

## **Side By Side: Gospel Partnership in Philippians**

### **The Certainty of Future Joy**

By [David Strain](#)

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#### **Philippians 1:19-27**

Now, would you please take your copies of Holy Scripture in your hands and turn with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1. We've been working our way through the book of Philippians. We've come to the second half of verse 18 and we'll read from there to the end of the chapter, though we'll be focusing on verses 18 to 26 in our sermon this morning. Before we read God's Word, would you bow your heads with me as we pray together?

*O Holy Spirit, would you be gracious to us now and come to us and illuminate sin-benighted understandings? Show us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining on sinners in the face of Jesus Christ. Open your Word to us, we pray. Help us to flee sin and self and run to Christ and find in Him infinite satisfaction for our souls in Jesus. And would you do that by this portion of Holy Scripture today in our hearts for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Philippians 1 at verse 18. This is the Word of the Almighty God. Paul has said, "I rejoice that Christ is proclaimed whether in pretense or in truth," and then he goes on

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Amen and we give thanks to Almighty God that he has spoken to us in his holy and inerrant Word. May he write it's truth on all our hearts.

### **Preaching Christ with All Joy, Endurance, and Confidence**

Last Lord's Day Morning, we were looking at the words of verses 12 to 18 of this opening chapter where the apostle Paul was reflecting on the realities of his own situation. He has been suffering, suffering quite acutely. Actually, he's under arrest in Rome. He is chained to a Pretorian guardsmen and, as we just read, he is unsure that this suffering of his will not end up in his own martyrdom. That is a distinct possibility that he is anticipating. So, he was modeling in verses 12 to 18 for the Philippians how to endure suffering clinging to Christ and as he did so, as verse 18 tells us, his own endurance and faithfulness to the Savior emboldened others who preached Christ and that Christ was being made known, that Christ's name was being proclaimed far and wide whether in pretense or in truth, made Paul rejoice. Paul is here languishing in chains yet he's overflowing in joy because his Savior is being made much of and his fame is being heralded all over the place. His witness has permeated the Pretorian guard. And, as chapter 4, I think, in verse—is it verse 22?—makes plain, his witness is even penetrated into the very household of Caesar itself. So Paul is in jail. He's rejoicing in the midst of suffering and the second half of verse 18, notice, says that not only is he rejoicing in what is happening at that moment, but he's also supremely confident that there is yet more joy to come. He says, "I will rejoice." "I am rejoicing that Christ is being proclaimed," yes, "and I will rejoice."

And so, as many of us have discovered from our own experience, when suffering comes and robs us of joy here and now, but not just of joy here and now, but blots out our horizons and all we can see in the future is still darkness and shadow and obscures all prospects of future joy, our question ought to be, "How is Paul able to say with such confidence in the midst of such acute suffering, not only that he does rejoice, but that he will rejoice, that there is still more joy to come?" Where does Paul get this remarkable assurance of future joy and this extraordinary confidence from? Or, perhaps to put it more pointedly, where can we find such confidence in future joy when our own trials overwhelm us and blot out, as it were, our hopes for the future? It is a chapter—a passage, rather, ringing with extraordinary confidence, isn't it? Verse 18: "I will rejoice." Verse 19:

“I know this will turn out for my deliverance.” Verse 20: “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed.” Filled with assurance and confidence and so we need to find out, don’t we?, not just as an academic exercise but as a pressing concern for the good of our own souls as we face trials of many kinds where do you get confidence like this?

And, I want you to notice three things in particular that I think help us answer or are Paul’s answer in verses 18 to 26 to that question. Here are the grounds and the roots of Paul’s assurance of future joy. I want you to notice with me first the solid grounds on which his confidence rests, the grounds of Christian confidence. Then, the surprising logic of his Christ-centered calculation that stands right at the very heart of this passage. And, then, finally, the sacrificial character of complete commitment. The sacrificial character of complete commitment. So, the solid ground of Christian confidence, the surprising logic of Christ-centered calculation, and the sacrificial character of complete commitment.

## **I. The Solid Grounds of Christian Confidence**

First, then, the solid grounds of Christian confidence. Paul’s confidence here is not wish fulfillment. It is not naive hopes despite all the evidence. His confidence is well founded primarily resting on three things.

### **The Certainty of Future Deliverance**

In the first place, Paul’s confidence rests on the certainty of future deliverance. Look at the passage again. Verse 19: “I know this will turn out for my deliverance.” He has an earnest expectation, verse 20, that he will not be at all ashamed. Now, we might easily read those words as meaning nothing more than that Paul believes he will be released, that he will not face the shame of a condemning sentence at the hands of the Roman judicial system. But as the passage itself makes immediately clear he has no such confidence. He is not at all sure that he will escape martyrdom. So what does he mean when he says, “This will turn out for my deliverance”? It’s my persuasion that the deliverance he has in mind is eternal. It is spiritual in nature, not at all deliverance from present trials, but ultimate deliverance. He is saying that my chains, my sufferings by God’s perfect ordination will become in the hands of my Redeemer instruments that will in the end produce deliverance for me—ultimate, final and glorious.

Now, hear that carefully, for it is vitally important for us if we are to handle the reality of personal trials when they come. Paul is teaching us that our sufferings become instruments in the hands of God to bring us safely home to glory in the end, to work in us perseverance and endurance, to deepen our dependence on the Savior, to become in the hands of Jesus the Master Surgeon a clean knife to cut away the cancer of our sin. He will use our trials. Paul does not say that despite his suffering he’ll be delivered. He says his suffering will result in

deliverance. They are instrumental in fitting him for glory. Grasping that changes our perspective and helps us handle our sufferings when they come, doesn't it? It helps us understand these have been ordained for me and can be blessed to me, can be sanctified to me by my Savior to fit me for heaven, to equip me for dependence upon him, to work in me a depth of perseverance and endurance that will weather the storm to the glory of the Savior's great name. That is what is happening in Paul's life. Keep eternity in view as you face trials of many kinds, brothers and sisters, Paul would say to us. Understand that the Savior is simply preparing you for your eternal by every trial that he sends to you. The certainty of future deliverance.

### **The Power of Prayer**

Then, notice, also the centrality for Paul of the prayers of the people of God. There are two great instruments that will result in Paul's deliverance. One immediate in his own circumstance: the reality of personal trial; one more distant, one more to do with the life of the church. That is to say, it is as the people of God pray for him that he is enabled by the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in response to their prayers that he is enabled to persevere through these trials. His trials are blessed to him as the Spirit is given in answer to the prayer life of the church. A stronger statement of the instrumental role that the prayer life of the local church plays in gathering and equipping the people of God for life here and perseverance all the way to the finish line, I do not think it is possible to find anywhere in Holy Scripture. Paul is saying that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers as God's people pray great things happen in the life of Paul. As God's people pray great things happen in the life of Paul.

Moisés Silva, one of the commentators on this passage writes this here. He says, "The point to note here is that even Paul's personal growth, his sanctification does not take place in isolation from the support of the church. It is indeed a sobering thought that our spiritual relationship with God is not a purely individualistic concern. We are dependent on the Spirit's power in answer to the intercessory prayers of God's people. Do you long for more of the power and dynamic of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in your Christian life, in our life together as a church? Paul says get praying. Do you long for help, for resources to persevere through trials? Begin to pray for one another. That's what Paul says the Philippians are doing for him. The church is gathering to pray and as they pray the Spirit is being given and Paul's trials are blessed to him for his deliverance.

I think Paul would say that attendance at the prayer meeting is a good barometer of the love of the members of the local church for one another. As we pray for each other. It is an index of the spiritual temperature of a congregation as a whole what its attitude is to the prayer meeting. When you come do you come pleading with heaven for the outpouring of the Spirit for the perseverance and growth of the church and of the saints? That's what Paul says the Philippians did for him and as they did he is confident that things will turn out for his deliverance.

## **The Exaltation of Christ**

The certainty of future deliverance, the power of prayer. The third part of his well-founded confidence in the face of suffering is simply the exaltation of Christ. Paul's confidence, you see, is not simply focused on himself and what will happen in his own life but what will happen to the name and honor of Jesus. Verse 20: "It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed but with full courage now as always Christ will be honored," or magnified, "in my body whether by life or by death." "Whether I live or die, I know Jesus will be made much of. And, that fills my heart with gratitude because, as we'll see, Jesus is everything to me. Jesus will be made much of." He will be magnified, is another way to translate Paul's language there. We use two different instruments to magnify things, don't we? One is a microscope. A microscope makes very, very small things look bigger than they are. That's not what Paul means when he says we magnify Jesus. What Paul says is rather that his whole life, his deepest ambition, is committed to being much more a telescope than a microscope. A telescope makes things that are big, but from our vantage point seem small, because of our perspective in relation to it, it appears small. But, Paul says I live to show this Jesus in his true dimensions. That's what a telescope does. It makes something that is large but is distant from us and appears small; it makes it seem to us as it really is in its true dimensions. That's what it means to magnify Jesus, to display him as he really is. And Paul says, I live for nothing so much as to make Christ known, to magnify him, to show him as he really is in all his glory and beauty and excellency and worth.

## **II. The Surprising Logic of Christ-Centered Calculation**

And as he does he is enabled, because his deepest longing is not fixed first on himself but on the honor and fame of Jesus being spread, he is enabled to say, "I will rejoice regardless of what happens to me. Even if I should die, I will rejoice because whether by my life or by my death Jesus will be magnified." Which brings me to the second thing to notice in this passage that is right at the very heart of the reason for Paul's extraordinary confidence here. Not just the solid grounds of his confidence but the surprising logic of his Christ-centered calculation. There's an extraordinary piece of sacred calculus here, isn't there? You see it in verse 21: "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Famous words. They could easily serve as Paul's epitaph printed on his tombstone. They sum up wonderfully, perhaps better than any other passage of Scripture, the heartbeat of the mighty apostle Paul. "Jesus is all in all to me," he says. "Whether I live or die, it is Christ that I want and all that I need is him. For to me to live is Christ. There are no verbs actually in Greek. It's almost as though the apostle Paul is struggling to speak in complete sentences as he tries to convey all that Jesus is to him. Two simple clauses, literally, "for to me the life, Christ; and the death, gain." To me, here's the calculus of it, here's the math, the equation: life

equals Christ and death equals gain. Jesus is all-satisfying to me. He is all-satisfying to me.

## **Death is Gain**

Listen to Martin Lloyd-Jones as he elaborates and paraphrases this first clause of Paul's extraordinary statement "to me live is Christ," he says, "there are certain demands I make of life. There are certain things I'm looking for. I'm looking for peace and joy. I'm looking for happiness and Christ completely satisfies me in every respect. I have an intellect. Christ satisfies it, says Paul. I have feelings and desires which need satisfaction; Christ is my all in all. Every demand that I make of life is more than fully satisfied in Christ. That's what Paul means," says Lloyd-Jones by saying that living to him is Christ. The reaction to things that happen and all the demands of Paul's nature and his personality are fully satisfied and filled. "My dear friends," Lloyd-Jones asks, "can you say the same thing? I'm sorely tempted," he goes on, "just to stop at this point and ask that question over and over: are you fully satisfied with Christ? This to me is the very essence of the Christian position, the thing that makes a Christian, is Christ. Christ is always central. He is everything to me. Living to Paul meant Christ and all that full sense. To me to live is Christ. Ultimate satisfaction in him." And then he goes on to say, "And death, death is gain. That is the Christian position on death, you know? Many of us think wrongly about it I suspect. For Paul death is gain.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, I think, sums up wonderfully Paul's point of view. Question 37: "What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?" And it answers, "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory. And their bodies being still united to Christ do sleep in their graves until the resurrection. Their bodies will one day be made perfect and raised imperishable and reunited to their souls to dwell in a new heavens and a new earth at the last day. Until that day dawns, Paul says, the Confession says, this is what Paul is teaching here in our passage: death is gain because the souls of believers "do immediately pass into glory and are made perfect in holiness," face to face with their Savior. When you close your eyes in the sleep of death, Christian believer, you open them immediately on the face of the Savior who died for you. When you close your eyes in the sleep of death, you open them immediately upon the face of your Redeemer. "This day you will be with me in paradise," Jesus said to the thief on the cross, Luke 23:43. Death is gain. Death is gain because I have uninterrupted communion with the Christ who for me in life is all-satisfying and supremely valuable. He is all in all to me in life and so in death I have him with nothing to interrupt the sweetness of my fellowship. No sin to interpose itself between me and my Redeemer. Forever with the Lord which is far better. Death is gain.

## **Christ is All**

Is Christ all in all to you? Is life to you Christ? Is he satisfying? Is he enough? Or must there be something else? Yes, Jesus, but I have to have this. I have to have it. I can't be satisfied without it. It's an idol. It is an idol, a competitor for glory in your heart, and you must smash it and tear it down and set apart Christ alone as Lord. He will brook [allow] no rivals. Nor should you turn to any other for every other is a broken cistern. It will leave you hungry and thirsty in the end. Only Jesus supplies streams of living water welling up to everlasting life for all who come to him who drink they will never thirst again. Some of you have been drinking at broken cisterns for a while. Running after all the counterfeit satisfactions of the world and they seem to glut your appetite for a season, but they leave you hungry and thirsty in the end. You were made for satisfaction, but your satisfaction can only be found in an infinite source: the Lord Jesus Christ. You need him. Turn to him. Paul says, "To me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Hugh McKail was, a Covenanter, was to be martyred in Edinburgh for his commitment to Reformation principles. I think he articulates this very idea, this very commitment and attitude and conviction that we find in the apostle Paul very well. After singing the thirty-first Psalm, he began to climb the scaffold. "I care no more to go up this ladder," he said, "and over it than if I were going home to my Father's house." Each step of the ladder he cried out, "every step is a degree nearer Heaven." After he read from God's word and preached briefly to the crowds who'd gathered to witness, the noose was placed around his neck. "Now I leave off to speak any more to creatures and turn my speech to thee, O Lord. Now I begin my intercourse with God which shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother, friends and relations. Farewell, world and all delights. Farewell, meat and drink. Farewell sun, moon and stars. Welcome, God and Father. Welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, Mediator of the new covenant. Welcome, blessed Spirit of grace, God of all consolation. Welcome, glory. Welcome, eternal life. Welcome, death. Welcome, death. To die is gain."

We can face the worst if Christ is enough. We can face the worst if Christ is enough. If you have lived being able to say "to me to live is Christ" you will die saying "death is gain."

### **III. The Sacrificial Character of Complete Commitment**

And, then, finally, notice the sacrificial character of Paul's complete commitment. The solid grounds of Christian confidence, the surprising logic of his Christ-centered calculation. And, then, finally, the sacrificial character of complete commitment.

#### **Reveling and Glorifying in Christ**

Paul speaks in the remainder of our passage as though the choice were entirely up to him. "Shall I stay or shall I go and be with my Savior? I want to be with

Jesus. It's far better. But, I'm torn between the two. Should I stay or should I go and be with my Savior? It's as though, he's speaking as though he had the choice entirely on his own. And, he's really doing that as if to show us where his heart was. He doesn't know whether he will be martyred or not, released or not. But, if it were up to me, he says, here's what I'd choose: even though being with Christ is far better, I want your welfare. I love what my Savior loves and he loves his church like no other. And I love the church too. I love you Philippians and I long that you might taste more and more of the all-satisfying Jesus that I have come to find my satisfaction in." And so he says to them, "Remaining will mean fruit for my labors," verse 22. Verses 25 and 26: remaining in ministry will mean their progress and joy in the faith. Supremely, verse 26, he wants to come to them again. "So that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again." He wants to be the means of capturing and captivating their hearts with delight in the Savior. And, so, he is committed to enduring on. If the choice were given to him, he would suffer on that he might make a difference for the people of God.

You know when Jesus is all in all, when your deepest longing and your highest ambition is his glory rather than your own, you will endure anything that his fame might be spread and his honor proclaimed. And, nothing will fire your joy so much as seeing the people of God rejoicing and resting in Christ with you. A joy shared is a joy doubled. So Paul is able to say, I will rejoice whether I live or die. And if I have opportunity to live then I will go on pouring myself out no matter the trials that come that my joy might be doubled by being accompanied with yours as together we glory in Christ. May the Lord give to us hearts that echo the example and pattern of the great apostle that for us as also for him Christ may indeed be all in all.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, we bless you for the Lord Jesus who is infinitely satisfying. Forgive us for running to empty idols, for seeking our satisfaction at broken cisterns that always run dry. Help us, instead, to run to the fountain of living water and to draw with joy from the well of salvation that never runs dry that we might never thirst again as we drink from the wellspring that is Jesus. Make him in every heart here gathered all in all. For we ask it for his sake, Amen.*

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