

Philippians IX – “A Quandary of Joy” (Phil 1:22-26)

Introduction – We love Philippians 1:21 – “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” But Paul shows us from prison what it really means to believe this and to wrestle with this in light of his love of his Savior and his love for the church, his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is hard pressed, not between two difficult decisions, but between two wonderful possibilities. And here is how we are to see our life in Christ as well.

The Text - “*But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.*”

The Quandary (vv22-24) – If I had to choose, I don’t know which I would choose. The AV says, “I am in a straight betwixt two.” Then he goes on to describe what ‘life’ in Christ is, and what ‘gain’ in death is.

Fruitful Labor – Paul is not arrogant here. He is convinced that his work of faith will bear fruit, for he operates in the Word of God given to him, with all of its promises (Isaiah 55:10f). Imprisoned now, Paul has testified that this has not stopped the work of God, and he is convinced in this argument that he will be released (v25). Paul can also be convinced because he knows that to live on in the flesh will not mean more wasted time, more self-seeking, more chasing after lust, or more whining and complaining. An optimistic view of one’s future life grows from a life of repentance and faithful living now.

To Depart – It is important to understand the Bible’s teaching on what happens at death. Paul is not wishing to escape from his bodily existence. He is not arguing for the immortality of the soul as the Greek philosophers believed. He has no expectation of ‘soul sleep’ or reincarnation or ghost-haunts or purgatory. He knows that upon his execution, he would “*depart and be with Christ.*”

There Is A Sleep At Death – But this refers to the body (John 11:11-15, 1 Cor 11:29f, 1 Thess 4:13-16).

Our Spirits Are Brought To Christ – This is what Paul sees as the immediate gain (Luke 23:39-43).

Resurrection Hope – Plato looked forward to a ‘naked soul’, and the Greeks spoke of the body as a tomb. But that is not Paul’s hope at all. We groan now, not because we have bodies, but because we have fallen bodies. Paul’s hope in death is that he will be with Christ, and that being with Christ, he will one day have a glorified body as well (1 Cor 15:20-23, 42-44; 2 Cor 5:1-8).

More Needful For You (v24) – Paul’s love for Christ manifests itself in two directions. First, he would love to be ‘with Christ’. But his love also constrains him with sacrificial love for Christ’s body, the church. And that love for the church is for people, not simply the abstract idea of ‘the church’.

The Joy (vv25-26) – Paul resolves that God will have him remain, not for Paul’s affairs, but to serve the church. And what are the affairs of that church? That they would “*strive together for the faith*” and in the midst of opposition, do so “*in one spirit*” (1:27). This is to be manifest in their love for one another (2:2), their humility as they consider others ahead of themselves (2:3-4), and as they keep focused on the end prize themselves (3:14-21). This is what Paul means when he says that he will continue with them “*for your progress and joy of faith.*” His optimism is not because of his confidence in himself, but in God’s promise for this church and for its people.

Rejoicing (v26) – The great boasting (rejoicing) will be in Christ because of Paul’s release. The word ‘rejoicing’ has to do with putting one’s full trust in the Lord and then glorying in Him (Jer 9:23f).

Our Quandary – Those outside of Christ are in a quandary. Death is fearful with uncertain, even horrifying consequences. But life ultimately has no meaning either, and so spirals into misery and despair regardless of one’s circumstances. However, in Christ, we find ourselves in another quandary. Prepared to die, we find ourselves equipped to live. And both, in Christ, leave us with a dilemma to resolve – which would I choose, if I had to choose?

Faithful Living, Faithful Dying – What will you fill in the blank with: ‘to remain on in the flesh will mean more _____’?

How precious a thing it is for a congregation to be filled with bondservants who obviously are living for Jesus Christ. How you live and how you die will be a testimony to those around you. You do not have to have the world-wide public ministry of Paul – your life is having an impact on other eternal souls. Your life of prayer, of example, of service in word and deed, is a life necessary for others – that is why you have not gone home yet.

The Quandary of Joy – Those in Christ long to be with Christ more than life itself. But this longing for Christ changes the way we view our time here serving His purposes. Our sacrifice for His body, our devotion to His kingdom rule upon this earth, these are signs of life. And those signs come when we at the same time cannot wait to be with Christ in perfect holiness and, one day, with glorified bodies.