

LIVING AND DYING

PAUL'S EVALUATION

By Richard Jordan

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Philippians 1:21

The writer has often wondered if this verse could not have been Paul's “life verse,” for it clearly gives his evaluation of life and death, reducing both to their simplest forms.

TO DIE IS GAIN

Only the believer can say, “*To die is gain,*” for only the believer knows for certain where he is going when he dies. Yet death is never said to be the hope of the believer. Rather, death marks the beginning of a process which hosts much more. That this was Paul's view seems certain from his words later in this same epistle:

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:20, 21).

One day our Lord will come—not simply to take us in death but to “*change our vile [bodies] that [they] may be fashioned like unto His glorious body.*” What a glorious prospect this is!

For the believer who has experienced the frail, yes, even the vileness of this present mortal body—and who among us does not know our “mortal flesh” can at times humiliate us!—the prospect of a new glorified body is indeed a blessed one. Pastor Otis Wasson used to say, “Then there will be no more baldness, bifocals, bridgework, bulges or bunions!” And so it will be.

There is, however, more involved in our glorified bodies than merely release from physical discomforts and limitations, as welcome as this will be. More, we say, because Scripture indicates that a “glorified” body is more than simply a physically renewed one. Members of the Body of Christ are destined to share in the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Hence Paul writes to the Roman believers:

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:17, 18).

An illustration of “*glorified humanity*” is found in our Lord’s experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew gives the account thus:

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

“Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

“And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matthew 16:27-18:17:2).

It was as the “Son of man” that Christ was transfigured, thus demonstrating His glorified humanity. As Peter later puts it, they were “eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory ...” (II Peter 1:16, 17).

But just *how* was His glory manifested? The answer is given in the words “as the sun.” The light was not simply shining on Him like a spotlight, but rather it was coming from *within* Him and shining outward, as does the sun.

A glorified body is much more than new eyes, limbs and organs. Yes, it is all this. But it is more. It is a body out of which the glory of God shines!

THE GLORY OF GOD

Something of what the glory of God is can be seen from the account of Moses’ encounter with the Lord in Exodus 33 and 34. Confused by God’s seeming contradiction of His promise to accompany Israel, Moses demanded an explanation of the delay and sought proof that His promised presence would be a reality.

The Lord reassured Moses by saying, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (Exodus 33:14). Moses was not content simply to have this promise of His presence, however, and said, “I beseech thee, show me thy glory” (33:18). In other words, for Moses the *presence* of the Lord was His manifest *glory*. And what was this manifest glory of the Lord? Notice the Lord’s response:

“And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy (Exodus 33:19).

“And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

“Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*...” (Exodus 34:6, 7).

Mark carefully: when the Lord revealed His presence and declared His name to Moses it was by passing before him the embodiment of all His attributes—goodness, mercy, graciousness, longsuffering, truth, holiness, etc.—in a blazing representation of light. The glory of God was *the outshining of all that He is!*

With all this in mind, we can more fully understand the depth of the meaning in Paul's words to the Colossians:

“When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

The Rapture will bring the delight of our Lord's presence, new bodies, blessed reunion and fellowship with loved ones and saints, and much more. But there will be something far more wonderful than even these marvelous things. Believers will “appear with Him in glory” and all that He is shall be manifest to the universe through us! Then Ephesians 2:7 will be a blessed reality for through us He will “show the exceeding riches of His grace” throughout the ages to come.

The *hope of glory* should hearten and strengthen us, enabling us to say with Paul that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Death—and all that lies beyond—is indeed, great gain for the believer.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

The glorious future awaiting the believer is not simply a “cop-out” from present reality. Rather it lends stability to our lives. Notice that Paul's words about death being gain are preceded by the declaration: “For me to live is Christ.”

His meaning here is clear enough for Verse 21 is but his commentary on the preceding verse, which says,

“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.” (Philippians 1:20).

Christ was everything to Paul—and He should be to us! Every area of life should be focused on Him. The total decision-making process for the believer has but one proper focus: *Christ*. Whether it is our personal life, family life, business life, recreational life, social life or spiritual life, every detail should be focused on His glory.

This is more, however, than simply handling the details of life so as to please Him, although it is surely this. More, because Paul exhorts us:

“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.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The “transformed” of this passage is the “transfigured” of Matthew 17:2. Here II Corinthians 3:18 must not be forgotten:

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glassⁱ the glory of the Lord, are changedⁱⁱ into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Corinthians 3:18).

As we behold in the Word of God all that Christ is and has done for us it has a transforming effect on us! The Spirit of God thus changes us and the character of God is then exhibited through us as we are “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11). Hence Paul can go on to say that we are:

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

“For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (II Corinthians 4:10, 11).

His life, *His* attitudes, *His* actions are thus “manifest in the flesh” as we walk by the Spirit’s direction through His Word to us. Then “*to live is Christ*” is more than a wish or a cliché—it is a blessed reality!

Before we conclude this article we would remind the reader that Philippians 1:21 is a statement of Paul’s own personal evaluation of life and death. Notice how he says, “For *to me* to live ...”

We cannot but ask you, dear reader: What is life *to you*? Is it money, entertainment, friends, school, a house, family, work, sex, sports—just what is your life focused on? One thing is certain, your life will never be all that God intends it to be until it is focused on *Christ*!

And we must also ask: To you, what is death? Gain? Or will it be loss? If you have not yet trusted the One who died to be your Saviour, do so *today*. Then for you, too, both death *and* life will be gain in the truest sense of the word.

ⁱ 1. A figure of speech used to refer to the Word of God. See James 1:22-25.

ⁱⁱ 2. The same Greek word as “transformed” in Romans 12:2 and “transfigured” in Matthew 17:2.