on earth, body like Jesus' glorious body

Confident

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Cor 5:6-8)

Goal

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. (2 Corinthians 5:9)

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. (Romans 14:8)

Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.(Phil 1:20)

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

TO DIE IS GAIN