

## CHRISTIANITY CONDENSED

### Philippians 1:21

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

In twelve brief words, the Apostle Paul has summarized the Christian view of life and death. I have used two different titles for this verse. One is “Christianity Condensed,” the other is “The Simple Secret of the Christian Life.” The verse is a compound sentence constructed by the combining of two smaller sentences. All the words in the sentence are monosyllables, or one-syllable words. You do not need to know the complicated language of theological jargon to live the life that wins. Here it is in twelve brief, one-syllable words. And nine of the twelve words have three letters or less! This means that this verse is the very apex of simplicity. Nothing could be simpler, yet nothing is more profound.

The two shorter sentences are separated by a comma. The sentence before the comma gives the Christian view of *life*, while the sentence after the comma gives the Christian view of *death*. There are three strong words in the verse, the words “me,” “live,” and “Christ.” The middle term, “live,” is defined in the union of the two other words, “me” and “Christ.” When the two terms, “me” and “Christ” are brought into right relationship, I become “alive unto God.” The human finds real life in union with the Divine. This is the only combination that truly deserves to be called “life.” The word “life” stands defined in the equation of this verse.

However, in our foolish attempts to find life, we take other extremes and combine them, and we call the result “life.” We sometimes say, “To me to live is money.” Or, “to me to live is pleasure.” Or, “to me to live is fame.” But the New Testament answers each of these combinations with this verdict, “Thou hast a *name* that thou livest, and art *dead*.” All other combinations fail. The equation is not accurate without the Biblical components. Life is the unique product of a unique union. Jesus said, “This is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). This is the theological statement; our text is the practical statement. The word “know” in Jesus’ statement is a present tense continuous verb, and may be translated, “go on knowing,” or “be knowing.” So eternal life is an ongoing relationship or union with God through Jesus Christ. Also, this verb “know” is the same word that is used in the old Septuagint or Greek version of the Old Testament for sexual intimacy. Thus, the Bible says that “Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived, and brought forth a son.” So life is found in intimate, loving interaction between a human being and God. Paul’s words echo the Biblical formula for life. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Here is the simple secret of the Christian life — and yet, so profound!

## I. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS DEEPLY PERSONAL

First, the verse indicates that the Christian life is *deeply personal*. “*To me* to live is Christ.” The words, “to me,” stand in the emphatic position in the sentence. It is obvious that Paul is making a statement of deep personal feelings and preferences here. Jesus Christ is only possessed personally in the life of a human being. If these words do not comprise my personal testimony, then I am not a Christian. Martin Luther said, “Every man must do his own believing, just as every man must do his own dying.” And he added, “The most important words in the Bible are the personal possessive pronouns, my and mine.”

The Bible says that “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). It says that “Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25). But this would bring me no benefit if I could not say with Paul, “Christ loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*” (Galatians 2:20). The Bible says that Jesus is the “Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep” (John 10:11). It says that He is the “Great Shepherd” (Hebrews 13:20). It says that He is the “Chief Shepherd” (I Peter 5:4). But this would bring me no benefit if I could not say with David, “The Lord is *my* shepherd” (Psalm 23:1).

A cartoon by syndicated cartoonist George Clark showed two women talking over a cup of coffee. One says, “I’m pleased as punch with my weight-watchers club. Last week, we collectively lost 143 pounds among us!” But then she added, “However, I’m sad to admit that none of it was mine personally!” So where was the accomplishment? Where was the victory? She was not a real part of the victory or the accomplishment. You see, dear friend, it is not enough to be closely associated with Christian people, Christian places, or Christian activities. You must know Christ *personally*.

A girl named Edith went to church every Sunday, though nobody else in the family attended. One Sunday, her mother met her at the front door as Edith returned home from church. Edith was smiling broadly. Her mother asked her what she was smiling about. “Mama, the preacher preached from a verse of the Bible that had my name in it!” Edith announced. “Really, what was the verse?” her mother asked. “Luke 15:2, ‘This man (Jesus) receiveth sinners, and *Edith* with them!’” she answered triumphantly. Dear friend, unless you have seen the proposition of salvation addressed personally to you, unless you have received Christ personally, unless you have been born of God personally — unless you have heard your name as personally called by God as Edith did, you have never been saved.

Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, could not believe that she was included in God’s life. She struggled and struggled, trying to believe. She finally went to see a pastor with her problem of unbelief. He opened a Bible to Isaiah chapter 53 and directed her attention to verse four, “He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” The pastor said to Ruth Graham, “I want you to put your finger on that verse and read it out loud, inserting your own name in place of the word, “our.” She did so, and suddenly, God turned the lights on in her inner spirit. “He (Jesus) was wounded for *Ruth’s* transgressions.” She saw the truth clearly, and entered into her inheritance in Christ. Have you seen yourself as the personal object of God’s love and God’s search? Do you realize that Jesus died for you as if you were the only sinner who ever lived, or the only sinner who ever needed to be died for? The Christian life is deeply

personal.

## II. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS WONDERFULLY PRACTICAL

Second, the text indicates that the Christian life is *wonderfully practical*. Look at the second pair of words, “to live.” “To me *to live* is Christ.” Note that this is a verb, “to live,” and not a noun, “life.” The verb is the action word of our language. The New Testament is a book about life and living. If I were to ask you, What is the main theme of the New Testament, what would your answer be? Consider this before you lock in an answer. The words “life” and “live” are used over 1,000 times in the New Testament! This alone makes a strong case that the main theme of the New Testament is life and living. Remember that there are three strong words in our text, “me,” “live,” and “Christ.” And remember that the word “live” is the word that is defined by the union of the other two words. Now, living is a very practical thing (!). Someone said, “The problem of living is that it is *so daily*.” Exactly! And this is the genius of Christianity. It offers a concept that covers every moment of every day. Jesus said, “I am with you always.” “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” If we walk (a practical word) with Him, He will make our lives majestic. However, it must be honestly said that if we don’t walk with Him, *He* will make our lives miserable. You see, He is serious in His desire for relationship with the people He made for such a relationship.

A little boy was taking an elementary science exam at school. One question was, “What is salt?” He could not remember the chemical formula, sodium chloride, so finally he wrote, “Salt is the stuff that spoils the potatoes when you leave it out!” Well, Jesus is the One who spoils life — when you leave Him out. There is no maliciousness in the arrangement when you learn that you must breathe to maintain physical life, and there is no maliciousness when you are told that you must have a relationship with God through Christ to have eternal life. No threat, just fact.

The word is “live,” not dream, or wish, or hope, or theorize. The Christian life is a continuing experience. Can you imagine anyone announcing, “I’m real tired right at this moment, so I’m going to stop living for two hours and get some rest, then I’ll resume the living at the end of that time.” No, when a person stops living, it tends to be permanent! I don’t live off of moments of inspiration or spasms of faith. I don’t just live for one hour and thirty minutes on Sundays, then go dead for the rest of the time. I live every moment of every day and every moment of every night. Even so, Christ is my life every moment of every day and every moment of every night. He doesn’t live in me in spells and spurts and spasms.

Many people could be called “hypodermic saints,” or “epidemic saints.” When they get a “fix,” an inoculation, of Christianity in a super-charged atmosphere, they excitedly vow that they will live for Jesus. Their roots are planted in the excitement of the moment rather than in Christ. The “epidemic saint” catches the high-fevered contagion of a meeting or a crusade or an infectious preacher, but he fades away as quickly as he started. He is a chocolate soldier who stays firm in a cool and comfortable place, but melts when the sun gets hot in an exposed place.

A true relationship with Jesus Christ means that every part of my life is affected at all times; every relationship in my life is involved at all times; every moment of my life is to be

changed and transformed. Whatever living means to me anywhere and all the time — working or lounging at home, driving a car or a bus, walking along a sidewalk, shopping in a grocery or a mall, reading the Bible or a novel or a newspaper, banging a typewriter or answering a telephone, standing behind a counter or in a line — whether I am tired or in full strength, sick or well, happy or disappointed, whether it is Monday morning or Saturday night, “*to me to live is Christ.*” The Christian life is wonderfully practical.

### III. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS GLORIOUSLY POSSIBLE

Third, the Christian Life is *gloriously possible*. One word in the verse makes it possible. That word is “Christ.” Paul did not say, “To me to live is to confess Christ,” or, “to me to live is to be like Christ,” or, “to me to live is to live for Christ,” or, “to me to live is to pray to Christ,” or, “to me to live is to serve Christ.” These formulas sound wonderful, and are easy replacements for the real thing. No activity, or function, or attribute of the life must be mistaken for the life itself. Jesus Himself is the Source, the Secret, the Substance, and the Solution of the Christian life. Someone said, “Many people are trying to live the Christian life when they don’t have The Life to live.” No accouterment or accompaniment of the life is the life itself.

Captain Reginald Wallis said, “The greatest day of my Christian life was the day I discovered I could not live it, and God did not intend me to. Then, and then alone, was I willing to invite the Lord Jesus to live His own life in me.” Some people say, “The Christian life is out for me. I just can’t live it.” I’ve got good news for you. You are dead right; you can’t live it! And furthermore, you were never expected to live it as far as God is concerned. Let me say it reverently but firmly. God isn’t so stupid as to demand perfection and then expect a thoroughly imperfect person like you to live it!

Billy Graham asked a young man, “Are you a Christian?” “Well, I’m trying to be,” was the reply, a quite typical reply to such a question. Graham asked teasingly, “Ever try to be an elephant?” To depend on your own effort is to guarantee failure, but to defer by repentance and faith to Christ’s exercise in you is to guarantee fulfilment and fruitfulness.

Pastor Stuart Briscoe was on a preaching mission on the Isle of Man. A lady came to him at the end of one of the services and said glumly, “Mr. Briscoe, I just don’t know what is wrong with me....” Briscoe interrupted before she could go further and said, “Ma’am, are you a Christian? Do you know you are saved?” “Why, yes, she replied, but I just don’t know what is wrong with me....” Briscoe interrupted again, and politely asked her, “Ma’am, tell me in the simplest terms what happened to you the day you were saved.” She thought a moment and replied, “Well, Jesus came into me.” He said, “Excuse me, would you repeat that?” “Jesus came into me,” she answered. “Please say that again,” he insisted. She said, “Jesus came into me.” “Again,” he said gently. “*Jesus came into me,*” she said. You see, the staggering and stupendous reality of having the eternal Son of God, the Lord of glory, the King of all kings, living in her had never become a vital reality to her, and thus the Christian life was an impossible proposition.

Every Christian has a decisive line of demarcation driven through his life. He has a B.C. (Before Christ) and an A. D. (Anno Domini, “in the year of our Lord”) life. He has a Then and a

Now. In the B. C., or Then, time, he had to say, “To me to live is (his own name goes here).” “To me to live is Herb.” “To me to live is George, or Joe, or Polly, or Sue.” Then, by a glorious new birth, he became a Christian. This means that the center of gravity within him shifted from himself to Christ. Do not misunderstand this. The Christian life is not a circle with only one center, Christ. This would violate and destroy your personality. No, the Christ life is an ellipse with two possible centers, you and Christ. Now, “He must increase, but you (the self-centered, fleshly, competitive self) must decrease.” As the false usurper, the selfish you, decreases, the true you, the you that you were meant to be, emerges under the administration of Christ’s life.

So life is Someone Else! Life is Christ. Shortly after Malcolm Muggeridge, the renowned English journalist, became a Christian, he delivered a sermon in Queen’s Cross Church, Aberdeen, Scotland, on Sunday, May 26, 1968. In that sermon, Muggeridge made this confession: “I may, I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets — that’s fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Inland Revenue — that’s success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions— that’s pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time — that’s fulfillment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing — less than nothing — a positive impediment — measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty — irrespective of who or what they are. What, I ask myself, does life hold, what is there in the works of time, in the past, now and to come, which could possibly be put in the balance against the refreshment of drinking that water?” *Life is Someone Else!*

In the early 1960s, the heroic Christian leader Martin Niemoller came to America on a speaking tour. Knowing of his experience under the Hitler regime in Germany and of his resistance to the Nazis, two reporters representing large city newspapers hurried to hear him, expecting a sensational discussion of those war years. Instead, Dr. Niemoller preached a warm, Christ-centered Gospel message and yet hardly mentioned his experiences in Nazi Germany. The two reporters left the church greatly disappointed. As they departed, one reporter was heard saying to the other, “Six years in a Nazi prison camp, and all he has to talk about is Jesus Christ!” *Life is Someone Else!*

When John Bunyan was saved, he wrote in his journal, “O, I thought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ that was now before my eyes! O Christ! O Christ! O Christ! My Lord and my Savior! O Christ! O Christ!” It is *Christ* Who “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (I Corinthians 1:30). *Life is Someone Else!*

And life is *someone else*. Note the subtle change, the necessary addition, that is made when a person truly knows Christ. There is not only a shift of the “center of gravity” within him from self to Christ, but there is also a shift from self to other people. “*You* are my joy and my crown,” Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (2:19-20). *You* are “my joy and crown,” he wrote to the Philippians (4:1). This is the whole point of the Christian life. We become fulfilled and gratified and useful as the focus of our lives turns from ourselves to Christ and others. When the focus of

our lives is on Christ, He actually serves us, and, in a reciprocal miracle, we serve Him. When the focus of our lives is on others, we serve them for Christ's sake. If we only relate to Christ without a resulting focus on others, the Christian life becomes self-centered and mystical, an exercise in personal piety alone. This exercise appears wonderful at first, but it is in reality merely another caricature of the real Christian life.

On the other hand, if we sympathetically seek to focus on others without the monitor of a live relationship with Christ, we become mere social contributors — and soon that deteriorates into mere friendship. If I focus on Christ and His Life, then my relationships with others are incredibly sanctified.

We must realize that Jesus does not impart life as something separate from Himself. He Himself is the life which He imparts. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” When we get *Him*, we get “*It*.” “He who has the Son has life, but he who has not the Son of God has not life” (I John 5:12). He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). We use this verse almost exclusively for evangelistic purposes, but it has a far more profound meaning than merely to say that Jesus is the only way to God and to heaven. After all, He said *three* things in the verse, not just one.

Explore the phrases, and let me interpret for a moment. He said, “I am the way” — that we might be *saved*. He said, “I am the truth” — that we might be *sure* of it and *sensible* about it. And He said, “I am the life” — that we might be *satisfied* just with Him. One hundred percent of Christians have gotten into the way and been saved. But substantially less than one hundred percent of Christians are *sure* of their salvation and *sensible* about their relationship with Christ. So someone is tampering in our minds and hearts with the authority of Jesus, because the same Christ spoke both sentences. But if there is a large decrease of participation from the first sentence of the verse to the second part, just look at the third part.

“I am the life” — that we might be *satisfied* just with Jesus, that we might find our *sufficiency* only in Christ. How many Christians do you know who have impressed you that they are satisfied just with Jesus? This is a very difficult question to answer. The only way it could be practically tested would be to remove everything but Christ and see if the person is satisfied. When the Apostle Paul came to die, he said, “I have kept the faith.” You see, the faith *was about all that he had left!* But because he had lived a Christ-centered life, he was satisfied and gratified. How many Christians do you know who appear to find their sufficiency in Christ? Do you think you know *even one?*

Now, think carefully of the implications of the fact that Life is Someone Else, that Life is Christ and Christ is Life. Paul's equation is that Life equals Christ, and Christ equals Life. This means that there is no true life from which Christ is absent. Remove Christ, and you have removed life. Insert Christ, and you have inserted life. This means also that for any Christian to know and understand himself, He must get to know Christ — personally, intimately, accurately, and well. Dear Christian, if you are to have an adequate and accurate sense of identity, you must get to know Christ — because *He is your Life!*

Now, it is just this fact that makes the Christian life gloriously possible. Sadly, most Christians still think they must live the life for Christ instead of allowing Him to live His own life in union with their personalities.

A father came home from work. He saw his son sprawled on the front lawn. “Do you want to play?” the father asked. “Naw, Dad, I’m too tired!” “Why are you so tired, son?” “I’ve been riding a horse all over the neighborhood,” the boy said, pointing to his broomstick horse that was lying beside him on the lawn. “Son,” his Dad said, “riding a horse shouldn’t make you that tired.” “I know, Dad, but when you ride this kind of horse, you have to do your own galloping.” A Christian has the winged horse of the universe, Jesus the Son of God, to carry him, but sadly, most Christians still do their own galloping!

In happy contrast, consider the ride which Lucy and Susan enjoyed on Aslan after he had risen from the dead in C. S. Lewis’ great story entitled The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. An incredible story of redemption from sin through death and resurrection, the story climaxes with the two girls commanded to get on Aslan’s back and ride. “That ride was perhaps the most wonderful thing that happened to them in Narnia. And it was a ride on a mount that doesn’t need to be guided and never grows tired. He rushes on and on, never missing his footing, never hesitating, threading his way with perfect skill ...” To get the full meaning, do yourself a favor and read the entire book. Go back to your childhood for a little while, and *enjoy the ride*. The Christian life is gloriously possible because Jesus communicates His Life to you and wants to carry you all the way home.

Every person on earth lives at all times in one of two verses from Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The first is our text in Philippians 1:21: “To me to live is Christ.” The other is one chapter away in Philippians 2:21: “For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”

“Only two philosophies occupy life’s shelf,  
Either live for Christ, or live for self.”

Those two philosophies of life, that of the Savior and that of Satan, confront us in these two verses. Everlasting life is life with Christ at its center, but the other philosophy, that of self-serving, created Satan and agrees with him — and the person who lives that way will have to endure Satan’s company forever! Let’s finally consider the permanent consequences of the Christ-centered life.

#### **IV. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS ETERNALLY PROFITABLE**

When a person says, “To me to live is Christ,” he will enjoy Christ’s company forever. The Christian life is *eternally profitable*. “To me to live is Christ, *and to die is gain*.” A Christian can live or he can die — *but he cannot lose!* The word translated “gain” in this verse is “*kerdos*,” which means gain in the sense of “profit.” It was used often in the secular writing of Paul’s day to refer to interest gained on invested money. In II Timothy 1:12, Paul spoke of his faith as a deposit (the KJV translates it “commit”) of his whole life into Christ’s keeping.

According to Colossians 3:3 and other Scriptures, this means that Paul's whole destiny went into Heaven's triple-padded Safety Deposit Box. We often call this Eternal Security, and it is exactly that. But it is not a mere sterile idea; it is part of a dynamic relationship.

You see, the only person who can give Paul's analysis of *death* is the person who is living out Paul's analysis of *life*. Only the person who can truthfully say, "To me to live is Christ," can fully, accurately and faithfully say, "And to die is gain." If a person belongs to Christ in life, he will also belong to Christ in death, and there is victory either way. The Moffatt translation says, "Death means gain." If Christ is my life, then death must be "gain," because it simply means that I get much, much more of what I was living for — Christ! When the time came for Paul to die — he was beheaded near Rome, according to history — you might have said to him, "Do you see the Emperor's executioner approaching?" Paul might have answered, "No, but I see Christ!"

Death meant just one thing to Paul, and that was a complete and unhampered union with Jesus. Paul talked freely, naturally and realistically about death. He called it "the last enemy," because it is just that. Paul never denied its stark reality, nor did he evade its imminence. It is a sure sign of our carnal-mindedness, immaturity, and insecurity that we moderns do not talk of death except in hush-hush voice or in somber tone and tragic mood. Or we swing to the other extreme, the "Polyanna" mood of denial, deliberately acting as if we are invincible or that we will face the dark "king of terrors" only when he gallops across our path. Meanwhile, "eat, drink, and be merry" is our mediocre lifestyle. But Paul not only talked freely and naturally about death; he actually looked forward eagerly to the experience. He knew that death was the limousine that would transport him into the King's Presence, and though the last few miles of the ride might be very rough and bumpy, that "it will be worth it all, when we see Jesus!"

It is the clear teaching of Scripture that *death has two sides to it*, and not just one. For example, Jesus spoke of death as "sleep," and sleep has wakefulness both before and *after* it. Death is an "exodus," and we cannot imagine an exodus from one place without an entrance into another. Death has a before and an after, and one Person holds the key to victory in the life *before* death and in the life *after* death. In the context of verse 21, our text uses a large and expansive word for death. In verse 23, it is referred to as a "departure." Paul said, "I have a desire to *depart* and be with Christ, which is far better." He pictures himself as occupying a "narrow place", like a man walking down a narrow corridor between two solid walls. Paul is between two "pulls," one outward toward his earthly companions, the other upward toward Heaven. He says, "My preference, my desire, is to depart and be with Christ." That is the "gain" of death to a Christian.

The word "depart" (verse 23) is another of those treasure-packed words of Scripture. In Paul's day, it was often used as a *soldier's* term, and it meant to take down a tent — to loosen and remove the pegs, to fold up the fabric, to break camp and to prepare to move to a new location. II Corinthians 5:1 says, "We (Christians) know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle (portable tent) be dissolved (the work death does), we have a building of God, a house (a permanent residence, unlike a portable tent) not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Then the word "depart" is a *sailor's* term, and it meant to loosen the cables and set sail. Think of it. A ship is moored at dockside in a harbor. Then it loosens its moorings and moves



out to the threat and the adventure and the prospect of the high seas. Friends and loved ones in the harbor might weep over the departing passengers and say, “Farewell.” But a while later, in a distant harbor, other friends and relatives might smile as they hear the cry, “Ship ahoy!” and a few minutes later, the passengers will receive warm and wonderful welcomes from those who greet them in the new land. So is death to a Christian.

The word “depart” is also a *sojourner’s* word, and it simply means to move from one location to another. You see, when a Christian dies, he *only changes location, he does not change companionship*. Who is going to heaven? Those who live in a vital relationship with Christ on earth; those who can validly say, “To me to live is Christ.”

If we are to adequately explore the phrase, “and to die is gain,” we must at least briefly inventory the Christian’s “Death Benefits.” In what sense is it true for a Christian to say, “To me ... to die is gain”?

Death is gain for a Christian, first, because it will mean eternal *freedom* from the *problems* of life. As incredible as it may seem, there is coming a time (an eternity!) for a Christian when he will never *sin* again, never *suffer* again, and never *struggle* again! “To die is gain.”

Second, death is gain for a Christian because it will mean an eternal *future* in a *place*. Jesus said to His disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you.” Note the words “prepare” and “place,” and remind yourself that Jesus was a carpenter while here on earth. As of this writing, He has been in Heaven for about 2,000 years — and possibly He has done a considerable amount of *interior decorating* on the place — “for you”! If the language used to describe it in Revelation 21 and 22 is literal language, then it is unbelievably beautiful. If the language is figurative, then the place itself is even more beautiful than figurative language can describe.

Two Christian men died together and entered heaven together. As they were touring the premises, one exclaimed, “Man! This place is spectacular! Why didn’t someone tell us in advance how beautiful it was?” The other excitedly replied, “And just think of it! We could have been here ten years sooner if we hadn’t eaten all those health foods!” Forgive the facetiousness, but this is something to laugh about and to celebrate. When the prospect has materialized into reality, you may be sure that we will laugh and shout and sing and celebrate — and I am sure there will be enough fuel for our celebration to last forever!

Finally, death is gain for a Christian because it will mark the beginning of unhindered eternal *fellowship* with a *Person*. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you, that *where I am, there you may be also*.” In His great high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom You have given to me, *be with me where I am*.”

A dentist had an upstairs office. One day, he was working on a patient in the dental chair. Suddenly, they both heard a loud scratching sound at the door. The dentist laughed as he explained, “That’s my dog. I left him downstairs. He has never been in this room; he doesn’t

even know that it would be a safe place. *But he knows that I am here, and he just wants to be with me.*” It might greatly impress some people to be told that the streets of heaven are made of gold, the walls of jasper, and the gates of pearl. But when a person has lived by this standard, “To me to live is Christ,” he would have only one criterion in evaluating heaven: “Forget the furniture of the place, and its location. I want to know one thing: *Is Jesus there?*”

“My knowledge of that place is small  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But it is enough that Christ knows all  
And I shall be with Him.”

I want to ask you, dear friend, to finish my sermon for me. The method will be simple. Dare to write out your life philosophy in an honest sentence. If someone were to ask you, “In a word, what are you living for?” what would you say? In a word, what is your dominant aim or motive in life? Perhaps you would have to reply, “To me to live is *money.*” Or, “to me to live is *pleasure.*” Or, “to me to live is *fame.*” Or perhaps your philosophy would be the all-inclusive one, “To me to live is *self.*” Now, dare to finish the sentence of Philippians 1:21: “And to die is ... ” If you must admit that life to you is summarized in a quest for money, then to die is certainly not gain; it is rather loss, because you can’t take it with you. Billy Sunday added, “And if you could, it would melt where you are going!” If life for you is summarized as a quest for pleasure, then to die is loss, because God will not cater to your selfish appetites, sensations, and thrills. Any other motive will end up holding the same loss!

The only person who can say, “To me ... to die is gain,” is the person who has happily adopted this lifestyle, “To me to live is Christ.” You see, dear friend, “Heaven holds all of that for which you sigh,” but it is only yours if you can say, “To me to live is Christ.” If Christ is your very life now, He will be your very life forever. “Do you not see that executioner, Paul?” “No, I see no executioner.” “*Then what do you see?*” “*Ever and always, I see only Christ.*”