

Torn between Two

Philippians 1:19-26

Following his passionate discourse regarding the preaching of the Gospel, Paul continues to bear his heart unto the church at Philippi. Here we find those often quoted verses that reveal Paul being in a strait, betwixt two – having a burning desire to depart and be with Christ, and yet knowing he must finish the work he had received of the Lord. He was willing to lay aside the passion of his heart in order to be of further benefit to the church.

The great 1800s Scottish preacher Alexander MacLaren said: *"Many of us cling to life with a desperate clutch, like some poor wretch pushed over a precipice and trying to dig his nails into the rock as he falls. Some of us cling to it because we dread what is beyond, and our longing to live is the measure of our dread to die. But Paul did not look forward to a thick darkness of judgment, or to nothingness. He saw in the darkness a great light, the light in the windows of his Father's house, and yet he turned willingly away to his toil in the field, and was more than content to drudge on as long as he could do anything by his work. Blessed are they who share his desire to depart, and his victorious willingness to stay here and labour! They shall find that such a life in the flesh, too, is being with Christ. He is no more in a strait betwixt two, or unwitting what he shall choose. He chooses nothing, but accepts the appointment of a higher wisdom. There is rest for him, as for us, in ceasing from our own wishes, and laying our wills silent and passive at His feet."*

As difficult as this may be, we too need to develop the attitude of Paul, having a genuine desire to meet the Lord, and yet remain committed to the work we've been given until the Lord calls us home. I want to be found faithful when He calls for me. As we examine the [admissions](#) of Paul within the text, I want to consider the thought: [Torn between Two](#).

I. The Discipline of Paul (19-21) – Here we discover the great spiritual discipline Paul possessed. Consider:

A. His Assurance (19) – [For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ](#). This thought is actually tied to the previous verses. Paul refers to the preaching of the Gospel and the joy it brings. Lest there be any confusion, Paul does not refer to their prayer being the source of his spiritual salvation, but rather the source of his well-being and possibly his release from prison. Their prayers for him and those who shared the Gospel, along with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, offered great assurance to Paul as he dealt with the struggles of his bondage.

- As we walk this journey of life, seeking to serve the Lord, there is great assurance for us as well. We are commissioned to share the good news of Jesus Christ, aided by the prayers of the saints and the help of the Spirit. This provides great comfort and assurance for the believer.

B. His Anticipation (20a) – *According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed.* Bear in mind Paul is imprisoned in Rome for preaching the Gospel. There are those who sought to destroy his life and mar his reputation. Some sought to add to his suffering by any means possible. Although he was faced with extreme difficulty, Paul remained hopeful and confident. He refused to allow his bonds to bring shame. He possessed a confident expectation and hope that refused to be deterred. Paul knew he had not labored in vain. He would gladly suffer bonds and reproach for the cause of Christ. While he may have lost his physical freedoms, countless souls had been freed from the bondage of sin. Others were preaching the Gospel and the body of Christ was growing! Even though his current situation left much to be desired, Paul maintained a confident and hopeful expectation in Christ.

- It would be easy to overlook this profound truth disclosed along with the following verses, but we need to pay close attention to the words of Paul here. Life is filled with adversity and pain. Serving the Lord is never without opposition or personal cost. The enemy would love for us to come to the conclusion that our efforts are not worth the gains, but that is a lie to be rejected. Regardless of what this world believes, there is no shame in serving Christ our Lord. The Gospel remains relevant today and the Lord continues to save. We must continue to share the Truth with confident expectation in the Lord.

C. His Allegiance (20b) – *According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.* Paul refused to be silenced, even if it meant giving his life for the cause of Christ. He desired the Lord to be exalted through his efforts, whether it be in life or death. He refused to allow his current struggles to dictate his existence and witness for Christ. He remained bold in the face of increased opposition.

- I will admit that is difficult to embrace, but as believers we too must maintain our allegiance to Christ. We must strive to exalt the Lord through our every word and deed, whether in life or death. We are called to magnify the Lord through the lives we live and continue to do so when it comes our time to die. *Rom.12:1 – I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

D. His Ambition (21) – *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Paul knew that in Christ he was victorious either way. If he continued to live, he lived for Christ and had opportunity to magnify Him among men. If he died, he gained entrance to the presence of Christ. In essence, Paul was content to live or die, whichever pleased the Lord. He was secure in his faith and ready to meet the Lord when that day arrived.

- To have this great assurance offers peace that escapes explanation. Those who are walking in fellowship with Christ are quite happy to live for Him in this life, and yet ready to meet Him when He chooses to call for them in death. This is contrary to human nature and is only obtainable through a right relationship with the Lord. It is the essence of the Christian life – to live for Christ every day in this life while being prepared and ready to meet Him face to face!

II. The Dilemma of Paul (22-24) – Here Paul discusses the great dilemma he faced, the great anguish of soul for the devoted servant. He speaks of:

A. The Abundance in Life (22a) – *But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour.* Although Paul was prepared for death, and was unafraid, he also understood the great joy in living for Christ in this life. He had the opportunity to share the Gospel and experience unbelievers come to saving faith in Christ. He had the privilege of investing in the church and discipling them in the faith. He was able to bear witness of the grace of God every day he lived. He was fruitful for the Lord.

- This challenges modern thought, but it reveals our reason for existence. We are not called to live a life of selfish devotion, but to be fruitful for the Lord. That is the source of real joy and abundant life as we walk upon this earth.

B. The Appeal of Death (22b-23) – *yet what I shall choose I wot not.* ^[23] *For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.* Although Paul was quite content to be of service to the Lord in this life, his desire to depart and be with Christ was overwhelming at times. He literally stood in a strait – *a place of distressed perplexity*. His longing to be with the Lord often exceeded his desire to remain. He knew being in the presence of Christ would be far better than anything he experienced in life.

- This too is contrary to human nature, but as believers we know it is true. We have no way of knowing how the death experience will be, but we do know those in Christ enter His presence at death. I am sure the glories of heaven and the presence of our Lord will far exceed anything we have experienced in this life. Death is not the end for the believer, but the beginning of something more wonderful than we can imagine!

C. The Admission of Need (24) – *Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.* True to his nature, Paul refused to be selfish. Although torn between heaven and this life, he knew the church needed him. He would gladly forego an immediate entrance to paradise in order to further benefit the church. He realized they needed him, and he would gladly stay as long as the Lord desired to leave him.

- I don't know of any who possess a desire like Paul to enter the Lord's presence, or any who have impacted the church as he did, but we too ought to have a desire to be of benefit to the church. We should be willing to lay aside our personal preferences and desires for the good of the body of Christ!

III. The Determination of Paul (25-26) – As we conclude today, we see the determined commitment of Paul for the church at Philippi. Consider:

A. His Confidence (25) – *And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.* Paul is not implying that his decision had affected the Lord's timing in calling him home, but rather he assures them he will abide faithful unto the church as long as he lives. He will continue to invest in their lives in order to further their joy and faith.

- We need that type of committed determination as well. We must walk closely with the Lord to possess that type of confidence, but it would be wonderful if every believer was committed to investing in the lives of others as long as they lived. There is no place to sit down or abandon the work of the Lord. We must abide faithful until the Lord calls for us.

B. His Contribution (26) – *That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.* Paul knew his continued presence among the church would result in their abundant joy in Christ. He had the ability to make a positive impact on the church and he was committed to serving them as long as he could.

- Wouldn't it be great if every believer desired to make a positive contribution to the church? I am not speaking primarily of monetary contributions, but of physical and spiritual contributions, using the gifts we have received to help and encourage others. Far too many today have this turned around. They seek what others can offer them instead of desiring to give of themselves. I pray we will devote ourselves as Paul did unto the Lord and His church.

Conclusion: Although Paul was torn between heaven and earth, he was content to serve wherever the Lord desired. He wanted his life to magnify Christ, whether in life or death. Do we share that same desire? Are we willing to serve at the leisure of our King? Do we strive to magnify Him through our daily lives? If you need a renewed passion, come to Christ and confess your need. If you are unsaved, you can't appreciate Paul's perplexity between heaven and earth. If the Spirit is dealing with you regarding salvation, respond in faith and repentance unto salvation.

ⁱ <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-sermon-central-staff-quotes-deathnearness-79574.asp>