

“To Me, to Live Is Christ, and to Die Is Gain”
(Philippians 1:18-27 – Pentecost 18 – September 27, 2026)

Philippians 1:18-27 – ¹⁸*And in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.* ¹⁹*For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,* ²⁰*according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.* ²¹*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* ²²*But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.* ²³*For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.* ²⁴*Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.* ²⁵*And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,* ²⁶*that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.* ²⁷*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*

Dear fellow Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

When we walk through a cemetery, we may see an epitaph inscribed on a tombstone. An epitaph is a brief statement in memory of the deceased, often relaying the hopes by which the person lived. Sometimes we see words like, *“I know that my Redeemer lives”* (Job 19:25), expressing the faith of the person here buried that his Savior would one day raise his body from the grave to eternal life in heaven. To see that one has lived by such a motto in life is a powerful witness to those who still walk the earth.

What is our motto in life? If we were to boil down all our life to one important thing we want others to know about us, one important thing we want to pass on to them, what would we have inscribed over our head? Indeed, what inscription is even now imprinted on our hearts and lives as we walk this earth?

In our text, we hear the motto the apostle Paul lived by: **“To Me, to Live Is Christ, and to Die Is Gain.”** Let us see how this was a fitting motto for Paul’s life and for ours.

1) It was a fitting motto for Paul’s life

There was a time when Paul had nothing to do with Christ. His thoughts were the farthest from anything resembling the motto: *“To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* In his former way of life as a Pharisee, his motto was more like: *“To me, to live is myself. Life is about proving to God and other people how morally superior I am. Thus, when I die it will be for my gain; for I will have earned my way to heaven.”* Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, had no place in Paul’s life as a self-righteous Pharisee.

But as Paul wrote this text, the Holy Spirit had changed his life. Now he knew that he was saved by God's grace in Christ, not by his own goodness or merit. He knew that all his own righteous acts had been as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), soiled by his self-serving, sinful nature. He says in Philippians 3:7-9: *"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."*

By God's grace, Paul was changed from faith in himself to faith in Christ. He knew that on the cross, Jesus had paid for all his sins, and God looked on him through Jesus' perfect life. Now life was not about keeping a "holier than thou" image among men, and really serving himself. Life was about rejoicing in Jesus' saving grace for sinners and serving Him in thankfulness.

And he knew that if he should die, it only meant gain. No longer was it a question of, "Have I been good enough to gain heaven?" Rather, covered by Jesus' pure righteousness, Paul knew God already declared him fit to live in heaven with his Savior, in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

As Paul wrote the words of our text, he was in prison at Rome for preaching the Gospel. He did not yet know the outcome of his trial, whether he would be executed for the sake of Christ, or whether he would be set free. Yet, knowing his eternal life was in God's gracious hands, he could view his present situation and say to fellow believers: *"What I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again"* (vs. 24-26).

Paul looked forward to the heavenly joys Jesus won for him. But as long as he lived on earth, he wanted to make the most of the time by sharing God's salvation in Jesus. He wanted to continue building up the faith of those who already believed, and bring others to know Jesus as their Savior. This was true, even if it meant he must suffer for the Gospel. Truly Paul lived by the motto: *"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

2) It is a fitting motto in our life as well

It is a fitting motto for our life as well. Like Paul, we have been called out of our former way of walking in spiritual darkness, living for ourselves and our sinful desires. The Holy Spirit brought us to repentance and faith in Jesus. He called into the wonderful light of His salvation. Now we know that God has forgiven all our sins through Jesus'

death on the cross. God sees us baptized into Jesus and clothed in His holiness. No longer must we wonder if we have been good enough to get to heaven. Heaven is God's free gift, won for us through Jesus' perfect life and sacrifice. Cleansed by Jesus' blood and clothed in His righteousness, God already declares us fit to live in heaven with our Savior in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Therefore like Paul, we consider all things loss compared to the excellence of knowing Jesus, who is our life and salvation.

"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This is our motto, not only when we pass from this world, but in our daily life. This is what it means that we are baptized into Christ. Romans 6 says we were baptized into His death; we have died to ourselves and our sinful nature. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by His Father, He has raised us up in newness of life. Every day, we return to our baptism in repentance. We pray to God: "Crucify my sinful flesh with its unholy desires; cleanse me by the blood of Your Son; raise me up by Your Holy Spirit to live in newness of life, in the joy of eternal life." Every day, our faith declares: *"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

How does this motto, this defining statement, come across in our lives? As we think of our God-given callings in life, let us ask: Does the way I relate to others tell them: *"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*?

Husbands and wives, do we seek to show each other that *"to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*? A Christ-centered marriage includes dying to our self-serving desires, dying to self-righteous fault finding and proud power struggles; and it means rising in Christ to serve one another's good. As those who have been washed by the blood of Jesus, we want to share with our spouse His forgiveness and love. Our humble and loving service shows we are concerned for one another's greatest good. Above all, until death parts us, we want to share our heavenly hope as we say with Paul: *"I shall remain and continue with you... for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing... may be more abundant in Jesus Christ."*

Parents, in our God-given role as father or mother, do we seek to show our children that *"to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*? Do we seek to show them His Fatherly goodness and love, teaching them about Jesus their Savior? Christian parenthood includes dying to self-serving interests, dying to selfish neglect and unduly harsh punishment; and it means rising in Christ to serve our children's needs. As those who have been washed by the blood of Jesus, we want to share with our children His forgiveness and love. We want to share our heavenly hope that says: *"I shall remain and continue with you... for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing... may be more abundant in Jesus Christ."*

Children, in our God-given role do we seek to show that *"to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*? Do we seek to honor and obey our parents? As brothers and sisters, do we seek

to get along and encourage each other by word and example? Christian childhood includes dying to self-serving disobedience, dying to foolish quarrels and ongoing strife; and it means rising in Christ to love, honor, and serve each other's good. As children of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can encourage each other to stand firm in faith. As those who have been washed by the blood of Jesus, we want to share with each other His forgiveness and love. As fellow members of the family of God, we want to share our heavenly hope that says: *"I shall remain and continue with you... for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing... may be more abundant in Jesus Christ."*

We could go on considering the many callings God gives us in the home, in the church, in society. When we go into the world and serve employers, customers, friends, neighbors – in every relationship, we can seek to show that *"to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* By our Christ-centered service in word and action, we show that we are concerned for the greatest good of others. Above all, we want to share our heavenly hope that says: "I will continue with you as long as God has me here, praying that you may be filled with joy in Christ as I share His grace and salvation with you."

As Paul wrote the words of our text from prison, he did not know what the outcome of his trial would be. He did not know how much longer God would have him living in this world. But even as he suffered for the Gospel, he was certain that what was happening to him was all in God's plans to bring the Gospel to many people.

We do not know how much longer God will call us to live on this earth and serve in the roles and relationships He gives. But like Paul, every day we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave His life for our salvation (Galatians 2:20). We know that our Redeemer lives, and we live in the hope and joy of eternal life He gives!

One day, unless Jesus comes first to take us bodily into heaven, people may look upon the place where our bodies are laid to rest. Perhaps they will read an epitaph describing our place in life, our hope, our motto in life. What important thing do we want others to remember us by? Indeed, what inscription is even now imprinted on our hearts and lives? May our motto ever be: *"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.