

PAUL'S REPORT FROM PRISON, PT. 5; PHIL. 1:21-26 (Ed O'Leary)

INTRODUCTION.

TODAY, ~ WE WRAP UP OUR LOOK AT PAUL'S REPORT FROM PRISON BY EXAMINING verses 21-26.

▶▶ Recall from [verse 20](#) that Paul's concern was that he would continue to be bold for Christ as he had been in the past, ~ and that his life would bring honor to Jesus whether he lived or died.

▶▶ The mention of life and death led him into discussing the contrasts between life and death.

▷▷ Although Paul did not expect to be martyred at this time, ~ he was ready for both life or death, ~ and did not fear death.

↳↳ Recall that, ~ though he did not expect to be executed, ~ we noted that Paul later alludes to the fact that he still held to the fact the thought that it might not go the way he anticipated.

→→ Death is a real possibility.

▷▷ And so in [verses 21-26](#), ~ Paul weighed up the options of remaining in this life and going home to be with the Lord, ~ and came to a conclusion as to which he thought would actually play out.

▷▷ Now, ~ we might expect Paul to weigh the pros and cons of each option.

↳↳ But Paul doesn't do that. ~~ He weighs the pros and [pros](#) of each one.

↳↳ Each side of the contrast is viewed positively. ~~ IOW, ~ it's not good vs. bad, ~ but good vs. better.

→→ And of course the better option ~ Which makes perfect sense

OK, ~ LET'S LOOK AT WHAT PAUL SAYS IN THIS PARAGRAPH.

IN VERSE 21a, ~ PAUL SAYS, ~ "FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST."

PAUL DOES NOT DEFINE THE PHRASE "TO LIVE IS CHRIST" FOR US.

▶▶ What does it mean? ~~ Well, ~ as always, ~ context determines meaning. 📖 1/7

▶▶ In [verse 22a](#), ~ Paul talks about "fruitful labor" that will come from remaining in this life. ~ ~ And he goes on and says later that he'll remain for their spiritual growth.

▶▶ Also, ~ consider from [verse 20](#) that one of Paul's concerns was that his life would bring honor to Jesus whether he lived or died.

▶▶ So, ~ I would suggest that "to live is Christ" means this: ~ ~ "to live on in the body means to continue working for Jesus and more opportunities to bring Him honor."

PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE WAS THAT REMAINING IN THIS LIFE MEANT SERVING AND glorifying Jesus, ~ not serving himself or any selfish desires or bringing himself honor.

▶▶ And this is the perspective he wants all believers to adopt.

▷▷ I guess we, ~ each believer here, ~ should ask ourselves, ~ "what does remaining in this present life mean to me?"

↳↳ "From my perspective, ~ does it mean more time and opportunities to serve and honor Jesus or solely to serve and honor myself?"

OK, ~ REMAINING IN THIS LIFE IS GOOD, ~ PAUL SAYS. ~ ~ then he tells us what's better.

VERSE 21b, ~ "TO DIE IS GAIN."

IT IS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT HERE THAT THE PHRASE "TO DIE" MEANS THE event of dying, ~ not the process.

▶▶ The emphasis is upon the instant death actually occurs, ~ when the soul is separated from the body.

▶▶ The process of death, ~ which is often drawn out & terribly painful, ~ is not in view here.

▶▶ Please do not misunderstand. ~ ~ Paul is not saying that the process of death is positive. ~ ~ That split second of time when death actually occurs for a believer is gain.

FOR THE BELIEVER, ~ DEATH IS GAIN.

▶▶ Think about it. ~ ~ We are freed from our sinful body and our sin nature, ~ freed from temptation, ~ our enemies, ~ suffering, ~ and death itself.

▶▶ Yes, ~ definitely, ~ for the people of God, ~ death is gain.

- ▷▷ Think about it. ~ In the presence & have the companionship of Jesus forever. 📖 2/7
- ▷▷ We will behold all the glory of our triune God forever. ~ We will join with all the hosts of heaven in songs of joy and triumph. ~ We will enter into a state of unending joy.
- ▷▷ And we will be reunited and forever fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ who have gone before us. ~ Truly, ~ "to die is gain."

THEN PAUL TURNS HIS ATTENTION BACK TO THE GOOD IN HIS GOOD VS. BETTER contrast.

VERSE 22a. ~ "IF I AM TO LIVE IN THE FLESH, THAT MEANS FRUITFUL LABOR FOR me."

▶▶ To die would be gain for Paul, ~ but living would not be a waste, ~ because it meant "fruitful labor" for Paul.

▷▷ For Paul, ~ remaining in this life, ~ indicated that he could carry out more useful, ~ productive, ~ and honoring service for Jesus, ~ which would include leading more people into the Kingdom and helping believers grow.

▶▶ Notice what he doesn't say.

▷▷ He does not say, ~ "Now if I am to go on living in the body, ~ this will mean finishing my bucket list."

▷▷ Or, ~ "living means spending more time fishing ~ buy a boat, ~ or fill in the blank."

▷▷ No, ~ it looks like the only reason Paul opened the door to a desire to stay in this present life was what he could accomplish for Jesus, ~ not for himself.

↪↪ Something to think through for our own lives.

▶▶ In addition, ~ let's give some thought to this, ~ my fellow believers: ~~~ The best use of our lives is to employ them in working for Jesus.

▶▶ And let's always remember: ~ Nothing we do in the Lord's service is ever useless.

▷▷ Paul points this out in 1 Cor. 15:58. ~ "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, ~ [and here's why:] ~ knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

▶▶ To die is gain for a believer. ~ But to remain in this life is not a waste; ~ because it means that we can carry out more useful, ~ productive, ~ and honoring service for Jesus.

IN VS. 22b, ~ PAUL ADMITS THAT doesn't really know which option he prefers. ↯↯ 3/7

"YET WHICH I SHALL CHOOSE I CANNOT TELL."

▶▶ Now, ~ on a surface reading level, ~ this verse can be very confusing.

▷▷ Because most translations translate the Greek word as "choose," ~ which is one possible meaning of the word.

▶▶ But it seems highly unlikely that Paul meant he would have the ultimate say in whether he lived or died.

▷▷ That decision rested in the hands of God Himself.

▶▶ It is also highly unlikely that Paul would have thought he could choose and then go before the Roman authorities and expect them to accommodate him.

▶▶ The Greek word in question also means "prefer." ~ The Greek verb translated "choose" more likely has the sense of prefer here in [verse 22b](#).

▷▷ And the word could actually be translated, ~ and is in some translations, ~ as prefer.

↪↪ E.g., ~ "yet I don't know which I prefer."

▶▶ In fact, ~ there's a clue in the context that shows he's not talking about choosing.

▷▷ Jumping ahead for a second, ~ notice in [verse 25a](#), ~ Paul says, ~ "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all."

↪↪ Observe that he does not say, ~ "Convinced of this, ~ I will choose to remain and continue with you all."

▶▶ So it does not mean that Paul literally had the prerogative of choosing his fate ~ It was referring to Paul's personal preference.

AND PAUL DID NOT KNOW WHICH HE PREFERRED: ~ TO GO HOME TO BE WITH JESUS ~ or to remain in this life.

▶▶ This speaks volumes about Paul's selflessness. ~ No selfish thinking going on here.

▷▷ Not knowing which option he preferred also speaks volumes about Paul's concern for believers' spiritual growth, ~ and his desire to see people come to Christ for salvation.

↪↪ Paul stands as a model for us to follow. ↯↯ 4/7

IN VERSE 23a, ~ PAUL SAYS, ~ "I AM HARD PRESSED BETWEEN THE TWO."

I.E., ~ PAUL WAS UNDECIDED AS TO HIS PREFERENCE BECAUSE HIS MIND WAS pulling him in two directions.

IN VERSES 23b AND 24, ~ PAUL EXPLAINS THE TWO DIRECTIONS TOWARD WHICH his mind was pulling him.

FIRST OF ALL, ~ IN VERSE 23a, ~ HE SAYS, ~ "MY DESIRE IS TO DEPART AND BE WITH Christ, for that is far better."

▶▶ His mind was pulling him toward preferring going home because his desire was to be with Jesus, ~ which is far better than staying in this life.

▶▶ This statement doesn't need much comment. ~~ It's pretty self-evident. ~~ Going home to be with Jesus is far better than anything.

▷▷ So of course, ~ any believer would be strongly pulled by this desire to depart and be with Jesus.

▶▶ What I would like us to focus on is his statement "to depart and be with Christ," ~ because this teaches a very important biblical truth.

▷▷ When believers die, ~ they are immediately with Jesus. ~~ No waiting room. ~~ No interim facility. ~~ No purgatory.

↪↪ No soul sleep. ~~ I.e., ~ the belief that a believer's soul sleeps until the resurrection. ~~ In this concept, ~ the person is not aware or conscious.

↪↪ Not biblical. ~~ E.g., ~ Moses & Elijah @ Transfiguration.

→→ Also, ~ consider the thief on cross. ~~ Lk. 23:39-43

▷▷ Paul makes it very clear here in 1:23. ~~ For a believer, ~ to die is to be with Christ. ~~ No time lag. ~~ No other alternative.

▷▷ Paul also makes this very clear in 2 Cor. 5:8. ~~ "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

THE OTHER DIRECTION PAUL'S MIND WAS PULLING HIM toward preferring was remaining in this life, ~ because he knew that the these believers in Philippi needed him. ~~ Verse 24.

▶▶ For them it was more necessary that he remain in the world. 📖 5/7
ON THE ONE HAND, ~ PAUL DESIRED TO GO HOME AND BE WITH JESUS.

▶▶ On the other hand, ~ it was more necessary for believers that he remain in the world. ~
That's why Paul was so undecided.

BASICALLY, ~ PAUL IS TORN BETWEEN HIS PERSONAL DESIRE AND WHAT'S necessary.

▶▶ That's a very human thing, ~ isn't it?

▷▷ Shows Paul is human. ~ I think sometimes we look at the apostles and the early believers as somehow perfect, ~ on a different level as the rest of us.

▷▷ To paraphrase James, ~ Paul "was a man with a nature like ours."

↳ Recall that Paul was ready to write off John Mark.

▷▷ Paul very human. ~ And very humanly, ~ torn between personal desire and what was necessary.

PAUL REACHED A CONCLUSION IN VERSE 25.

"CONVINCED OF THIS, I KNOW THAT I WILL REMAIN AND CONTINUE WITH YOU ALL, for your progress and joy in the faith."

▶▶ Sure that it was more necessary for them that he remain in this life, ~ he concluded that he would indeed be acquitted and stay on, ~ for the purpose of helping them in their spiritual life.

▷▷ Paul didn't know which he preferred, ~ but he was more than willing to do that which was necessary for others.

▷▷ Attitude was that their needs outweighed his personal desire to go home. ~ Selfless.

▷▷ A question for each of us to ponder this coming week: ~ What are the implications of Paul's willingness and attitude for me?

▶▶ Now, ~ we should mention again here, ~ and we'll come back to it 2:17 in more depth, ~ that even though Paul expected to be released, ~ he still held the thought that it might not go the way he expected.

▷▷ Also, ~ consider that the word for "know" does not mean infallible knowledge. ~ IOW, ~ it was not a prophetic statement. ~ It was Paul's personal conviction. 📖 6/7

IN VERSE 26, ~ PAUL NOTES RESULT OF HIS REMAINING IN ORDER TO HELP them.

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▶▶ The result of Paul remaining would be that Jesus would be glorified not Paul.

▷▷ Paul's potential release would have nothing to do with Paul and everything to do with Jesus.

↪↪ And without hesitation, ~ Paul gave the glory to Jesus.

▶▶ When working on this verse, ~ I was reminded of Daniel's response.

▷▷ Dan. 2:24-30

▶▶ My brothers and sisters in Christ, ~ in cases in which there is the potential of us receiving the glory that is due the Lord, ~ 77

▷▷ we must always be quick to give the glory to Jesus, ~ and take none for ourselves.

↪↪ Repeat ~ Paul & Daniel

CONCLUSION.

AND THAT BRINGS US TO THE END OF PAUL'S REPORT FROM PRISON.

▶▶ Keep reading. ~ Your observations.

LET'S PRAY 7/7