

Life and Death

Philippians 1:21-24

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Introduction:

The themes of life and death explain how Paul would glorify God in his body—even death would not keep him from it. These themes also prompted him to evaluate the purpose of living. With this introduction to 1:21–24, it seems that the section explains the commitment of the previous verses (vv. 18b–20).

Often Paul spoke of Christ as his life. In Gal 2:20 he said, “I live by faith in the Son of God.” In Col 3:4 he stated that Christ “is your life.” These two passages differ in context and concern. The emphasis in Gal 2:20 is soteriological; in Col 3:4, Paul speaks to the mysterious union between Christ and the believer. Paul did not mean precisely either here, however. In this context he spoke of glorifying Christ through whatever means he had, and that provides the interpretive environment. The statement is completed by envisioning death as a better state than life. Thus, “to live is Christ” must mean that Paul so totally wanted to glorify Christ that as long as he lived everything about him was to point people to Christ. This was accomplished in part by the chains which were “manifested in Christ” (1:13); but even if he were called to die, it would be an occasion for Christ to become prominent. Death was a gain because he would see the Lord, enjoy him, and no longer endure the difficulties he was called to bear on earth.

Body :

I. In Life and Death v.21

a. Live

- i. Live- life depends *in the flesh* in contrast to the heavenly life
- ii. Is Christ
 1. By saying τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, “living is Christ,” Paul does not mean that Christ is the source of his physical existence (cf. Acts 17:28), or even of his spiritual life (Rom 8:2–11; 2 Cor 5:17), if the ideas are exclusive. He probably includes both. Nor does he mean that Christ is his life (Luther, Tyndale), in the sense that Christ lives in him—Gal 2:20 is *not* an explanation of this statement

2. To say “living is Christ” is to say that for him “life *means* Christ” (GOODSPEED, KNOX, MOFFATT, PHILLIPS). Life, both physical and spiritual, is summed up in Christ. Life is filled up with, occupied with, Christ, in the sense that everything Paul does—trusts, loves, hopes, obeys, preaches, follows (Vincent), and so on—is inspired by Christ and is done for Christ. Christ, and Christ alone, gives inspiration, direction, meaning, and purpose to existence. Paul views his life in time (against Dibelius) as totally determined and controlled by his own love for and commitment to Christ. Overpowered by Christ on the Damascus road (which event, however, he never explicitly alludes to) and overwhelmed by his majesty, love, goodness, and forgiveness, Paul can see no reason for being, except to be “for Christ” (Rom 14:7–9).
3. Quite the contrary. Precisely because Christ was the goal of Paul’s life, he felt constrained (ἀνάγκη), not by external pressure but by the inner compulsion of love, to take up the tough task of preaching the gospel (Phil 1:7, 12, 16, 27; 2:16; 4:3). As a result, his life was marked by imprisonment (1:7, 13, 17), afflictions (1:17; 4:14), sufferings (1:29; 3:10), struggles (1:30), beatings, stonings, weariness, pain, privation, and dangers of every sort (2 Cor 11:23–27). Precisely because Paul’s life was so occupied with Christ, so totally given over to Christ, to doing the will of Christ, he found life a very heavy load to carry.
4. Since for Paul “living is Christ,” meaning that life for Paul had no significance whatsoever without Christ, it follows that he never would have renounced Christ to save himself from those things that wearied him, hurt him, and made life a burden for him. Therefore, for him to go on and say that “dying is gain” required a firm belief on his part that death, although it had the power to free him from “lingering out his days in misery,” could not in any way separate him from Christ (see Rom 8:38–39). He was certain that even in death the Christian was still in vital relation with Christ.
5. For to me to live is Christ.’ For Paul life is summed up in Christ. Christ is its inspiration, its aim, its end. To trust, love, obey, preach, follow, suffer,—all things are with and in Christ.

b. Die

i. Die

ii. Is Gain - advantageous; profit

1. If it is true that Paul by his statement τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “dying is gain,” is echoing the universal longing of a human being to be released by death from the burden life has placed upon him, (1) how does this square with his first statement τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, “living is Christ,” and (2)
2. It is also this belief that spells the fundamental difference between Paul’s thinking and that of his non-Christian counterpart. The pagan viewed death as a release from earthly troubles and no more. It was for the pagan a walking away from present ills out into the unknown, perhaps into nonexistence, and hence a κέρδος, “gain,” in that sense Paul also viewed death as a release from earthly troubles. But he saw death as more than this: in death there was a continuing relationship with Christ.
3. to die is gain; because it will introduce him to complete union with Christ, unhampered by limitations of the flesh. His gain will therefore magnify Christ.
4. Normally, one would say to live is gain and to die is Christ, but Paul reversed these. At death a Christian gains a more intimate relationship with the Lord. The statement “to live is Christ” is magnified by the statement “to die is gain.”

II. In the Flesh v.22

a. Flesh - with physical limitations, life here on earth

- i. Flesh - Here, however, linked as it is with τὸ ζῆν, “to live,” it means nothing more than life in the body—Paul’s physical life lived here on earth.
- ii. Fruitful Labor - gain from labor
 1. Paul envisions “a further extension of his missionary labours and a greater opportunity to prove that Christ is his life.” ἔργον, “work,” is a word used frequently by Paul to describe his missionary activity
 2. The literary pattern emphasizes his conviction that he would remain, that the result of his trial would be life not death. In 1:22 he expressed the conviction that fruit would result from his continued physical life. The way the discussion takes place reveals the interpretation of “fruitful labor for me” (1:22). This statement

is matched by the conviction that he would remain for the sake of the Philippians (1:24). While it may appear that the “fruit” was some spiritual development in Paul’s life, the context clearly relates “fruit” to the service Paul performed

3. It was helpful to them for Paul to remain; the fruit was what resulted from his work for others. The longer Paul lived, the more people would be touched by his life

III. Earth or Heaven v.23

a. Hard Pressed - conflicting emotions

1. Indeed, I am torn between two desires.” The verb συνέχομαι, “I am torn,” serves to highlight the magnitude of Paul’s dilemma. It is a powerful word that can describe a person who is hemmed in on both sides so that he has no room to move (Luke 8:45) or a city encircled by enemies who are closing in on it from every side (Luke 19:43).

ii. Both Directions

1. Finally, in the last part of this verse, Paul admits to not knowing which to choose: death or life. The Greek verb translated “I can[not] tell”

b. Desire to Depart

i. Desire- desire for good things

1. τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων: ‘having the desire.’ Τὴν has the force of a possessive pronoun, ‘my’ desire. Ἐπιθυμία is used in N.T. in both a good and a bad sense.

2. Depart – Die

- a. εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι: Lit. ‘to break up’; ‘unloose’; ‘undo.’ It is used of loosing a ship from its moorings, of breaking camp, and of death.

ii. Be with Christ

1. The context of Phil 1:23 and the very wording of the verse itself favors the idea of “fellowship with Christ” as belonging to the phrase σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” found here. In fact, Paul, musing about death, his own death, and the meaning of death, comes to combine the words “living is Christ and dying is gain” and the words “to break camp and to be with Christ” in such a

way as to emphasize his growing conviction that death cannot in any way deprive believers of this “fellowship with Christ” (Rom 8:38–39); it can only provide them with the opportunity to enjoy this fellowship to a degree never before experienced. Paul’s focus on the supreme importance of Christ and fellowship with Christ and his own understanding of fellowship as living communion with Christ, based perhaps on his reflections on the Psalms

- iii. Much Better

- c. Remain in the Flesh

- i. Necessary for Your Sake

- 1. Necessary - more necessary

- a. The discussion of rewards clouds the basic issue. Paul’s longing for death was, in reality, a longing for a more intimate, open, and total relationship with Christ himself. Such a relationship could only occur after death. The practical dilemma, therefore, consisted of whether Paul would choose his own preference or remain to benefit others.

Word Studies

Live mention of that upon which life depends *in the flesh* in contrast to the heavenly life¹

Gain – advantageous; profit

In the NT Tt. 1:11 refers to the αἰσχροὺν κέρδος for the sake of which members of the community teach what they ought not. In Phil. 1:21 Paul says that for him to live is Christ, and therefore death, in which this life finds fulfilment in sight, is advantage or gain. For the sake of Christ who is his life all the natural and historical advantages that belong to the Jews by divine ordination, and especially their moral superiority and blamelessness, which might otherwise seem to be κέρδη, advantages, are now regarded as a disadvantage, ζημία (Phil. 3:7).² In the light of the all-transcending knowledge of Christ the life which trusts in, and appeals to, descent, the Law and achievement, is not just fruitless exertion but harmful in the absolute sense.²

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 425.

NT New Testament.

² → II, 890.

² Heinrich Schlier, [“Κέρδος, Κερδαίνω,”](#) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 673.

Flesh - with physical limitations, life here on earth³

In 2 C. 10:3; Gl. 2:20; Phil. 1:22, 24 (ἐν) σαρκί simply denotes the earthly life in its totality.²²⁴ It is not in any way disparaged. In it man has the possibility of not living after the flesh (→ 130, 24 ff.), of dying to the Law and living for God in faith, rendering service for Christ. Ultimately, then, the σάρξ which is given up to destruction in 1 C. 5:5 denotes earthly being as a whole → VI, 435, 20 ff. For this reason σάρξ (Gn. 2:24) can be adopted with σῶμα in 1 C. 6:16, → VI, 419, 11 ff.; 420, 17 ff.⁴

Fruitful Labor - gain from labor

Hard Pressed - conflicting emotions

Desire – desire for good things

Depart - die

Flesh is Necessary – more necessary

³ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 915.

²²⁴ Bultmann Theol., 231 f. (§ 22, 2) concludes from the unusual ἐν that here the (Gnostic, Käsemann, 103–105) idea of the sphere is new (par. to ἐν πνεύματι) → lines 21 ff.; but there is Jewish precedent for the expression → 110, 4; n. 178; 145, 29 f.

⁴ Eduard Schweizer and Friedrich Baumgärtel, “[Σάρξ, Σαρκικός, Σάρκινος](#),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 126.

21 ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” ἐμοί, “to me,” is the very first word in this new section. Paul purposely places it here in the emphatic position to draw special attention to his own personal understanding of life and death, irrespective of what others may think or say about them. His sentences in Greek are short, perfectly balanced, concise, verbless, powerful. τὸ ζῆν, “living,” is a present infinitive, accentuating the *process* of living. It answers to τὸ ἀποθανεῖν, “dying,” an aorist infinitive, accentuating the *act* of dying. The verb “to be” is absent from both sentences, but can and should be supplied; for Χριστός, “Christ,” and κέρδος, “gain,” stand in the predicate position to τὸ ζῆν, “living,” and τὸ ἀποθανεῖν, “dying,” respectively. Χριστός, “Christ,” in the first sentence, therefore, answers to κέρδος, “gain,” in the second.

By saying τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, “living is Christ,” Paul does not mean that Christ is the source of his physical existence (cf. Acts 17:28), or even of his spiritual life (Rom 8:2–11; 2 Cor 5:17), if the ideas are exclusive. He probably includes both. Nor does he mean that Christ is his life (Luther, Tyndale), in the sense that Christ lives in him—Gal 2:20 is *not* an explanation of this statement (see the comments of H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 124; cf. R. Bultmann, *TDNT* 2:868–70). He does not even mean that living is to be with Christ (cf. Phil 1:23). Rather, without rejecting these ideas, but including them and embracing them in his thinking, Paul nevertheless puts the emphasis now in quite a different place. To say “living is Christ” is to say that for him “life *means* Christ” (GOODSPEED, KNOX, MOFFATT, PHILLIPS). Life, both physical and spiritual, is summed up in Christ. Life is filled up with, occupied with, Christ, in the sense that everything Paul does—trusts, loves, hopes, obeys, preaches, follows (Vincent), and so on—is inspired by Christ and is done for Christ. Christ, and Christ alone, gives inspiration, direction, meaning, and purpose to existence. Paul views his life in time (against Dibelius) as totally

determined and controlled by his own love for and commitment to Christ. Overpowered by Christ on the Damascus road (which event, however, he never explicitly alludes to) and overwhelmed by his majesty, love, goodness, and forgiveness, Paul can see no reason for being, except to be “for Christ” (Rom 14:7–9).

“To me, living is Christ!” would be a slogan whose impact may well have been greater to Greek hearers of the letter, since the words τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, spoken in Koine Greek, may well have been heard as the Greek motto ζῆν χρηστός, “life is good” (Droge and Tabor, *Noble Death*, 121). On this point we may observe that (1) the confusion between *Christos* and *Chrestus* is evidenced in the well-known reference in Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4 (see also Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 60.6) and (2) as far as the present authors can remember, the only modern translator to follow the (non-attested) reading *chrēstos* is H. J. Schonfield (*The Authentic New Testament* [London: Dobson, 1955]), who renders the verse “To me life is useful.”

But for Paul to say this “does not thereby mean that his life [was] a carefree or blissful absorption into a transcendent realm of being” (Palmer, *NovT* 17.3 [1975] 217). Quite the contrary. Precisely because Christ was the goal of Paul’s life, he felt constrained (ἀνάγκη), not by external pressure but by the inner compulsion of love, to take up the tough task of preaching the gospel (Phil 1:7, 12, 16, 27; 2:16; 4:3). As a result, his life was marked by imprisonment (1:7, 13, 17), afflictions (1:17; 4:14), sufferings (1:29; 3:10), struggles (1:30), beatings, stonings, weariness, pain, privation, and dangers of every sort (2 Cor 11:23–27). Precisely because Paul’s life was so occupied with Christ, so totally given over to Christ, to doing the will of Christ, he found life a very heavy load to carry. Thus, he was led to say τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “dying is gain.” These words are not the words of the brave martyr, like Ignatius of Antioch crying out for “fire and cross and struggles with wild beasts” to come upon him in order that he might attain to Jesus Christ (Ign. *Rom.* 5.3) or in order that he might be carried up straight away from the place of execution into heaven without passing through any intermediate state (see Lohmeyer; Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, 186). They are the words of the very human Paul giving vent to a very human and universal sentiment: death is a gain to those whose life has become weighed down with well-nigh unbearable burdens.

For these reasons we should refuse the view that Paul is contemplating suicide as a way to decide his fate. Holloway (*Consolation in Philippians*, 114–15) commends his mentor’s view that Paul did in fact consider suicide (Droge, *NovT* 33 [1988] 268–86; cf. Jaquette, *Neot* 28 [1994] 177–92). The one point in favor of this interpretation is Phil 1:22, where life and death are Paul’s to

Suetonius *Life of Claudius*

Claud Divus Claudius (Suetonius)

NovT Novum Testamentum

Rom. Romans

NovT Novum Testamentum

Neot Neotestamentica

choose (αἰρήσομαι), but that he might in the future choose death seems contradicted by the hope of a revisit to Philippi (1:26).

The universality of the sentiment that death is gain for the burdened life can be demonstrated by numerous quotations drawn from lyric poetry, drama, philosophy, and rhetoric, spread over several centuries of Greek and Latin literature. The vocabulary used to express this sentiment is almost identical with that which Paul uses here in Phil 1:21. Antigone, for example, says: “Whoever lives in as many ills as I—how does this one not get gain [κέρδος] by dying?” (Sophocles, *Ant.* 463–64). And Io, upon being told by Prometheus of sufferings still to come, cries out, “What gain [κέρδος] have I then in life? Why did not I hurl myself from this rugged rock?... Better it were to die [κρεῖσσον θανεῖν] once for all than linger out all my days in misery” (Aeschylus, *Prom.* 747–51; cf. Euripides, *Med.* 145–47; Plato, *Apol.* 40c–e; see Gniska; Palmer, *NovT* 17.3 [1975] 203–18, for the best collection of similar expressions; see also Sir 41:2b–4).

If it is true that Paul by his statement τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “dying is gain,” is echoing the universal longing of a human being to be released by death from the burden life has placed upon him, (1) how does this square with his first statement τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, “living is Christ,” and (2) how, if at all, does Paul make any advance in thinking over his pagan counterparts? The answers to these questions seem to be as follows. Since for Paul “living is Christ,” meaning that life for Paul had no significance whatsoever without Christ, it follows that he never would have renounced Christ to save himself from those things that wearied him, hurt him, and made life a burden for him. Therefore, for him to go on and say that “dying is gain” required a firm belief on his part that death, although it had the power to free him from “lingering out his days in misery,” could not in any way separate him from Christ (see Rom 8:38–39). He was certain that even in death the Christian was still in vital relation with Christ. So certain was he that he put the two ideas together in one phrase, εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, “to depart [= to die] and to be with Christ.” (The verb ἀναλύειν means to “break camp” [a military term] or “weigh anchor” [a nautical expression]. As a metaphor for death, its usage is Hellenistic.) It is also this belief that spells the fundamental difference between Paul’s thinking and that of his non-Christian counterpart. The pagan viewed death as a release from earthly troubles and no more. It was for the pagan a walking away from present ills out into the unknown, perhaps into nonexistence,

Sophocles Sophocles

Ant. Arbeiten zur Neutestamentlichen Textforschung

Prom. Prometheus Bound

Med. Meditationes (Marcus Aurelius)

Plato *Apology of Socrates*

Apol. First Apology

NovT Novum Testamentum

and hence a κέρδος, “gain,” in that sense (cf. Plato, *Apol.* 29a–c; 40c–e). Paul also viewed death as a release from earthly troubles. But he saw death as more than this: in death there was a continuing relationship with Christ. Life that is in Christ is thus not destroyed by death; it is only increased and enriched by death (GNB, PHILLIPS). Hence, for Paul τὸ ἀποθανεῖν, “dying,” is κέρδος, “gain,” in the ultimate sense of this word (cf. Antin, *RSR* 62 [1974] 259–60, for a somewhat different interpretation; cf. also Ridderbos, *Paul*, 498).

22 εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτό μοι καρπὸς ἔργου, καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω, “But if to live on in the body means fulfilling some good purpose, then I cannot tell what I would choose.” At this point, for whatever reason (Bockmuehl, 89: “It may well be that the grammatical deterioration reflects something of Paul’s own inner conflict on the matter!”; cf. Martin [1959], 77), Paul’s sentence structure becomes quite broken and difficult to piece together. It is so difficult that Michael wishes to emend the text saying that none of v 22 except the last clause belonged to Paul’s original sentence. Michael’s reconstruction of vv 21–22 certainly makes everything flow smoothly—“as life means Christ to me, so death means gain; and which to choose I cannot tell”—but there is not a shred of evidence to support this radical treatment of excision to resolve a difficult problem. So it is necessary to try to make sense out of the verse as it stands.

Literally translated, v 22 reads as follows: “but if to live in the flesh, this to me fruit of work, and what I shall choose I do not know.” Apparently this verse is an elliptical sentence, a common phenomenon in Paul’s writings (Rom 4:9; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 1:6; Gal 2:9, and others). Something, then, must be supplied in order for the translated sentence to be intelligible. The simplest thing to do is to add a second εἰ, “if,” immediately before τοῦτο, “this,” so that τοῦτο, “this,” clearly harks back to and explains τὸ ζῆν, “to live.” It also means that the καὶ introduces the main clause and must be translated “then” (cf. Luke 2:21; Acts 1:10; 2 Cor 2:3; BDF §442[7]). The result of this slight addition gives a perfectly understandable translation in harmony with the context: “but if to live in the flesh—if this is the fruit of my work—then I do not know what I would choose,” meaning that if to live is going to result in productive effort for Paul, then he is in a dilemma—he cannot tell which to choose, life or death (cf. Dibelius, Bonnard, Collange, GOODSPEED, GNB, JB).

Plato *Apology of Socrates*

Apol. First Apology

GNB Good News Bible = Today’s English Version

RSR Recherches de science religieuse

BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (University of Chicago/University of Cambridge, 1961)

GOODSPEED *The Complete Bible: An American Translation*, E. J. Goodspeed

GNB Good News Bible = Today’s English Version

JB A. Jones (ed.), *Jerusalem Bible*

Looking more closely at the text, one notices that the “if” clause, introduced as it is by εἰ, may not really be conditional in meaning at all, but may border on causal, “since” (BDF §372[1]). If so, then by using this construction, Paul underscores the idea already expressed (see v 19 and the *Comment* there). He assumes that he will be released from prison and that fruitfulness will be the natural consequence of his release.

ἐν σαρκί, “in the flesh,” is an expression often found in Paul with very negative overtones describing one’s sinful lower nature (cf. Rom 8:5; see Sand, *Begriff ‘Fleisch’*; Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*). Here, however, linked as it is with τὸ ζῆν, “to live,” it means nothing more than life in the body—Paul’s physical life lived here on earth.

μοὶ καρπὸς ἔργου, “fruit of my work,” is also an ambiguous phrase. It may mean that as a result of his release Paul was confident that he would be able to reap the fruit of his efforts that had been interrupted by his imprisonment. More likely, as Martin ([1959], 77) points out, by using this phrase Paul envisions “a further extension of his missionary labours and a greater opportunity to prove that Christ is his life.” ἔργον, “work,” is a word used frequently by Paul to describe his missionary activity (Martin [1959]; cf. Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 10:11; Phil 2:30).

Finally, in the last part of this verse, Paul admits to not knowing which to choose: death or life. The Greek verb translated “I can[not] tell” is neither εἰδέναι, “know,” nor γινώσκειν, “know,” but γνωρίζειν. γνωρίζειν is a Pauline word, used by him eighteen of the twenty-six times it appears in the NT and always in the sense of “to make known” or “to reveal” (Rom 9:22–23; 1 Cor 12:3; 15:1; Gal 1:11; Phil 4:6, and so on). Hence, there is no good reason to translate it here: “I do [not] know” (cf. KJV, LB, JB, NIV; BDAG). The selection of this particular word reflects the reality of the dilemma Paul faced. “I dare [not] reveal” my preference and “I can[not] tell” what I would choose (cf. GOODSPEED, MOFFATT, RSV, KNOX, NEB) are translations that come closer to the force of the Greek than the translation “I do [not] know.” As explained by Jones (21), “The Apostle will not venture to decide between the alternatives, and the choice must be left in his Master’s hands.”

BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (University of Chicago/University of Cambridge, 1961)

KJV King James Version (1611) = AV

LB The Living Bible

JB A. Jones (ed.), *Jerusalem Bible*

NIV The New International Version (1978)

BDAG Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3d ed. Chicago, 1999.

RSV Revised Standard Version (NT 1946, OT 1952, Apoc 1957)

NEB The New English Bible

23 συνέχομαι δὲ ἐκ τῶν δύο, “Indeed, I am torn between two desires.” The verb συνέχομαι, “I am torn,” serves to highlight the magnitude of Paul’s dilemma. It is a powerful word that can describe a person who is hemmed in on both sides so that he has no room to move (Luke 8:45) or a city encircled by enemies who are closing in on it from every side (Luke 19:43). It can describe those who are attacked or tormented by pain, grief, or terror (cf. Job 3:24 LXX; Luke 8:37). It can also describe those who are totally controlled or dominated by some external power (H. Köster, *TDNT* 7:882–85). Paul uses συνέχειν in this last sense in 2 Cor 5:14, the only other time he uses it, where he speaks of being completely “controlled” by the love of God. Hence, upon seeing this word one can easily picture the stress Paul felt with two desires like two equally strong external forces pressing in on him viselike from both sides (ἐκ τῶν δύο, “between two”).

Paul names these desires and at the same time accentuates how equal they are in terms of the pressure they place on him in a perfectly balanced construction, obscured by punctuation and by most, if not all, translations. It is best to set them out clearly as diagrammed in figure 2.

Figure 2. Paul’s competing desires

τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, πολλῷ γὰρ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον, “I desire to break camp and to be with Christ, which is a very much better thing for me.” The first of these desires is “to break camp and to be with Christ.” Paul now refrains from boldly saying “I desire to die [ἀποθνήσκειν],” preferring rather to use a euphemism (ἀναλῦσαι, “depart”) for death. The verb ἀναλῦσαι, although it does mean “to die,” nevertheless is a highly picturesque word that paints death in brighter colors. ἀναλῦσαι is used to describe an army “breaking camp” and moving on (2 Macc 9:1; cf. Haupt, who finds an allusion to the wilderness generation of Israel and to the tents in which they lived). Or it is used to refer to a ship “being released from its mooring,” “weighing anchor,” and sailing off (Polybius 3.69.14). Or it is used to speak of the “solution” of a difficult problem (see LSJ). Hence, with any or all of these images in mind, Paul says “I wish to depart this life” (see Lee, *NovT* 12 [1970] 361, for a note on the possible origin of this remark by Paul).

Now the reason for his longing “to depart” did not lie in the desire for immortality, such as the ancient Greeks had. Paul did not yearn simply for a state in which his soul would live on, freed at last from the hampering shackles of his body (cf. Plato, *Phaed.*). The idea of a disembodied

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

LSJ Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*

NovT *Novum Testamentum*

Plato *Apology of Socrates*

Phaed. *Phaedo*

soul was intolerable to him (2 Cor 5:1–5; see Harris, “Paul’s View of Death”; idem, *Raised Immortal*, 133–42). Rather, Paul’s longing to leave this earthly life lay in the belief that he would “be with Christ” (σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι). He could not possibly desire the one without the other, that is, death without Christ, even if death did bring him relief from all his troubles. Paul’s grammar here indicates that for him although “departing this life” and “being with Christ” are not necessarily identical (against Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, 211–12), the latter being an advance over the former, they are nevertheless inextricably interwoven. He makes the two infinitives share one article in Greek—τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, “the departing and being with Christ”—thus binding the two together.

But what did Paul mean by the phrase σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, “to be with Christ”? As simple as these words seem, they nevertheless have been the catalyst for many lengthy and bewildering discussions. The issue arises from seeing in Paul a consistent doctrine of life after death, namely, that Christians who die “sleep” until the second coming of Christ, at which time they will be awakened, raised to life again, and given new, incorruptible bodies in exchange for their old, corruptible, physical bodies, a view that sees Paul insisting on the resurrection as essential in order for one to be a complete person (1 Cor 15:35–55; 1 Thess 4:13–5:10; see Caird; Moule, *NTS* 12 [1965–66] 120–23; Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul*; Ellis, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 35–48; idem, *NTS* 6 [1959–60] 211–24). Here in Phil 1:23, however, Paul seems to suggest quite a different view, namely, that the Christian, upon dying, goes immediately into the presence of the Lord, where he enjoys conscious personal fellowship with him, a view that leads some to believe that a future resurrection is superfluous, to see the “resurrection” as taking place at death (cf. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 319; K. Barth, as quoted by Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 49).

No completely satisfactory resolution to the problem posed by these seemingly contradictory views has as yet been given, and perhaps none can be given. But there are several important things to notice before making a final decision:

(1) The phrase σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” is a unique formula coined by Paul (W. Grundmann, *TDNT* 7:782) and is of fundamental importance in his thinking. Yet he is not always consistent in the meaning he attaches to it. (a) Sometimes he lets the expression σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” convey the idea of “incorporation” (cf. the interchange of ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ,” with σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” in Rom 6:11 and context), building on the concept of corporate solidarity—Christ is not only a single self but the last Adam, the new human being (1 Cor 15:45, 47), the embodiment of a new humanity. What happened to him happened also to that humanity: it was crucified with Christ (Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι, “I have been crucified with Christ” [Gal 2:20]; cf. Rom 6:6), put to death with Christ (ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, “we died with Christ” [Rom 6:8]; cf. Col 2:2), buried with Christ (συνετάφημεν αὐτῷ, “we were buried with him” [Rom 6:4]), and

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TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

made alive (i.e., resurrected) with Christ (Col 2:13; cf. Rom 6:4). Death, burial, and resurrection have already taken place for the Christian because the Christian is “with Christ,” incorporate in Christ (but see also 2 Cor 4:14; 13:4; Col 3:4, where some of these ideas are expressed by the future tense). (b) At other times Paul uses σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” to express the simple notion of “association.” For example, in 1 Thess 4:13–17 Paul states that the dead in Christ, those who sleep in him (διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “through Jesus”), will be resurrected and God will bring them with Jesus (σὺν αὐτῷ, “with him”) when he comes from heaven with a shout. They will join Jesus in his triumphal return. And what is more, those who are still alive at the Parousia of Jesus will be caught up to meet him in the air, and so, Paul concludes, “we will be with the Lord [σὺν κυρίῳ],” i.e., we will be in his company forever. (c) And there are other, though fewer, instances where Paul uses the expression σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” to stress the idea of “fellowship with Christ.” Following hard on the heels of the clearest futurist eschatological passage in Paul’s writings (1 Thess 4:13–17) come these words of the apostle: Christ “died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him [σὺν αὐτῷ]” (1 Thess 5:10; see BDAG on καθεύδειν; also A. Oepke, *TDNT* 3:436). As in the Psalms, where prepositions, such as σὺν, “with,” convey the idea of vital communion with God (LXX Pss 138:18; 139:14), so here the idea of conscious personal fellowship with Christ looms large, whether considering those who are alive or dead (cf. 1 Thess 5:10, MOFFATT, JB). Thus it is clear that there is no single idea expressed by Paul’s important phrase “with Christ.”

(2) The context of Phil 1:23 and the very wording of the verse itself favors the idea of “fellowship with Christ” as belonging to the phrase σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” found here. In fact, Paul, musing about death, his own death, and the meaning of death, comes to combine the words “living is Christ and dying is gain” and the words “to break camp and to be with Christ” in such a way as to emphasize his growing conviction that death cannot in any way deprive believers of this “fellowship with Christ” (Rom 8:38–39); it can only provide them with the opportunity to enjoy this fellowship to a degree never before experienced. Paul’s focus on the supreme importance of Christ and fellowship with Christ and his own understanding of fellowship as living communion with Christ, based perhaps on his reflections on the Psalms (cf. Pss 16[15 LXX]:11; 73[72 LXX]:23–24; see the comment on Ps 16 by A. Weiser, *The Psalms*, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962] 178; see also Luke 16:22–26; 23:43), seem to lead him to envision an intermediate existence in which any deceased Christian, not just the martyred Christian, as Lohmeyer suggests, is “with Christ” after death and before the resurrection in a state of

BDAG Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3d ed. Chicago, 1999.

TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

JB A. Jones (ed.), *Jerusalem Bible*

OTL Old Testament Library (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Westminster)

companionship with Christ in glory (2 Cor 5:2–8). (See Dupont, ΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩΙ, 182, although it is not necessary with him to find the origin of this idea in Hellenism. A more satisfactory view is that expressed by Moule, *JTS* n.s. 15 [1964] 1–15. See also Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 463–64, 552; Laeuchli, *BR* 3 [1958] 15–27; De Vogel, *NovT* 19 [1977] 262–74; Whiteley, *Theology of St Paul*. See Ellis, *NTS* 6 [1959–60] 211–24, for a different interpretation of 2 Cor 5:1–11.)

(3) But Paul does not speculate on the nature of this “interim condition” or “intermediate state” (Cousar, 142). He goes no further than to say that it exists and that it signifies union with Christ (Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 51 n. 7). Nor will he allow this intermediate state to substitute for a future resurrection. When Paul wrote the Philippians, he had in no way surrendered his futurist eschatology. That is to say, his doctrine of a bodily resurrection at the last day (1 Thess 4:13–17) was still intact—the exchange of the Christian’s humiliating and humiliated body for a glorious body does *not* take place at death, but only at the Parousia of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:20–21). Thus Phil 1:23 (and 2 Cor 5:1–10) cannot at all indicate a development in Paul’s thinking, away from the expectation of a physical resurrection in the future toward a spiritual “resurrection” in the present coincident with one’s departing from this life (so Dodd, *BJRL* 18 [1934] 69–70; Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, 135–36; Stanley, *Christ’s Resurrection*; Moule, *JTS* n.s. 15 [1964] 1–15; idem, *NTS* 12 [1965–66] 106–23, argues for a basic consistency in Paul’s various eschatological formulations). The two apparently conflicting views must be understood, as Kümmel (*Theology of the New Testament*, 242) has succinctly pointed out, in terms of Paul’s basic interest: “Paul obviously is interested only in the fact that the Christian always remains in fellowship with his heavenly Lord” (see also E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 432 and n. 9). What Paul longs for, then, is the hope of the resurrection. As Ridderbos (*Paul*, 505–6) observes, “But though that day should not yet dawn, he would nevertheless be of good courage ... to surrender his life in death.” This was in fact to be preferred in light of his trials, persecutions, and sufferings; “For then he might already take up his abode with the Lord” (Ridderbos, *Paul*, 506). Hence, “the idea of the ‘intermediate state’ is no *Fremdkörper* [foreign

JTS Journal of Theological Studies

n. note

BR Biblical Research

NovT Novum Testamentum

NTS New Testament Studies

n note

BJRL Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester

JTS Journal of Theological Studies

n. note

NTS New Testament Studies

body] here. It comes to the fore of itself ... when the future is still waiting and death is nevertheless an immediate reality” (Ridderbos, *Paul*, 506). And yet the intermediate state is not in itself a separate ground for comfort (cf. 1 Thess 4:18); it has no independent existence apart from the resurrection. Without the resurrection there is no hope at all for believers who have died (cf. 1 Cor 15:18; 1 Thess 4:13–16). Thus “to be with Christ” after death and before the resurrection “does not have the full redemptive significance in Paul’s epistles that the resurrection has” (Ridderbos, *Paul*, 506).

Cousar (142–43) has succinctly reviewed the proposals about Phil 1:21, 23 and categorized them: (1) Paul is not really concerned about life after death but is emphasizing the substantial “gain” (for the gospel; so Barth, who seems to follow Lohmeyer, 59–70, in making death a martyrdom; this would make the verses relate to Paul *sui generis*, not to ordinary believers for whom death is common as mortals) in Paul’s hope of being with Christ. (2) Paul is viewing the intermediate state as one in which there is no interruption in Paul’s relationship with Christ but an enriching of it, akin to 2 Cor 5:6–8. Cousar refers to Lincoln (*Paradise Now and Not Yet*, 106), who remarks: “It is clear from a comparison of Phil 1:23 with 3:20, 21 that the state into which Paul will enter at death is far better, bringing with it a greater closeness of communion with Christ. As of yet that is a state of expectation, less than the fullness of redemption described in 3:20 f.” (3) Caird (113–14) finds category (2) unintelligible since “those who sleep in the grave cannot be said to be *with Christ* who has left it.” So, Caird argues, Paul must be using death as “sleep” in an analogical fashion to mean that believers sleep in death and are unaware of time’s passing. They fall asleep in death only to wake up at the Parousia. The problem here is that Paul does not use “sleep” as he does elsewhere (1 Thess 4:13–15). Cousar’s preference of these three options is for (2) since, with Collange (69), he holds that Paul’s thought is “exclusively Christocentric” and, with Fee ([1995], 149), that the Pauline emphasis lies on the confidence that nothing can separate Paul from Christ’s presence.

24 τὸ δὲ ἐπιμένειν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ἀναγκαιότερον δι’ ὑμᾶς, “and [yet] I desire to remain alive in this body, which is a more urgent need for you.” The other desire, in addition to the desire to depart and be with Christ, that Paul had pressing in on him with equal force was the desire to go on living and to be with the Philippian Christians. Both desires are equally balanced grammatically by their respective comparative expressions (see the diagram in the *Comment* on v 23 above). The one has πόλλῳ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον, “very much better,” the other, ἀναγκαιότερον, “more urgent need.” It does not appear, therefore, that “the desire weakens before the necessity” (Gnilka) or that Paul’s “personal desire ‘to be with Christ’ in glory must be subordinated to his pastoral responsibility to the Philippians” (Martin [1959], 79), as though Paul himself decided through some sort of “pastoral altruism” (Martin [1976], 79) to say no to himself and yes to “the down-to-earth needs of his fellow-believers” (Martin [1959], 79; cf. Collange). Paul has already made clear that both these desires are equal in intensity, so much so that he himself was incapable of making a choice: τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω, “I cannot tell what I would choose!” (v 22). Hence, it is not Paul who, martyrlike, sacrifices his personal desire on the altar of service to others and decides to keep on living, but God who chooses for him.

25 καὶ τοῦτο πεποιθώς οἶδα ὅτι μενῶ καὶ παραμενῶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν, “Therefore, since I am convinced that this need exists, I know that I am going to stay, to remain on with all of you.” Because Paul is convinced that the Philippians need him (τοῦτο πεποιθώς, “being convinced of this,” the τοῦτο, “this,” pointing back to the very great necessity, “that this need exists,” and the

πεποιθώς, “being convinced,” taken as a causal participle, “since I am convinced”), a conviction that perhaps grew out of things he had learned about problems at Philippi (cf. Phil 2:1–4, 14; 4:2–3), he knows (οἶδα, “I know”) what God’s choice for his immediate future will be. As an apostle, “part of the divine plan of salvation is committed to him, and its seriousness consists in the fact that he cannot evade it” (W. Grundmann, *TDNT* 1:346–47). ἀνάγκη, “necessity,” therefore, characterizes Paul’s apostolic office (1 Cor 9:16). Need determines the direction his life is to take. In this instance the need of the Philippian church constitutes the divine call for Paul to go on living, a call to which he cannot say no and which he accepts with cheerfulness (against Lohmeyer). There is, thus, no need to debate the question “How can someone who has just been affirming the utter uncertainty of his fate now convincingly and without more ado make plans for the future?” (Collange, 69; see also Vincent, Michael, Dibelius, Bonnard, Lohmeyer, Martin [1959], Gnllka). For Paul was never uncertain about his fate. He was, however, uncertain about which choice to make, had he the chance to make it, whether to depart or to stay, to live or to die. He wanted the one equally as much as the other. Therefore, it must be repeated, Paul did not make the choice—he could not make the choice. God made it for him. Caught up in God’s redemptive plan, which is marked by healing and wholeness, Paul was certain that he would stay with (μενῶ, “I am going to stay”) and stand fast alongside (παραμενῶ, “remain on”) his friends. The wordplay of the synonyms μένειν/παραμένειν is preserved in NRSV: “remain and continue.” For similar wordplays see Rom 1:20; 5:19; 2 Cor 4:8; 5:4; Phil 3:2–3; 2 Thess 3:11.

εἰς τὴν ὑμῶν προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως, “in order that you may make progress and be glad in the faith.” This phrase expresses one purpose for Paul’s staying on. For the meaning of προκοπὴν, “make progress,” see the *Comment* on v 12, a noticeable example of chiasmus; and for the meaning of χαρὰν, “be glad,” see the *Comment* on v 4. Both these nouns share one article (τὴν) and thus should be associated closely with τῆς πίστεως, “the faith.” It was important to Paul not only that the Philippians make progress in the Christian faith, growing in their appreciation for and in their understanding and practice of those things taught by him as the truth of God (τῆς πίστεως, “the faith,” is used absolutely in the sense of the Christian creed; cf. Phil 1:27; 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 21; Jude 3), but that they also be glad while doing so. Joy for Paul was an indispensable element of the Christian faith.⁵

TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

NRSV New Revised Standard Version (1989)

⁵ Gerald F. Hawthorne, [Philippians](#), vol. 43, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 54–63.

21. ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστός: 'For to me to live is Christ.' For Paul life is summed up in Christ. Christ is its inspiration, its aim, its end. To trust, love, obey, preach, follow, suffer,—all things are with and in Christ. So Theoph. καινήν τινα ζωὴν ζῶ, καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς μοί ἐστι τὰ πάντα, καὶ πνοή, καὶ ζωὴ, καὶ φῶς: "A kind of new life I live, and Christ is all things to me, both breath and life and light." See further on ἐν αὐτῷ (ch. 3:9), and comp. 3:7–10, 20, 21; Rom. 6:11; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:15; Col. 3:3. Also Ign. Eph. iii., ἸΧ τὸ ἀδιάκριτον ἡμῶν ζῆν, 'our inseparable life'; and Mag. i, ἸΧ τοῦ διὰ παντὸς ἡμῶν ζῆν, 'our never-failing life.' Τὸ ζῆν is the continuous present. In the three other passages of Paul in which it occurs (vs. 22; Rom. 8:12; 2 Cor. 1:8), it denotes the process, not the principle, of life.

τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος: 'to die is gain'; because it will introduce him to complete union with Christ, unhampered by limitations of the flesh. His gain will therefore magnify Christ. (See Rom. 8:17.) This is in striking contrast with the Stoic apathy which, in proud resignation, leaves all to fate. (See a beautiful passage in Pfleiderer, *Paulinismus*, 2 Aufl. p. 219.)

22. εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτό μοι καρπὸς ἔργου, ... καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω:

B reads αἰρησώμαι.

Render: 'But if living in the flesh—(if) this is fruit of toil to me, then what I shall choose I do not declare.'

The protasis is thus εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ... ἔργου. The apodosis is καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι, etc. The subject of the protasis, τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, is resumed by τοῦτο, which brings out the contrast of καρπὸς ἔργου with the subjective personal κέρδος (vs. 21). The apodosis is introduced by καὶ 'then.' (So Chrys., (Ec., Mey.,

Theoph. Theophylact.

comp. Compare.

Ign. Ignatius.

B *Cod. Vaticanus*: 4th century. Vatican Library. Contains both epistles entire. Correctors: B², nearly the same date; B³, 10th or 11th century.

Mey. Meyer.

Ellic., Dw., De W., Alf., Lum., Kl., Lips., Ead.) Several other arrangements have been advocated, the principal one of which is to take εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί as protasis, and τοῦτο ... ἔργου as apodosis, making καὶ merely connective: 'But if living in the flesh (be my lot), this is fruit of toil to me, and what I shall choose I do not declare.' (So Weiss and Beet.) Lightf. suggests an arrangement in which he has been anticipated by Rilliet,—to take εἰ as implying an interrogation (as Rom. 9:22; Acts 23:9), and to regard the apodosis as suppressed: 'But what if my living in the flesh is to bear fruit? In fact what to choose I know not.' The rendering adopted seems to me to satisfy most of the conditions, though neither of those proposed is entirely free from objection. On the one hand, the awkward ellipsis required by the second appears quite inadmissible. On the other hand, the καὶ introducing the apodosis after a conditional protasis with εἰ is of doubtful authority, though I think that Jas. 4:15, with the reading ζήσομεν καὶ ποιήσομεν, is a fair case in point, not to mention 2 Cor. 2:2, which is perhaps a little more doubtful. Some weight also should be allowed to the LXX passages, Ex. 33:22; Lev. 14:34, 23:10, 25:2; Josh. 3:8, 8:24. Though not strictly analogous, these imply a sort of condition in the protasis. The exact construction is certainly found in Gk. poetry (see Hom. *Il.* v. 897; *Od.* xiv. 112). Δὲ is also used in the same way (Hom. *Il.* i. 135, xii. 246; *Od.* xii. 54). In Apoc. 3:20, καὶ in the apodosis

Ellic. Ellicott.

Dw. Dwight.

De W. De Wette.

Alf. Alford.

Lum. Lumby.

Kl. Klöpper.

Lips. Lipsius.

Ead. Eadie.

Lightf. Lightfoot.

LXX Septuagint Version.

Hom. Homer.

Hom. Homer.

after εἰ is retained by Tisch. and stands in marg. in WH. (See Blass, § 77, 6.) The use of εἰ as explained by Lightf., though legitimate, leaves some awkwardness attaching to καὶ. (See Win. lxiv. 7.)

Εἰ is not conditional or problematical (Beet), but syllogistic. (Comp. Rom. 5:17.) It assumes that fruitfulness will follow his continuance in life. Τοῦτο is not redundant, but resumptive and emphatic, calling attention to remaining in life. It was just *this*, in contrast with dying, which was to mean fruit of toil.

καρπὸς ἔργου: fruit which follows toil and issues from it.

τί αἰρήσομαι. Τί for πότερον. (Comp. Mt. 9:5, 21:31; Lk. 7:42, 22:27; and see Win. xxv. 1.) The future αἰρήσομαι takes the place of the deliberative subjunctive (Win. xli. 4 b).

οὐ γνωρίζω: 'I do not declare.' Most modern commentators render 'I do not perceive' or 'know.' The meaning 'to make known,' 'point out,' 'declare,' is extremely rare in class. One case occurs (Æsch. *Prom.* 487). In the sense of 'to become known' (passive) it is found in Plato and Aristotle (see Stallbaum on *Phaedrus*, 262 B); but the prevailing sense is 'to become acquainted with,' 'to gain knowledge of.' In the N.T. the sense, without exception, is 'to make known' or 'declare.' This is also the prevailing sense in LXX, though there are a few instances of the other meaning, as Job 34:25. See, on the other hand, 1 Sam. 6:2, 10:8, 14:12; Dan. 2:6, 10, 5:7; Ps. 16 (15):11; cit. Acts 2:28. For Paul's usage, see 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:3, 15:1; Gal. 1:11. No sufficient reason can be urged for departing from universal N.T. usage. Paul says 'to die is gain; but if the case is put to me that it is for your interest that I should continue to live, then I have nothing to say about my personal choice.' Possibly he felt that under the strong pressure of his desire to depart, he might be tempted to express himself too strongly in favor of his own wish. As it is, he will leave

Tisch. Tischendorf: *Novum Testamentum Graece. Editio Octava Critica Major.*

WH. Westcott and Hort: *The New Testament in the Original Greek.*

Lightf. Lightfoot.

Win. Winer: *Grammar of N. T. Greek.* 8th ed. of Eng. Transl. by Moulton. *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms*, 8 Aufl., von P. W. Schmiedel. 1 Theil, 1894.

Comp. Compare.

Comp. Compare.

Win. Winer: *Grammar of N. T. Greek.* 8th ed. of Eng. Transl. by Moulton. *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms*, 8 Aufl., von P. W. Schmiedel. 1 Theil, 1894.

Win. Winer: *Grammar of N. T. Greek.* 8th ed. of Eng. Transl. by Moulton. *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms*, 8 Aufl., von P. W. Schmiedel. 1 Theil, 1894.

class. Classics or Classical.

LXX Septuagint Version.

the matter in the hands of his Master. “Marvellous!” says Chrys. “How great was his philosophy! How hath he both cast out the desire of the present life, and yet thrown no reproach upon it.”

23. συνέχομαι δε ἐκ τῶν δύο:

The TR γαρ for δε is very slenderly supported.

Δὲ introduces an explanation, and at the same time separates it from that which is to be explained. (See Jn. 3:19, 6:39; 1 Cor. 1:12.) It may be rendered ‘now.’ I do not declare my preference. Now the reason is that I am in a strait, etc. Συνέχομαι is used by Paul only here and 2 Cor. 5:14. (See Lk. 12:50; Acts 18:5; LXX; Job 3:24, 7:11, 10:1, 31:23.) The figure is that of one who is in a narrow road between two walls. I am *held together*, so that I cannot move to the one or the other side. (Comp. Ign. Rom. vi.) The pressure comes *from* (ἐκ) both sides, from ‘the two’ (τῶν δύο) considerations just mentioned, departing and abiding in the flesh.

τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων: ‘having the desire.’ Τὴν has the force of a possessive pronoun, ‘my’ desire. Ἐπιθυμία is used in N.T. in both a good and a bad sense. (Comp. Lk. 22:15 and Mk. 4:19; Rom. 1:24, 7:7; Gal. 5:16; 1 Jn. 2:16.)

εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι: Lit. ‘to break up’; ‘unloose’; ‘undo.’ It is used of loosing a ship from its moorings, of breaking camp, and of death. Paul uses ἀνάλυσις of his own death (2 Tim. 4:6). If he employs the verb here with any consciousness of its figurative meaning, the figure is probably that of breaking camp. Paul’s circumstances would more naturally suggest the military than the nautical metaphor; and, singularly enough, nautical expressions and metaphors are very rare in his writings. The idea of striking the tent and breaking camp falls in with 2 Cor. 5:1. For the construction with εἰς, comp. Rom. 1:11, 3:26, 12:2; 1 Thess. 3:10; Heb. 11:3.

σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι: Beng. says: “To depart was sometimes desired by the saints (of the O.T.), but to be with Christ is peculiar to the New Testament.” Paul assumes that, on departing this life, he will immediately be with the Lord. (Comp. 2 Cor. 5:6–8; Acts 7:59.) On the other hand, Paul elsewhere treats death as a sleep from which believers will awake at the appearing of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:14, 16).

The passage does not lend itself to controversies on the condition of the dead in Christ. It is not probable that the dogmatic consciousness enters at all into this utterance of the apostle.

TR *Textus Receptus*.

LXX Septuagint Version.

Comp. Compare.

Ign. Ignatius.

Comp. Compare.

comp. Compare.

Beng. Bengel.

Comp. Compare.

Discussions like those of Weiss and Klöpper as to the agreement or disagreement of the words here with those of Cor. and Thess. are beside the mark, as is the assumption that Paul's views on this subject had undergone a change which is indicated in this passage. Lightf. is quite safe in the remark that the one mode of representation must be qualified by the other. Weiss (*Bibl. Theol.* § 101) justly says that "if the more particular dealing with eschatological proceedings is reserved in the four principal epistles, to a yet greater extent is this the case in the epistles of the captivity, without its being possible to show any essential change in the position on these points." In this familiar epistle, in this passage, written under strong emotion, Paul throws out, almost incidentally, the thought that death implies, for him, immediate presence with Christ. If it be asserted that death introduces believers into a condition of preparation for perfect glorification, that supposition is not excluded by either these words or those in Cor. and Thess. In 2 Cor. 5:8 the intimation is the same as in this passage. In any case we are warranted in the belief that the essential element of future bliss, whether in an intermediate or in a fully glorified state, will be the presence of Christ. These words do not exclude the idea of an intermediate state, nor do the words in 1 Cor. exclude the idea of being with Christ.

πολλῷ γὰρ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον: 'for it is very far better.'

DF^{gr} G read ποσω for πολλω.

Lightf. Lightfoot.

Weiss *Der Philipperbrief ausgesetzt und die Geschichte seiner Auslegung kritisch dargestellt*. 1859. A most thorough piece of work. It leaves no point untouched, and treats every point with ample learning, conscientious pains taking, independence, and positiveness. It is valuable in studying the history of the exegesis.

D *Cod. Claromontanus*: 6th century. Græco-Latin. National Library, Paris. Contains both epistles entire. Corrector: D^b, close of 6th century.

F *Cod. Augiensis*: 9th century. Græco-Latin. Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. Philippians entire; Philemon wanting in the Greek from πεποιθώς (vs. 21) to the end.

G *Cod. Boernerianus*: 9th century. Græco-Latin. Dresden. Wanting Greek and Latin, Philem. 21–25.

γὰρ with \aleph^a ABC 17, 31, 47, 67, WH. Tisch. Omitted by \aleph^* DFGKLP, Vulg., Goth., Syr.^{utr}, Basm., Arm., Æth.

\aleph *Cod. Sinaiticus*: 4th century. Discovered by Tischendorf in the convent of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, in 1859. Now at St. Petersburg. Contains both epistles complete. Correctors: \aleph^a , nearly contemporary; \aleph^b , 6th century; \aleph^c , beginning of 7th century, treated by two correctors,— \aleph^{ca} \aleph^{cb} .

A *Cod. Alexandrinus*: 5th century. British Museum. Contains both epistles entire.

B *Cod. Vaticanus*: 4th century. Vatican Library. Contains both epistles entire. Correctors: B², nearly the same date; B³, 10th or 11th century.

C *Cod. Ephraem*: 5th century. Palimpsest. National Library, Paris. Very defective. Wanting from τοῦτο οὖν (Eph. 4:17) to καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι (Phil 1:22), and from μὲν (Βενιαμὲν) (Phil. 3:5) to the end. Correctors: C², 6th century; C³, 9th century.

17 National Library, Paris: 9th or 10th century. Both epistles entire.

31 British Museum: 11th century. Both epistles entire.

47 Bodleian Library: 11th century. Both epistles entire.

67 Vienna: 11th century. Both epistles entire.

WH. Westcott and Hort: *The New Testament in the Original Greek*.

Tisch. Tischendorf: *Novum Testamentum Graece. Editio Octava Critica Major*.

\aleph *Cod. Sinaiticus*: 4th century. Discovered by Tischendorf in the convent of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, in 1859. Now at St. Petersburg. Contains both epistles complete. Correctors: \aleph^a , nearly contemporary; \aleph^b , 6th century; \aleph^c , beginning of 7th century, treated by two correctors,— \aleph^{ca} \aleph^{cb} .

* the title of a MS.

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F *Cod. Augiensis*: 9th century. Græco-Latin. Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. Philippians entire; Philemon wanting in the Greek from πεποιθώς (vs. 21) to the end.

Notice the heaping up of comparatives according to Paul's habit. (Comp. Rom. 8:37; 2 Cor. 7:13, 4:17; Eph. 3:20.) Render, 'very far better.'

24. τὸ δε ἐπιμένειν τῇ σαρκί:

For ἐπιμενεν B reads ἐπιμειναι.

G *Cod. Boernerianus*: 9th century. Græco-Latin. Dresden. Wanting Greek and Latin, Philem. 21–25.

K *Cod. Mosquensis*: 9th century. Moscow. Contains both epistles entire.

L *Cod. Angelicus*: 9th century. Angelican Library of Augustinian monks at Rome. Wanting from ἐξουσίαν (Heb. 13:10) to the end of Philemon.

P *Cod. Porphyrianus*: beginning of 9th century. Palimpsest. St. Petersburg. Both epistles entire, but many words illegible.

Vulg. Vulgate.

Goth. Gothic.

Syr. Peshitto and Harclean versions.

^{utr} Peshitto and Harclean versions.

Basm. Bashmuric.

Arm. Armenian.

Æth. Ethiopic.

Comp. Compare.

B *Cod. Vaticanus*: 4th century. Vatican Library. Contains both epistles entire. Correctors: B², nearly the same date; B³, 10th or 11th century.

BDFGKL add εν with σαρκι. ἐπιμένειν ἐν occurs only in Paul (1 Cor. 16:8).

Observe the change of construction from τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων. Render, 'to abide by the flesh.' Not precisely the same as τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί (vs. 22), which was a little more abstract, expressing life in general, while this refers specifically to his own staying by the flesh. (Comp. Rom. 6:1.)

ἀναγκαιότερον: The comparative is slightly illogical. The strong emotion which shaped the comparative πολλῶ μᾶλλον κρείσσον carries on that form, by its own momentum, to the succeeding adjective. The point of comparison is not definitely conceived. Living is the more necessary under the present circumstances. (Comp. Seneca, *Ep.* 98: "Vitae suae adjici nihil desiderat sua causa, sed eorum quibus utilis est." Also a striking passage *Ep.* 104). Two practical errors are suggested by these words,—the subsiding of all interest in the future world, and the undue longing for it which strikes at patient submission to the will of God. There is also to be noted the higher grade of self-abnegation exhibited by Paul, not in the casting aside of earthly pleasures and honors, which really possessed little attraction for him, but in the subjugation of the higher longing to enjoy the perfect vision of Christ.

25. καὶ τοῦτο πεποιθῶς οἶδα: 'And being confident of this I know.' Construe τοῦτο with πεποιθῶς, not with οἶδα, as Lightf., who takes πεπ. adverbially with οἶδα, 'I confidently know,' citing Rom. 14:14; Eph. 5:5. But these are hardly in point. (Comp. vs. 6.) Οἶδα is not prophetic. It merely expresses personal conviction.

μενῶ καὶ παραμενῶ:

B *Cod. Vaticanus*: 4th century. Vatican Library. Contains both epistles entire. Correctors: B², nearly the same date; B³, 10th or 11th century.

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L *Cod. Angelicus*: 9th century. Angelican Library of Augustinian monks at Rome. Wanting from ἐξουσίαν (Heb. 13:10) to the end of Philemon.

Comp. Compare.

Comp. Compare.

Lightf. Lightfoot.

Comp. Compare.

TR συμπαραμενω with DEKLP and some Fathers.

For similar word-plays, see Rom. 1:20, 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:8, 5:4; 2 Thess. 3:11; Acts 8:30. Μενῶ is absolute, 'to abide in life': παραμενῶ is relative, 'to abide with some one.' Παραμενῶ in a manner defines the simple verb. The value of his remaining in life lies chiefly in his being with his brethren and promoting their spiritual welfare. Paul uses μένειν in the sense of continuing to live, only here and 1 Cor. 15:6.

εἰς τὴν ὑμῶν προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως: 'for your progress and joy in the faith.' For προκοπὴν, see on vs. 12. The genitives τῆς πίστεως and ὑμῶν to be taken with both nouns. (Comp. 1:20, and see Win. xix.) For the phrase 'joy of faith,' comp. χαρὰ ἐν τῷ πιστεῦειν (Rom. 15:13). Progressiveness and joyfulness alike characterise faith.

Kl. and Weiss take πίστεως with χαρὰν only.⁶

TR *Textus Receptus*.

D *Cod. Claromontanus*: 6th century. Græco-Latin. National Library, Paris. Contains both epistles entire. Corrector: D^b, close of 6th century.

K *Cod. Mosquensis*: 9th century. Moscow. Contains both epistles entire.

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P *Cod. Porphyrianus*: beginning of 9th century. Palimpsest. St. Petersburg. Both epistles entire, but many words illegible.

Comp. Compare.

Win. Winer: *Grammar of N. T. Greek*. 8th ed. of Eng. Transl. by Moulton. *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms*, 8 Aufl., von P. W. Schmiedel. 1 Theil, 1894.

comp. Compare.

Kl. Klöpffer.

⁶ Marvin Richardson Vincent, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1897), 26–30.

1:21 The themes of life and death explain how Paul would glorify God in his body—even death would not keep him from it. These themes also prompted him to evaluate the purpose of living. With this introduction to 1:21–24, it seems that the section explains the commitment of the previous verses (vv. 18b–20). As far as Paul was concerned,⁹⁴ “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” This differs from what others thought and what might have been expected. Normally, one would say to live is gain and to die is Christ, but Paul reversed these. At death a Christian gains a more intimate relationship with the Lord. The statement “to live is Christ” is magnified by the statement “to die is gain.”⁹⁵

Often Paul spoke of Christ as his life. In Gal 2:20 he said, “I live by faith in the Son of God.” In Col 3:4 he stated that Christ “is your life.” These two passages differ in context and concern. The emphasis in Gal 2:20 is soteriological; in Col 3:4, Paul speaks to the mysterious union between Christ and the believer. Paul did not mean precisely either here, however. In this context he spoke of glorifying Christ through whatever means he had, and that provides the interpretive environment. The statement is completed by envisioning death as a better state than life. Thus, “to live is Christ” must mean that Paul so totally wanted to glorify Christ that as long as he lived everything about him was to point people to Christ. This was accomplished in part by the chains which were “manifested in Christ” (1:13); but even if he were called to die, it would be an occasion for Christ to become prominent. Death was a gain because he would see the Lord, enjoy him, and no longer endure the difficulties he was called to bear on earth.

1:22–24 These verses describe both Paul’s dilemma and his resolution of it. The literary pattern emphasizes his conviction that he would remain, that the result of his trial would be life not death. In 1:22 he expressed the conviction that fruit would result from his continued physical life. The way the discussion takes place reveals the interpretation of “fruitful labor for me” (1:22). This statement is matched by the conviction that he would remain for the sake of the Philippians (1:24). While it may appear that the “fruit” was some spiritual development in Paul’s life, the context clearly relates “fruit” to the service Paul performed. In between these two statements, he posed the troublesome question of his choice. “What shall I choose?... I am torn between the two.”⁹⁶ It was helpful to them for Paul to remain; the fruit was what resulted from his work for

⁹⁴ This is a dative of reference.

⁹⁵ Some commentators want to break the equation and make it say something like “to live or die is Christ.” That is unnecessary and confuses the passage.

⁹⁶ This chiastic arrangement emphasizes the expectation that he would continue to serve them. The question is there, but it remains a question. The answer is clear: They needed him.

others. The longer Paul lived, the more people would be touched by his life.⁹⁷ Many understand Paul to say that he would reap the harvest of his past work. Therefore it would benefit him to remain in the flesh.⁹⁸ These interpretations, however, seem to neglect the fact that Paul's rewards, and therefore his "benefits," awaited him at death. That is why dying was gain. Further, this passage reveals Paul's concern for others, not himself (1:24, 26). He must have been thinking of the future and the harvests that would come from his life should God allow him to continue on this earth.

Beyond the discussion of rewards, however, Paul clearly expressed the desire to be with Christ (1:23). It was better. The discussion of rewards clouds the basic issue. Paul's longing for death was, in reality, a longing for a more intimate, open, and total relationship with Christ himself. Such a relationship could only occur after death. The practical dilemma, therefore, consisted of whether Paul would choose his own preference or remain to benefit others. His conviction was that he would remain. While the statement obviously takes an optimistic perspective on the trial Paul faced, it spoke more to his conviction regarding his life service. His work remained unfinished. He thought, therefore, that God would have him remain and accomplish it.

One final concern emerges from these verses. Some commentators introduce the problem of the doctrine of soul sleep here.⁹⁹ Generally those who do must address the fact that these verses

⁹⁷ This verse has had many diverse interpretations. The syntax is ambiguous. Paul introduced the statement with a first-class condition format, εἰ ("if"), but where the apodosis begins is not clear. Is it with "this will mean fruitful labor" or with "what shall I ask?" The NIV takes the former and makes the rest of the one sentence in Greek introduce a new idea. There are three ways of rendering it: If my living on in the body means that I could reap the fruit of my past toil, then I do not know which to prefer. If I am to live on in the body, that will mean that I can reap the fruit of my toil. Yet I do not know which to prefer. What if my living on in the body means that I could reap the fruit of my toil! I do not know which to prefer. The second appears to be the best even though it means introducing an apodosis with καί ("and"), and the τοῦτο ("this") seems unnecessary. There are fewer problems with it.

⁹⁸ It may be that every Christian wants to see the work he has done and to enjoy it. Paul, however, wanted to see Christ more than all.

⁹⁹ Caird says that Paul taught consistently that "Christians who die remain in a state of sleep until the Advent of Christ, who will then raise them to eternal life" (113–14). This conclusion is not so clear, however, even from the passages he draws upon for support (1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 1 Cor 15:35–55; 2 Cor 5:1–10; Rom 8:18–25). For example, there is a two-part experience in 1 Thess 4:13–18, as Paul said those who are asleep (a euphemism for death) in Jesus will be raised with him. They are alive and conscious; they come to be

do not teach the doctrine. They must harmonize the passage with what they have deduced from others. Paul directly stated that in death he would be “with Christ,” and the language speaks of being immediately in Christ’s presence. Further, Paul would hardly have been comforted by being away from Christ after death. He was already with him and looked forward to a more open relationship with him at death. Why would Paul want to sleep (away from the conscious presence of Christ which he enjoyed on earth) when his tension resulted from the desire to enjoy Christ more fully? Finally, making this passage conform to an already assumed position such as soul sleep is difficult.¹⁰⁰ The natural way to read the passage speaks against it, as do the other Pauline discussions of life after death. The fact is, Paul did not discuss the doctrine in this text at all. He simply expressed his conviction that if he died he would gain because death was a departure whereby he would be in the presence of the Lord (*syn Christō*, 1:23).⁷

reunited with their bodies. It is the resurrection that awaits the Advent, not the presence with Christ.

¹⁰⁰ Caird, an advocate of soul sleep, states, “This verse seems to present the contrary view that those who ‘die in the Lord’ go directly into his presence” (113). He then attempts to explain why the obvious cannot be so to his mind.

⁷ Richard R. Melick, [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 84–86.