

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: Change ***
*** Topic: Paul: A Change in Desire * Philippians 1:12-30 * 2/9/25 ***

MAIN POINT

The life of a Christian should be radically changed forever. This includes what we desire most in life. The tools the Holy Spirit uses to make these changes include God's word and the Church.

INTRODUCTION

Complete this sentence; "For me, to live is . . ."

How might your non-Christian friends finish that sentence?

The main desire of many people is to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. In direct contrast to this, Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while in chains under house arrest in Rome while expressing the idea of joy 14 times in this short book. Our main desire in life should not be to improve our circumstances, but to grow in our relationship with Christ and to carry out the great commission.

Note to study leader: The current sermon series at The Heights is titled "Change." We started by looking at how God supernaturally intervened in Paul's life to lead him to Christ. Today's lesson continues by looking at how Christ changed Paul's desire in life. We will be considering this by looking at Philippians 1:12-30, where Paul wrote of his joy in Christ while he was under house arrest in Rome.

UNDERSTANDING

Note to study leader: Today's lesson contains an extended "Application" section. It will be necessary to budget adequate time to cover the application in class.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 1:12-19

Note to study leader: Paul was under house arrest in Rome while awaiting his trial before Caesar. He had been arrested in Jerusalem after being accused of teaching people everywhere to oppose the Jewish faith (Acts 21:27-36). Since he was a Roman citizen, he exercised his right to appeal to Caesar, and this led to his being brought to Rome, and being placed under house arrest while awaiting his trial (Acts 25:8-12). Part of being under house arrest in Rome included being chained to a Roman guard.

Why did Paul say his imprisonment had been for good?

What do you make of Paul's conclusion in verse 18? Does God use every problem situation to see that Christ is proclaimed? What made the proclamation of Christ a reality in this instance?

What do these verses reveal about what Paul desired in life?

Paul saw God's perspective on the whole situation, reminding the church that—even while he was in prison—God's mission was being accomplished. The best news for Paul was that his trials had served to advance the gospel, which was a much higher priority for him than his temporary comfort or pleasure.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 1:20-26

Based on these verses, what did Paul desire in life? What stands out to you about his perspective?

Paul desired to honor Christ. Anything less than that would cause him to "be ashamed."

What did Paul mean when he said, “for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.” (v. 21)?

Paul was convinced that whether he lived or died, he would have the privilege of continuing to honor Christ (v. 20). Paul’s desire was to live for Christ and proclaim the gospel. He joyfully faced a terrifying future (execution) because he knew that neither death nor life could keep him from being with Christ.

Which of the two options before Paul does he say is better? Which does he choose?

Paul states very clearly that his desire is “to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” However, he recognizes that if the Lord spares him from death now, that he will have the privilege and joy of continuing to spread the gospel and encourage churches to grow in their walk with Christ.

Notice that it was not just the promise of eternal life that allowed Paul to face death without fear, but his focus on the glory of God. How might focusing on living for the honor and glory of Christ free you from the fear of death?

As Christians, we know exactly why we exist—to glorify God. When we focus on living for Christ and His glory, death doesn’t seem so daunting. In Christ, our future is secure; He has saved us from sin and promises to take us to be with Him forever when we die. Paul did not fear the possibility of death. Instead, he used it as motivation to make the most of the time God had given him to proclaim the gospel and encourage churches in their pursuit of Christ. The more we focus on Christ, the more we will take advantage of the opportunities God has set before us to spread His fame and build His church.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 1:20-30

What characteristics would you identify as evidence that a person is walking in a way that is worthy of Christ’s gospel?

How are the phrases “stand firm” and “striving together” related to walking worthy of the gospel of Christ?

Paul called on the Philippian believers to live out the gospel as individuals and as a church. When a group of believers consistently live out the gospel, they impact their larger community. Believers are to live lives that are different from those who reject Christ. In doing so, believers demonstrate the worthiness of Christ.

How can we word Paul’s directive in verse 28 in a positive way?

How does expressing confidence in Christ serve as a sign of destruction to those who oppose Christ?

Paul called on the believers to boldly declare their confidence in Christ when facing opposition to the gospel. Paul assured believers that they would face opposition in some way, just as he was imprisoned by some who opposed him. We can stand with confidence knowing that our salvation is an invaluable gift of God’s grace that is greater than any opposition faced.

What does it show about what we should desire in life by the fact Paul considered suffering something that is “granted” to us (verse 29)?

Note to study leader: The Greek word translated as “granted” is “charizomai” (pronounced khar-id’-zom-ah-ee), means to do something pleasant for, to do a favor for, or to give graciously.

Paul views suffering as something that draws us closer to God. And contrary to the false doctrine in the church known as the “prosperity gospel”, God in his love is much more interested in growing our walk with Him than He is in our temporary comfort or pleasure.

APPLICATION

As Christians, we don't just automatically change to become more and more like Christ. We need to intentionally become more involved in allowing God to work in us to become more like Christ.

Note to study leader: Consider using three columns on the whiteboard to list the three forces that stand against us, the three allies we have as Christians, and the three actions we can take to grow as Christians.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ THE FOLLOWING THREE PASSAGES, AND LIST THE THREE FORCES THAT OPPOSE US FROM CHANGING AS CHRISTIANS

- 1) 1 Peter 5:8: Satan
- 2) Romans 7:18: The flesh (our old sinful nature)
- 3) 1 John 2:16: The world (The present world's philosophy)

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF PASSAGES, AND LIST THE THREE ALLIES THAT HELP US BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST

- 1) Acts 1:8 and 1 John 4:4: The Holy Spirit
- 2) 1 Corinthians 5:17: Our new natures
- 3) Hebrews 3:13 and Hebrews 10:24-25: The church

"We need each other. That's why God gave us the church.... You ever hit a place (where you say), 'I'm not sure I can trust God.' ...Are you a part of the body of Christ... among people where you can sit in their trust for a little while until yours comes back? There's no recipe for journeying with the Lord alone."
Pastor Randy Hahn, The Heights Baptist Church, December 29th, 2024

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ THE FOLLOWING THREE PASSAGES, AND LIST THREE ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE TO BECOME MORE CHRISTLIKE AS CHRISTIANS

- 1) James 4:7: Resist the Devil.
- 2) 2 Timothy 2:22: Flee evil desires.
- 3) 1 John 2:15: Do not love the world, or anything in the world.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGE TO LIST ONE MORE VITAL AGENT OF CHANGE WE NEED TO INCORPORATE INTO OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS

- John 17:17: The Bible is what God uses to sanctify us (make us become more like Christ).

Is there something in my life that makes it difficult to desire Christ above everything else?

Is there a lifestyle choice I can make to better abide in Christ, the true vine?

PRAYER

Ask God to give each of us an eternal perspective on life, and the insight and courage to truly embrace the fact that "to live is Christ, and to die gain." Pray also that God will help us sacrifice our personal desires and interests to proclaim the gospel and do our part in fulfilling the great commission.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-30

1:12. Paul points to his own persecution and his present imprisonment in Rome. Instead of hampering the gospel, these have advanced it. Paul appears to be reassuring the Philippians that even though his movements are restricted, mere human constraints cannot thwart the gospel.

1:13. Paul's imprisonment was not due to committing any crime. He was in chains for Christ. The whole palace guard along with the common people on the street understood that he was in prison due to his commitment to the cause of Christ.

1:14. With Paul not having the freedom to minister where he pleased, other believers had taken the baton or come up to the plate to speak the word of God in Paul's stead. Conventional or worldly wisdom would think the threat of jail would make Christians fearful of proclaiming their faith. Yet the opposite was true. God saw fit to use what looked to be a setback to gain new converts.

1:15. Paul's difficulties spawned missionary zeal based on two types of motives: selfishness and goodwill. Seizing the opportunity of the moment, some envied the success God had given Paul, while others wanted to be a part of what God was doing through Paul. Both gave people the good news of Christ's gospel.

1:16. Motivated by Paul's example, those who preach with right motives do so in love. Such love flows out to Paul, to unbelievers needing the gospel, and to God. Such love realizes that Paul was suffering, not for some wrong he had done, but because he preached Christ (see vv. 12–13).

1:17. Those with wrong motives seek to exalt themselves. They do not promote the gospel in sincerity. Rather they seek to further their own selfish ambitions and to stir up trouble for Paul. They hoped Paul would think they had taken over his place and so would be disheartened.

1:18. Some Christians wanted to harm the messenger, Paul. Yet he was not concerned for himself. He focused strictly on the message. Even though the gospel was being proclaimed with mixed motives, the message, nevertheless, was Christ. Even wrong motives could result in actions that let people come to know Jesus. So Paul emphasized the results, not the reasons, and rejoiced.

1:19. Paul was detained; but the gospel was still going forth, so Paul remained encouraged. He had faith something good would happen to him. Why? Because the Philippians prayed and the Spirit of Jesus Christ remained at work. So Paul looked expectantly toward the day he would leave prison but at the same time comprehended that he could be executed.

1:20. Whether he regained his freedom to minister outside of prison or went to be with the Lord in heaven, he did not want to be ashamed of his testimony for Christ. Whatever took place, he desired for Christ to be exalted in his body. The strength to live or die for Christ can only come by abiding in Him, so we can tap into His power, not ours (Ephesians 1:18-20).

1:21. Many people believe this verse is the most important of the entire book. It demonstrates that Christ is the source of meaning for Paul. He announced: to live is Christ. In death the adversities of this life would be over, and he would be with Christ in heaven. Therefore, to die is gain.

1:22–24. Paul conveys the dilemma of his situation. The apostle was so committed to the cause of Christ that staying on earth had its advantages but so did departing and going to heaven. To live means fruitful labor. He could remain ministering and spreading the gospel. To die means eternity with Christ. Given a choice in the matter, Paul did not know his decision. Being with Christ appeals to him. It would certainly be an improvement in his present circumstances. Yet he places the needs of his readers ahead of his desire. Staying lets them benefit from his ministry.

1:25–26. Paul knew Christ’s mind, a mind that put the needs of others above personal desires, so Paul knew he would remain on earth to minister to the churches. Paul considered the welfare of fellow Christians more important than his desire to go to heaven. By enduring on earth, he could assist their spiritual growth and joy in the Christian faith. This joy is not from circumstances but from a relationship in Christ Jesus, the source of true joy for believers.

1:27-28. Live your life (lit “conduct yourselves as citizens”; cp. Acts 23:1) alludes to Philippi’s political history, reminding the church of its higher citizenship (in the kingdom of God). Paul’s primary concern, that you are standing firm in one spirit, reflected military pride. Roman armies stood ready for combat regardless of the enemy’s level of strength and preparedness or the distracting enticements of culture. The church must manifest the same readiness. “One spirit” expresses the believer’s unified attitude. One mind (lit “same soul”) means that believers share “life.” Together they prevent divisiveness like Paul witnessed at Rome (vv. 14-17). Standing firm involves working side by side. “Working” comes from athletics where teams contended for a prize (cp. 4:3). Harmony, not individualism, achieves God’s purposes. Standing also involves not being frightened... by your opponents. Soldiers used “frightened” to describe horses that might easily be startled.

1:29-30. “Given” (lit “by grace”) indicates that God “graces” Christians to believe and suffer on Christ’s behalf. Both contribute to Christ’s glory.