

## **Bibles**

### **Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority**

In 1994, almost 25 years ago – I can't believe it has been that long, the world was introduced to the wisdom of one Forrest Gump.

“Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get”,  
right-

Actually that was wisdom from Forest's mom.

**I would make the claim that life is all about choices...**

And we make choices every day.

What school am I going to go to?

What car am I going to buy?

What am I having for lunch?

What church should I attend?

Should I date so and so?

Where am I going to invest my money, my time and resources?

What kind of music do we listen to?

I was into grunge music in the early 90's. What motivated me? The culture – that was the “in” thing during that time. The newness of it – I guess.

As we look back on our choices, we can discern what motivated us or what drove us to make our decisions.

As Christians, of all the motivators in life, of all the things that drive our decision making, there should really be only one true master passion.

This one passion should be the driving force of our lives.

What should our master passion be? – well, our master passion should be our Master's passion.

What He desires for our life.

To live a life that pleases Jesus Christ in everything that we do.

Apostle Paul is a wonderful example in scripture of someone whose master passion was driven despite adversity to fulfill God's will for Him.

This morning as we finish chapter one in this wonderful book of Philippians, we will see Paul reveal this master passion to the church. Not to demonstrate how spiritually mature he was but, it is an invitation for us to adapt this master passion into our own lives.

Let's pray...

Let's go ahead and read our text for this morning...

**[Phl 1:21-30 NKJV] 21 For to me, to live [is] Christ, and to die [is] gain.**

**22 But if [I] live on in the flesh, this [will mean] fruit from [my] labor;**

**yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between**

**the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, [which is] far**

**better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh [is] more needful for you.**

**25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue**

**with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for**

**me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.**

**27 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, 28 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. 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not**

**only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 having the**

**same conflict which you saw in me and now hear [is] in me.**

Philippians is the book of the Bible that in my opinion, has the most "life motto" verses that get taken out of context.

Think about all the verses that come from Philippians:

"Do not be anxious about anything," Phil 4:6

"Rejoice in the Lord always," Phil 4:4

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," Phil 4:13

Many times we might find some of these verse on a coffee mug or a tee shirt or on a bumper sticker.

After all, they do sound nice...

However, do we really understand all of these verses? Take for example

Phil 4:13,

**[Phi 4:13 NKJV] 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

There is a basketball player who currently plays in the NBA, he is an All Star and Philippians 4:13 is his "life motto" verse. He writes the verse on his basketball shoes with a sharpie.

Sometimes he will wear a t-shirt to practice with that verse on it.

Sometimes you see other athletes being interviewed and they quote that verse after they defeated an opponent or after they won a race. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

**I am going to let you in on a little secret.**

Philippians 4:13 has nothing to do with basketball or baseball or track.

You see, I'm forty four years old, my vertical jump is zero.

Just because I wear a shirt with Phil 4:13 on it, or because I write Phil 4:13 on my sneakers – it doesn't mean that I am going to be able to dunk a basketball.

I am probably going to throw out my back or pull a hamstring or something.

Philippians 4:13 is all about God equipping us and strengthening us to be able to do His will and that's it. No matter the circumstances.

Someone who is in China or in Somalia preaching the gospel despite persecution, they are the ones that are holding on to Phil 4:13.

The first verse in our text today is another verse that is taken out of context.

**21 For to me, to live [is] Christ, and to die [is] gain.**

It certainly looks good on a coffee mug...

It certainly looks good when people post it on their social media.

To live is Christ, to die is gain...

However, we need to ask ourselves, “do we really understand what this verse mean?”

If we are going to claim a verse out of scripture – I think it is very important to understand the meaning right.

And the easiest way to answer that question is by answering the following question,

What are you living for?

What are you living for?

You see, your answer to that question will determine the direction of your life.

If your purpose is wrong, your direction will be wrong.

If your purpose is vague or fuzzy, your direction will also be vague or fuzzy.

If you don't know your purpose, unfortunately, you'll just be swept along by the currents of the world, doing only what seems to bring you short term happiness.

Unfortunately, this is the way many people live their lives.

What are you living for? I just want to party and be happy and have fun.

Over the past few weeks I have repeated the statement that happiness is just a response to our circumstances and when our circumstances change – so does our happiness.

This is why we have so many people turn to addictions in an effort to counter the change in circumstances in their lives.

**What are you living for?**

Apostle Paul has the answer. He says to live, is Christ, to die is gain.

With this one sentence, Paul lays out his passion in life and also responds to the uncertainties in life.

Whether Paul lived a long life or if his life was cut short, God's purpose for Paul was going to be fulfilled.

**Every person who professes Christ as Savior must grapple with the question, "Can I honestly say, 'For me, to live is Christ?'"**

**If I can say, "Yes," then I have also answered that fundamental question,**

**"What about death and what lies beyond?" It will be gain for me.**

You see, you cannot have the same response to anything other than Jesus Christ.

Let's say you were to say, for me to live is wealth.

Well, then, you have to say, then to die is loss, because you cannot take your wealth with you. You leave it all behind. So for you, it is all about accumulating wealth, working eighty hours a week. Then when you die, it's a total loss.

If you were to say, for me to live is fame and notoriety and status, then you'd also have to say, for me to die is loss, because you lose it when you die.

If you say, for me to live is having a perfect physical body and spending all my time at the gym working on my abs, well, you're going to have to put loss there, too, because when you die, it doesn't take long for your body to begin to fall apart.

However, if to live is Christ, if we are driven by His will for us in life, death is gain because we will spend our eternity in His presence.

So what does it mean when Paul says, "To live is Christ?"

**1. First of all, it means that we are joined organically in a living, real union with Christ the Head as a member of His body, the church.**

Everything that was true of Christ is true of the believer.

Turn with me to Romans 6,

**[Rom 6:10-11 NKJV] 10 For [the death] that He died, He died to sin once for all; but [the life] that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

It means growing to know Christ intimately (Phil. 3:10).

It means growing to love Christ with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

It means submitting all of my thoughts, emotions, words, and deeds to the lordship of Christ, so that I seek to please Him in all respects (Col. 1:10).

It means growing to experience Christ as my “all in all” (Eph. 1:23; Col. 3:11).

Every aspect of life must be centered around the Lord Jesus Christ.

The glorious person of Christ, and nothing less, **this is the Christian life.**

## **2. Secondly, to live is Christ means that everything we do, we do it to exalt Christ.**

We saw Paul do this last week in verse 20 when he says, "... that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death". This is just another way of stating the great goal of the Christian life, which is to glorify God by everything we are and everything we do.

It means that we may either exalt Christ or bring shame to His name by our attitudes, our words, and our behavior.

## **3. Finally, to live is Christ means that we die to selfish desires in order to live to serve others in His name.**

If we are not denying self in order to serve Christ, we are not "living Christ"; we are living for self. Many people today have the notion that Christ is there to serve me, rather than that I am to serve Christ. They think the church is here to meet their needs, and if it doesn't they drop out of church or try to find one that better meets their needs. We need to get back to the biblical truth, that we have been saved to serve Christ.

**[Mat 25:31-40 NKJV] 31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of**

His glory. 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides [his] sheep from the goats. 33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 'I [was] naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed [You], or thirsty and give [You] drink? 38 'When did we see You a stranger and take [You] in, or naked and clothe [You]? 39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, **'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did [it] to one of the least of these My brethren, you did [it] to Me.'**

This is what is meant to live is Christ, to fellowship with Him, to exalt Him in everything that we do and to serve Him.

Now let's take a look again at verses 22-24

**[Phl 1:22-24 NKJV] 22 But if [I] live on in the flesh, this [will mean] fruit from [my] labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, [which is] far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh [is] more needful for you.**

Paul doesn't know what's going to become of him.

He doesn't know if he is going to be freed from prison or if he is going to die once he stands before Nero.

**Paul simply wants what God wants – it is a complete surrender to God's will.**

Now in verse 23, Paul is telling the church that he is struggling between the two desires.

If your translation is a Revised Standard Version, it says that Paul is hard pressed between the two.

The word that Paul uses here in verse 23 is a word that one that would be used of a traveler in a narrow passage, with a wall of rock on either side, unable to turn in any direction.

Paul wanted to go home and be with the Lord. But, Also Paul was thinking of the spiritual wellbeing of those that he would leave behind.

You see, there were pros and cons for both cases,

### To depart – or to die would mean

- That Paul would die as a martyr
- He would instantly be with Christ in glory
- He would be free from the pain of this world – he wouldn't have to suffer any more beatings, no more shipwrecks and no more imprisonment.
- However, It would also mean that he would be absent from those who needed him.
- He would no longer be a living witness for Christ.

### To remain – or to continue to live would mean

- That he would continue to have fruitful labor in ministry.
- He would continue to provide security and hope to believers
- He would also be able to train up the next generation of believers. The future Timothy's that would later come and follow in his footsteps.
- However, he would also be absent from the physical presence of Christ and from the heavenly glory and would still have to put up with the suffering of the world.

As Paul contemplated both scenarios, he became convinced that the best path would be to remain for the sake of the progress and joy of the Philippians – and that is what we see here in verse 25.

You see, Paul didn't have to make the choice between life and death.

**This choice was already made for him by the sovereign purpose of the Almighty God.**

This is why Paul writes in verse 25,

**[Phi 1:25 NKJV] 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,**

God had revealed to Paul, that he would not suffer the punishment of death but would be released to visit the Philippians yet again.

We do know that Paul is eventually released and later on is captured again and imprisoned once more before church history tells us that he is beheaded.

Let's turn to 2 Timothy 4

**[2Ti 4:6-8 NKJV] 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the**

**righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**

So Paul was already being poured out. His head was not on the executioner's block yet, but his heart was there. He was ready to make the ultimate sacrifice.

He had fulfilled God's will for him here on earth and now he knew it was a matter of time before he was in His presence.

The amazing part in all this is that Paul simply didn't say I'm giving up this life of ministry after he was released from prison the first time. He was true to his word when he told the Philippian church –

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

He didn't get the next boat to the Bahamas – he went back into doing what God had called him to do.

Now, starting in verse 27, there is a shift in Paul's writing as he is no longer speaking about his imprisonment and his troubles – now the focus is on the conduct of the church in Philippi.

**[Phi 1:27-28 NKJV] 27 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, 28 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.**

Even though Paul knew he was going to get released, he didn't know how much longer he was going to be in jail.

So he reminds the church in Philippi regarding their conduct.

The word conduct can be translated as citizenship, so despite the fact Philippi was a colony of Rome. Paul is reminding them that their true citizenship is in heaven and therefore, their conduct should reflect their true citizenship.

There is that famous marketing catchphrase, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas"

Which by the way goes against everything in scripture. There is no such thing as a license to sin.

That is what Paul is telling Philippi. Just because you live in a Roman colony doesn't mean you can act like a Roman.

You see, Paul is calling us to a consistent Christian life.

If you're called Christian, then live up to the name.

A Christian must never live beneath his theology.

A Christian must never live beneath his belief.

And there is no better way to demonstrate our citizenship to others than by standing firm in one accord and in one spirit working side by side for the advancement of the gospel.

Not striving against each other but striving with each other. Encouraging one another.

The world wants to see the church as something different than they already have. Why would they want to become a Christian if all they see is division and strife among ourselves? The world has plenty of that to offer.

Paul also tells them to not be terrified by your adversaries in verse 28.

Listen, as believers, we are going to have adversaries.

**[Jhn 15:18-19 NKJV] 18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before [it hated] you. 19 "If you were of the world, the world would**

**love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.**

When our spiritual enemies fail to make us afraid, they have failed completely because they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation.

We have been given the gift of salvation and no one can take it away from us. That alone should embolden us to not be afraid.

Now, we end chapter one with a promise – and this is a promise that not to many people want to claim.

**[Phi 1:29-30 NKJV] 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear [is] in me.**

There are preachers today that preach in front of thousands a message that says that no Christian ever needed to suffer if he or she just had enough faith.

Church, be careful of such a message.

Apostle Paul clearly demonstrated that he was a man of great faith.

However, his faith was on Jesus Christ. His faith was never on his faith and unfortunately, that is what is being taught in some of those churches. To have faith on your faith.

Apostle Paul was able to make these choices because he had confidence. Not confidence in himself but confidence in his God.

Church we must understand that God is the one who gives us the strength to overcome. The same strength that Paul had to overcome his circumstances is offered to us, all we have to do is allow Jesus Christ to be manifested through our lives.

Amen.

Let's pray...

Dear Jesus,

Please forgive me of all of my sins.

I know that my sin has separated me from You and I am deserving of death.

I believe that you died for my sins and rose again.

I turn from my sins and I am asking that You come into my life.

Show me how to live my life that is right and pleasing to You.

I accept You as my Lord and Savior.

In Jesus name I pray.