

Paul's Quandary

"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh -- if this shall bring fruit from my work, then what I shall choose I know not. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better; yet to abide in the flesh, is more needful for your sake ..." (Phil. 1:21-24).

A "quandary" is a dilemma, a perplexity. Paul was in a quandary: death or life, which would be better for him? Of course the decision of life or death lay not in his hands at all, but in the hands of Caesar who would hear his case and declare his fate. Over Caesar's decision Paul had no control. Paul's quandary was, what should he wish for, pray for? He knew that if he lived it would be for "Christ." He knew that would be the one for whom he would live. He told the Galatians: *"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I but Christ who liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me"* (Gal. 2:20). Those same sentiments he also expressed when he wrote the Philippians: *"Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or death"* (1:20). Jesus said, *"Even so let your light shine before men that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Mt. 5:16). Paul also knew that he would gain, personally, should he die, for that, in his words, *"would be very far better."* John wrote, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors and their works do follow them"* (Rev. 14:13f). What a blessed release rest would be for Paul! One cannot read Paul's account of his trials and tribulations in his second letter to Corinth without great amazement at his fortitude. Surely, sympathy for his multitudes of sorrow should swell up in the hearts of all who read what things he experienced (2 Cor. 11:22-33). Who, in our present day, has suffered so much for Christ as Paul? It would personally be, as he put it, *"far better"* should he die and be with Christ.

Yet, Paul did not consider solely himself, his physical comfort, and personal safety. He had a "paternal" feeling for these churches which were the work of his own hands. Would his death be better for them? Could they profit by the continuation of his life? He concluded that they would. He knew that by his living and his stalwart strength and courage, he was a tremendous help to those whom he taught about Christ. They still had "growing to do." They still needed instructions, encouragement -- yes and sometimes, reproof. So should his case turn out that he should be granted reprieve to live a while longer, he was persuaded that to abide in the flesh was more needful for his disciples' sake. Thus his confidence was *"and having this confidence I know*

that I shall abide, yea and abide with you all ..." (Phil. 1:25). Paul was expressing a confidence, not a revelation from God. God revealed to him in Jerusalem he would be delivered from the hands of those who sought to assassinate him (Acts 23:12). God revealed to him he would escape from a watery grave, that although his ship would be lost, he, and all who sailed with him, would be saved (Acts 27:23-26). But God had not revealed to him either that he would be freed or condemned (although he hoped for release), for later in this epistle he wrote of Timothy, *"Him therefore I hope to send forthwith, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me"* (Phil. 2:23f).

Christians do not live for themselves. They live for God and for their brethren. What might be better, in some instances, for them mentally and physically would have to take a "back seat" to what service they might render others, even should it mean personal loss for self. Ultimately God rewarded Paul with what was personally best for him. That time would come with no uncertainty for he then knew that *"the time of my departure is come"* (2 Tim. 4:6). But, to the Philippians he could earlier write of his quandary and express his confidence that while abiding in the flesh would bring pain and sorrow to him, it would be for the profit of his brethren. So, he would choose life, should the choice be life to him. However, that choice was not in his hands: Caesar and God would determine that matter!

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