

Christ is My Life

Philippians 1

There are many people today struggling with the purpose for life and the issues that result from their philosophy. The increase in the suicide rate alone indicates the degree to which we are losing our Biblical perspective of life. William Buckley judiciously states that the sacredness of life ethic has been replaced with a quality of life ethic. It seems almost daily we hear about some decision made on a personal, judicial or governmental level that touches on this basic question of the meaning for life and the point at which life no longer has or does not yet have meaning.

These are not issues I struggle with personally. I am fully convinced of the sacredness of life. However, I have recently become cognizant of the fact that I do not live every day of my life as though it were sacred. Consequently, I am not enjoying the quality of life that Jesus intended .

In spite of everything he had been through - maybe because of everything he had been through - Paul knew that each day was a sacred gift. He succinctly states his view of life in Philippians 1:21: "To live is Christ."

"The very essence of Paul's present life was Christ and all that this entailed. Christ had become for him the motive of his actions, the goal of his life and ministry, the source of his strength."¹

When I read these words written by Paul and comprehend their gravity, I am compelled to ask myself, is Christ my life? I love Jesus Christ. He is my Savior. He is my Lord. But is He my life? Is Christ the motive of all my actions, the goal of my life and ministry? The source of my strength? I find this is a difficult standard to achieve in my life. While I resolutely affirm the sacredness of life at all stages, I allow the joy of life on a daily basis to escape me because my life does not express this truth: Christ is my life.

Paul had learned the secret of living this type of focused life. He writes:

For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Phil 4:12-13

I am comforted that this meaning of life, this secret of contentment, can be learned. So I turned to Paul to discover what it really means to have the view of life that can emphatically state, "To live is Christ."

IF CHRIST IS MY LIFE, THAT TRUTH WILL EXPRESS ITSELF IN MY LIFE IN SEVERAL WAYS:

1. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my *attitude* towards fellow Christians:

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of

Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Phil 1:1-11

Do I thank God for my Christian acquaintances - with joy? Do they have a special place in my heart? Do I love them with the affection of Christ Jesus? Am I even trying to love them with the affection of Christ Jesus? Or am I more concerned with protecting myself? If Christ is my life, then I will pray for my fellow Christians and strive to love them and serve them as Christ would.

2. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life in my *priorities*:

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. Phil 1:12-18

Could I, like Paul, put my circumstances secondary to Christ being proclaimed? Do I exalt Christ and represent Him well in all my circumstances? Does my response to my situation actually give courage to other believers who are watching? Are they emboldened to speak out for Christ because I place the proclamation of Christ by word and deed above my personal rights? If Christ is my life, then I will exalt Christ and represent Him well in all circumstances, putting my interests secondary to proclaiming Him.

3. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life by my *source of support and encouragement*:

For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. Phil 1:19-20

To whom do I look for my strength and encouragement? Do I look to my spouse? My children? My boss? My co-workers? My friends? My church? If I do, I will be disappointed. As wonderful as all these people are, none of them can know my need and provide for that need like Jesus. If Christ is my life, I will look only to Him for my strength and encouragement.

4. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life in my *purpose* for living:

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. Phil 1:21-22

Is my main purpose in living the pursuit of this world's values - money, popularity, power, pleasure, and prestige? If so, then I will not be able to view death and being with Christ as a gain, but rather as a loss. If the pursuit of worldly values is my purpose for living, then I will not be able to render the fruitful labor that Paul did. "For Paul, to live meant to develop eternal values and to tell others about Christ, who alone could help them see life from an eternal perspective. Paul's whole purpose in life was to speak out boldly for Christ and to become more like him. Thus Paul could confidently say that dying would be even better than living, because in death he would be removed from worldly troubles, and he would see Christ face to face (1John 3:2, 3)"¹

A dear friend of mine who died from cancer at the age of 39 said that she wished all of her friends could be told that they had a terminal disease. She did not say this to be cruel. She meant that the reality of death had changed her whole perspective of life. She finally knew what was important and she wanted all of us to be able to have that same perspective of life.

Close to the end of her life my friend wrote in her journal, "If my children can come through all this and say 'I love Jesus' then my life will have been worth it all." Christ was her life and that truth found expression in her purpose for living.

If Christ is my life, then I will have an eternal perspective that will enable me to pursue those things of eternal value and devote myself to fruitful labor, rather than devote myself to those things which will ultimately become useless or to those things which ultimately must be done again.

5. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life in my *desire in living*:

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. Phil 1:23-26

Do I desire above all things to be with Christ? I can be with Christ in my Bible reading and study, my prayer time, my evening walks. In Ephesians, Paul says that it is in Christ that we live and move and have our being. So in reality I am with Christ always. There is no place I can go to be away from Him. Yet do I live moment by moment as though I am in His presence? Is that my desire? And does my communion with Christ equip me for service to other people? Is my attitude like that of Paul's, a desire to be with others so that I could help them in their spiritual walk? Is my attitude such that I actually increase other people's joy just by being with them? Christ promised that He would give us His joy, and He would fill us up to the brim with His joy. If we are full up to the brim with the joy of Christ, it will spill over into the lives of those with whom we come in contact.

If Christ is my life, then I will desire to fellowship with Him and to enable those around me to grow in their relationship with Him.

6. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life in my *conduct*.

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; Phil 1:27

Is my conduct - in every situation - determined by what Christ has done for me (the Gospel) or is it determined by what I think are my rights? When I speak to the check-out clerk, the grocery bagger, the bank teller, are my words and conduct worthy of what Christ has done for me and for that person?

One of the best things my husband ever did was encourage me to get scriptures printed on my checks. Suddenly, I found that no matter how slow the check-out clerk was, no matter if the grocery bagger put the wet stuff in the paper and the dry stuff in the plastic - right opposite to what I said - I knew that everything I said to them would become a reflection on Christ because I had those scriptures on my checks.

If Christ is my life, I will make sure that my conduct reflects the gospel message to everyone I meet: Christ died for you.

7. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life in my *relationships*:

so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;28 in no way alarmed by your opponents--which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. Phil 1:27-28

Paul specifically mentions two kinds of relationships here: our fellow Christians and those who are opposed to us for some reason. Both of these relationships are affected by Christ in us.

For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. 2 Cor 2:15-16

Do my relationships and interactions with my fellow Christians encourage them to stand firm in their faith, to remain strong during their trials? If Christ is my life, then I will be an encourager to my fellow believers.

Conversely, if Christ is my life, there will be some people I can never please. Their reaction to Christ in my life is not my responsibility. My reaction to them is my responsibility. If Christ is my life, then like Christ I will not retaliate and seek their harm. I will pray for them and continue to seek what is best for them at every opportunity.

If Christ is my life, then I will encourage my fellow Christians and my life will convict non-Christians without me having to say a word.

8. If Christ is my life, that truth will express itself in my life in my *suffering*.

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. Phil 1:29-30

Do I look at suffering as a *gift* - "it has been granted to you"? How often do I really suffer *for* Christ anyway? There are many, many Christians today in other countries who are suffering for Christ. We have not yet been given that privilege in America. However, when I am suffering from physical aches, pains and diseases, what is my attitude? If Christ is my life, how will that truth be expressed when I am in physical, emotional or mental pain? Suffering can steal our joy when we focus on suffering rather than on Christ in the suffering. We have a choice when we are in pain - we can choose the Prison of Suffering or the Joy of the Lord. Suffering cannot take away our joy, however we can give it up to suffering.

Recently I did something to hurt my back. The pain was constant and unstoppable. There wasn't any way I could sit, lie or stand that would ease it. Any medicines I tried only made me sick to my stomach. In trying to focus on Christ instead of the pain, I began to intercede for Christians who were being tortured for their faith in other countries even though I didn't know them by name. At least I was in the comfort of my own home, and I had access to some pain relief, while they are in cold, damp prisons, poorly fed and often tortured. When I was in the bathroom sick, I would intercede for fellow Christians who were in pain from illness - especially those who were not only in pain but also sick from chemotherapy and other treatments. It did not make the pain enjoyable, but it did give value and perspective to the pain. With Christ as my focus, I did not lose my joy in the Lord. I did not fall victim to the monster of self-pity. I do not look forward to ever being in pain again, but I know when it comes that I can focus on Christ as my life and allow that truth to find expression in my pain through intercessory prayer for others.

If Christ is my life, then even my suffering can have value.

In summary, if I truly believe that Christ is my life that truth will express itself in my life in my attitude towards fellow believers, my priorities, the source of my support and encouragement, my purpose for living, my desire in living, my conduct, my relationships and my suffering.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I FIND I'M NOT LIVING THE TRUTH OF "CHRIST IS MY LIFE?"

1. I am going to *pray confidently* and ask God to help me live the truth of "Christ is my life" because I know from His Word that this is His will for my life:

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us, and if we know that He hears us we know that we have the request which we have asked from Him." 1 John 5:14-15

2. I am going to *claim God's promise* that He is working in me, giving me the *desire* to obey Him, and the *power* to do what pleases Him.

"For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Phil. 2:13

3. I am going to rely on the Holy Spirit to prompt me during the day to live the truth of "Christ is my life."

"But when the Father sends the Comforter instead of me - and by the Comforter I mean the Holy Spirit - He will teach you much, as well as remind you of everything I myself have told you." John 14:26 LB

4. I am going to practice living the truth of "Christ is my life."

".he who practices the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." John 3:21

When I blow it, I am going to ask His forgiveness and start again.

5. Finally, I am going to give God the glory, For.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Phil 4:13

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