

Philippians 1:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, Emoi gar to zēn Christos kai to apothanein kerdos)—One of Scripture's most compact, profound statements. To zēn ("to live," present infinitive) is not mere existence but conscious living is Christ (Χριστός, Christos). Life's meaning, purpose, content, and identity = Christ. Paul doesn't say living for Christ but living is Christ—union mysticism.

To die is gain (τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, to apothanein kerdos—"gain, profit") is commercial language Paul uses frequently (3:7-8). Death gains unmediated Christ-presence (v. 23). This verse demolishes fear of death and purposeless living. If life = Christ, suffering/death can't steal meaning. If death = gain, martyrdom isn't loss. Both outcomes win.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman philosophy (especially Stoicism and Epicureanism) debated death's nature—annihilation or soul-survival. Paul's confidence wasn't philosophical speculation but resurrection faith rooted in Christ's resurrection. His 'gain' is not disembodied bliss but waiting for resurrection (3:20-21). Ancient martyrs' fearlessness stemmed from this theology, shocking executioners.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Can you complete the sentence 'For me to live is _____' honestly? Is it Christ, or comfort, achievement, family?
2. How does viewing death as 'gain' (not loss) reshape your daily fears and choices?
3. What practical difference does it make to say life *is* Christ versus living *for* Christ?

Interlinear Text

ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος
to me For G3588 to live is Christ and G3588 to die is gain
G1698 G1063 G2198 G5547 G2532 G599 G2771

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 2:20 (References Christ): I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:8 (Parallel theme): We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (Parallel theme): For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Philippians 1:23 (References Christ): For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

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

2 Corinthians 5:6 (Parallel theme): Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

Revelation 14:13 (Parallel theme): And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Philippians 1:20 (References Christ): 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.

Galatians 6:14 (References Christ): But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (References Christ): But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

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