

Life In Christ

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Life in Christ
(Philippians 1:21)

"To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

I SUPPOSE the chief reason why Christianity does not yet pervade the world, is that Christ does not pervade the life of Christians. We speak of "the Christian world." The picture is truer than most people deem. It is a world with a Christian tinge upon it, but still a world. It is not a new heaven and a new earth, wherein righteousness dwells.

Among the many shortcomings of disciples, perhaps the chief is this: that to a large extent their life and spirit seem to intimate that they count Christ an unfortunate necessity, instead of exulting and boasting in him as their joy and their life. Christians seem to sigh because they cannot do without him, rather than welcome with glad songs the Sun of Righteousness as he rises upon a dark world with healing in his beams.

Oh for a step forward, a leap higher! Forgetting the things behind, let us bend forward mightily, and endeavour to apprehend the Christ, who has apprehended us. Arise, blind beggar on the highway-side! arise, lo, he calleth thee into light and joy!

To live beneath our privilege is to dishonour the Lord. The same act of advancement, which would be gladness to the Christian, would be glory to Christ.

I do not come here to preach a gloomy gospel: I proclaim glad tidings of great joy. I do not wield a spiritual terror to wrench human beings away from their only joys, and compel them to accept Christ lest they should drop into hell. I come to bid you retain and enjoy all the gifts of providence, and to enjoy them a thousand-fold more by enjoying them in the light of your Redeemer's countenance, as you enjoy a thousand-fold more the landscape when the sun is up.

The life and the death of which Paul speaks here are the ordinary life and death of human creatures. The terms are employed in no figurative or emblematic sense. To live is simply to live as you or I lived yesterday and live to-day. And to die means to depart from life, in the act of putting off this mortal. We do not need to search here for any hidden or mysterious meaning. The language is used in a simple and natural sense.

To live, for this man, now that he has been redeemed and forgiven and renewed,—to live is something great and sublime. Life for this man is not like the life of the beasts that perish—let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.

For him to live is not to eat and drink and be clothed. It is not the mere struggle for existence, or the chase after luxuries when the necessities of nature have been satisfied. Some men make this their life. They change the end for the means. Food and drink and raiment are necessary, are sweet, are God's good gifts to his children. It is the duty even of these children to labour for them, to use them,

to enjoy them. Without them there cannot be life, and consequently none of life's highest ends. These are the means of preserving life; but these are not the objects for which we live. A disciple of Christ and heir of glory lives *on* these as long as he is here; but no child of God lives *for* these. They who seek their life *there* shall lose it.

Life for him is not gain. The aim and end of living is not to acquire a great property. Property is useful in fulfilling some of the more important ends of life; but whenever it comes to be itself an end, its nature is changed. It is no longer a blessing. It is then like a bag of gold hung round the neck of a shipwrecked miser, to drag him down, down to death. He who knows what human life is, who knows its deepest need and highest destiny, has said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Life for this man does not consist in pleasure. He will not occupy his day in chasing tufts of thistle-down as they float on the breeze. He is a grown man, and has put away childish things; he is a new man, and has put away the old man with his deeds.

Life for this man is not honour—the highest place among his fellows. He has gotten the favour of God as a dear child, and he sets less value on the honours that the world bestows. Life for Paul does not consist in the chase after these things or in the enjoyment of them; so far all is clear.

But further: his life does not consist in refusing and avoiding these things. Suppose you should strip all these off, and deny yourself all comforts, you would be no nearer a true life in the Lord and for the Lord. Life consists

neither in having them nor in wanting them. The truly living may have them to-day and want them to-morrow.

This is a new life of which Paul speaks. He did not always possess it. Formerly he lived without Christ in the world, and now he lives with him. Before the Lord met him, he lived a sort of life. While he was in it he thought it good. It was a vigorous, active life. It burned like fire; but the sparks sprang from earth—they were not sunbeams out of heaven. As soon as he escaped from that life, he counted it vile. He thought with a shudder of his previous life. From the moment that the life of Christ was revealed to him, he was a new man.

But even this is not what he says in our text. It is not a life with Christ, or even a life in Christ; but his very life is Christ. This extraordinary expression conveys an extraordinary thought. It behoves us to search and see what it means. Life is now to him another thing: his former life he remembers as a horrid dream. And the bound over is extreme. It is not that his life is like Christ, for it *is* Christ. He is a new creature. His former self is lost. It is not I that live, but Christ that liveth in me.

A vine is growing; it grows in good ground; it grows strong. It draws the sap of the ground, and bears much fruit; but the fruit is bad. It is bitter to the taste, and poisonous. Another vine grows near it—a good vine—all good. They take a branch of the good vine, and bend it gently towards the wild vine; and they lay a strong hand on the wild vine, and bend it towards the good vine. They touch. They are fastened—the branch of the good vine to the stem of the evil. As yet this produces no change on the wild vine; but it is some needful pre-

pleasant; it is a dark passage, and the child shudders as he goes down. Not the narrow gate, but the life it leads to, is a gain. He will be richer too; he will rejoice over every one that returns. And oh! his joy will be great over the multitude that no man can number.

God was not taken aback and defeated when man his child was drawn into rebellion and death. He had a grander scheme in reserve prepared beforehand. The very fall of man touched a spring that set the greater plan in motion—a motion which will not cease till his many sons have been brought into glory. When the first Adam fell, the second Adam stood. The second Adam came—the Lord from heaven; the Man who should restore humanity, and make a glory that excelleth to encircle the brow of ransomed men. Men redeemed by Christ are higher up and closer in than angels unfallen. Will he have room for us all, and a beam of light from his countenance for each? Look up into the heavens. "Who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number? He calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power: not one faileth." "Lo, I am with you alway." *That is life: after life that, and more.* Christ the man—eternal, everywhere present God; yet transfused through every ransomed man. Every one in Christ; Christ in every one.

Christ and ignorance, seeing in part through a glass darkly: there Christ and light—we shall know, even as we are known. Here Christ and sins, vexing his Spirit, and polluting his dwelling-place: there Christ and purity—nothing shall enter that defileth.

Some people count their gains very carefully when they have got them. Some count the gains before they are won; they calculate the expected profit, and enjoy it by anticipation. Christian winners do likewise. Paul counts his gains before he gets them; he enjoys the expected wealth. It does no harm to gloat thus over the true riches. Your real money-makers never despise small winnings. This is their art—they despise nothing because of its smallness. It is thus that careful souls grow rich in grace.

Here we have Christ and pain. A dying girl said to her mother, "There will be no sore heads in heaven." To her to live was Christ and to die was gain. And she counted her gains beforehand on her bed of languishing, and cheered her aching heart with the glitter of expected fortune. There will be no evil-speaking there: that is a gain awaiting us. There will be no envy swelling in our own breasts: what a gain! There we shall have Christ and the company of Christians in all the beauty of holiness: how ravishing!—those bodies glorified like Christ's glorious body; souls perfect in purity shining through those beautiful countenances. "Thou art all fair, my love;"

"Thy beauty to the King
Shall then delightful be."

"*To die.*" In the original it is "*to have died,*" a past tense; whereas "*to live*" is a present. *Not* death is

paratory work. They now make an opening in the stem of the wild vine, and another in the branch of the good vine. They place them into each other at the wound, and bind them up. The wounds heal, and the two have grown into each other. The next step in the process is to cut off the head of the wild vine, and leave instead the now engrafted branch of the good. Then the branch of the good is severed from its parent stem. The root of the evil tree remains; but its head now is the new and the good tree.

"I live," murmurs the root and stem of the old evil tree far below. *I live*—you live; you have no leaf, no flower, no fruit: all the life is in the new tree. "I live," still humbly murmurs the old root out of the ground; "nevertheless not I, but the new good tree liveth in me; and the life that I now live in the ground, I live through the new and good tree, which loved me, and gave itself for me."

This cutting, and bleeding, and binding, and grafting process took place while the patient was prostrate and blind outside the gate of Damascus.

Thus is Paul's life a new thing; for to him to live is Christ.

Suppose he had said, To me to pray is Christ; it would have been true—a precious truth. Not only that he needs Christ when he draws near to God, but that to pray is all Christ. He comes not himself. He says, Look not on me, but on the Beloved; for worthy is the Lamb. He comes not in the filthy rags of his own righteousness. It is the righteousness of the Redeemer that is presented to the eye of God. The suppliant commands, because he stands on the right of the Son.

But it is not when he prays—when he comes to the communion, leaving the world outside—that he and the

Saviour are one ; but it is his common life—when he lies down and rises up, when he buys and sells, when he labours and when he rests, when he is in the bosom of his family and in public.

The Father loveth the Son. From everlasting the Son is in the bosom of the Father. This is the original and perfect idea of sonship. All that we know yet on earth is but a shadow, projected and dimly outlined upon the ground from the one perfect and substantial Sonship in heaven. In the eternal covenant man was designed as God's son: the Eternal Son was the ideal—the perfect man. When Adam was made, he was made on the model, in the image of God. But he was sent into life free—he was not upheld by Divine power ; and he fell. But when man, as he lived on earth, became corrupt, the perfect manhood was not lost. God did not risk all on one stake. The original remained, the type off which Adam in innocence was cast. Of him the Father will yet make a great nation.

Sometimes, after an engraven steel-plate has given forth some pictures it is destroyed, in order to enhance the value of the copies thrown off. If the copies were all destroyed, then the ideal would be lost. But when one type was thrown off and planted in Paradise, the original remained when the copy was spoiled. Man still remained—the Eternal Son remained.

Next time it was not another mould taken, and a holy man sent into the world to make another trial. This time it was the Eternal Pattern himself—the God-man—that came into the world, and took hold of us, and made himself one with his people.

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?” These words

were spoken to Saul as an enemy of Christ. But I think the words were very precious to Paul when he came into Christ. These words were burned into his memory, and taught him that Christ and his people are one. Thus those words of God that are against the wicked become the very bread that the children live on when they are children. I think Paul would roll those awful words as a sweet morsel under his tongue. *Me!*—not only on my side, but they are *me*.

Paul was thus acting, when Festus cried out, “Paul, thou art beside thyself.” Right, Festus. You may trust the governor for the mere observation of the fact. He knew what a *Saul* in himself would be—a Hebrew of the Hebrews—a Pharisee—“touching the law blameless.” But he made a mistake when he attempted to give the reason. Paul is not here—he is put off: another stands in his stead—“To live is Christ”—“*to die is gain*.” I do not think these two are different in kind; it is only in degree. You might say: Here is a man who is very rich; he owns vast estates in his own right; this wealth he enjoys in his father's lifetime, and his father's death will be gain—that is, he will retain all he had, and get it multiplied manifold. All his wealth he retains, and gets more. So here: it is not that in life Paul had Christ, and that at death he would lose that and obtain something else instead. “To me to live is Christ.” And what will death be to you when it comes? It will be Christ, and more.

The substance of the inheritance beyond we know, from verse 23, is the same Christ—“To depart, and to be with Christ.” But there will be something more—“To die is gain.” What are the gains? Peace instead of war. Here Christ and conflict: there Christ and peace. Here