

Philippians 1 v21 part one

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain

Going to look at this over 2 weeks and also in the order that the Greek words have it

εμοι	γαρ	το	ζην	Χριστος
to me	for	to live		Christ

Don't' ask me how to pronounce it as it is all Greek to me!

For to me to live is Christ,

In the Greek Paul starts off "to me". Putting it at the beginning shows what Paul wants to emphasize. TO ME - what follows is going to be something from Paul's inner core, something central to his whole existence. I wonder what is the centre of your faith, I wonder if we each had to write in one sentence what was important to us what we would write? We do need to reflect now and again on what is at the centre of our life. What is our key priority in life and I encourage to think about the answer to this question as I speak.

For to me to live is Christ,

For - the word that is used in Greek means that a reason or explanation is following but an explanation of what. Paul has expressed in the verses before how life has been difficult - he had been imprisoned. What is to follow is no clever thought dreamt up in a comfortable academic theological college. No the thought about to be expressed has been sharpened and polished on the stone of life and life with all its hardness and sharp edges.

For to me to live is Christ,

To live or living - the present tense to signify the process of living. It is not just existence it has more depth than that. Our life is to be more than a biological existence, more than getting up in the morning, working in the day be that in the home or outside, then coming home and plonking oneself in front of the telly until bedtime. It is to have a richness, a sense of fulfilment. Of course this does not mean material things.- how often we use the word need - I need this, need that - when in fact the right word should be I would like but it is not essential. What is it that is essential in your life? What needs do you express that in fact you should call desires?

What sort of things then is life to consist of. The verses after gives us an idea. V22 talks of worthwhile work - fruitful labour. Of course the idea of fruit was used by Jesus and it gets at the question what is it that you or I add to this world and is it for good or bad or does it not really matter. Now this is not about being a noble prize winner as v24 later in the chapter shows it is about how do we benefit others -what impact do we have on those around us. This can be family, neighbours or wider. What this reflection on life makes us do is question why we are doing something, it is not saying that in themselves some things are right and others wrong but does ask us to reflect on the deeper issues of life and who is controlling it and who is it for.

For to me to live is Christ,

Before we go on to what is at the centre of Paul's life I want to comment on what is not therein the Greek "is". In our English translation we put it in to made sense and it is legitimate to do so but in the Greek it is absent. This in its own way adds emphasis to the connection between the living and the next word Christ. For Paul the words are identical, there is an equivalence between them, one could say that one cannot separate the two in real life so Paul did not want to separate them on paper.

For to me to live is Christ,

Now we come to Christ - this is what is at the centre of the whole sentence both physically in the Greek and spiritually in Paul's life, remember we are looking at the second half next week. When reading about this verse I came across this in one of the commentaries that sums this central placing brilliantly:

Paul does not mean in saying to live is Christ that Christ is the source of his physical existence, or even his spiritual life, or that Christ lives in him, or that he is with Christ. No he means something that does not reject all of these separate ideas, includes them all and means something even more. One could say life is filled up with, occupied with Christ in the sense that everything that Paul does - trust, loves, hopes, obeys, preaches, follows, etc. - is inspired by and done for Christ. Christ and Christ alone gives inspiration, direction, meaning, and purpose to existence. Paul is just so overwhelmed by Christ that he can just say To me to live is Christ!

As I said before this conclusion is not something thought out in a comfortable existence but something lived and experienced in all the joys and sorrows of what is everyday life with its frustrations and successes. There is a sense with Paul that he is saying no compromise – bit like in Daniel when some of God's people are about to be thrown to their death for not worshipping the king they say that God will save them and then go on to say Daniel 3:18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

And we do compromise in so many different ways – I am amazed at how many people touch wood for luck or cross their fingers – just how is that going to help. Are we really putting our trust in a piece of wood or how we hold our fingers or horoscopes from the stars. Then there are other ways we compromise from the way we miss coming to worship, access that internet page that we know isn't helpful, breaking the speed limit, staying up to watch some drivel on tele when we know we need the sleep, there are so many distractions in life that pull us away from our central purpose – to live for Christ. This is not about obsessing about Christ but about allowing his priorities to infiltrate everything we are and do.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain

It is good to dissect a verse like this and explore the different levels of meaning. to reduce it to its basic elements. But the whole is greater than the parts that make it up. One could analyse a picture by saying how much of different shades of colour were used but a picture is more than just colours on a canvas, they express something beyond them - so this verse in its whole is so powerful and meaningful. I invite you over the next week to each day think on the verse and explore each part, a different part each day and then take the individual parts back to the verse to see how the whole verse is enriched and deepened.

Let us pray:

From a Christmas card I received
Jesus Christ, the Son of God
He is the breath of life within us
The fountain that refreshes us
The grace that frees us
The truth that renews our minds
The way that guides our steps
The love that fills our hearts
The fullness that gives us joy!