

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – Life and Death – 10-16 January 2026

Christ would have us be bound with Him. Paul says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). These words were prompted by unselfishness. Paul said that it was important that “Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.” After saying so, then follows the words, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Can anybody, after reading the previous part of the chapter, and especially the verses that immediately precede the statement that to die is gain, say that Paul had in mind gain to himself? Nothing could be more out of harmony, not only with the text, but also with Paul’s entire life. Would it be possible for the apostle to say that his only desire was to preach Christ with all boldness, and that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it was by life or by death, and then to immediately congratulate himself that if he was put to death that would be a great gain to himself personally? The idea is so absurd that the question needs no answer. Paul’s whole soul was wrapped up in Christ, and in the desire to see His cause advanced. When the brethren tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem, where he was seized by enemies, he said to them, “What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 16:13). And a little before that, while he was upon the same journey, he had said: “And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:22-24). So then, the apostle was not thinking of any gain to himself, but only of the gain to Christ.

Sunday: “Christ Will Be Magnified” – Read Philippians 1:19-20; what does Paul mean that whether in life or death, Christ will be magnified? Paul lived for Christ. “Long afterward, when the disciple had been brought into sympathy with Christ through the fellowship of His sufferings, the Lord revealed to John what is the condition of nearness in His kingdom. “To him that overcometh,” Christ said, “will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.” “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, ... and I will write upon him My new name.” Revelation 3:21, 12. So Paul the apostle wrote, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” 2 Timothy 4:6-8” {DA 549.2}. “The one who stands nearest to Christ will be he who on earth has drunk most deeply of the spirit of His self-sacrificing love, — love that “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, ... seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5), — love that moves the disciple, as it moved our Lord, to give all, to live and labor and sacrifice, even unto death, for the saving of humanity. This spirit was made manifest in the life of Paul. He said, “For to me to live is Christ;” for his life revealed Christ to men; “and to die is gain,” — gain to Christ; death itself would make manifest the power of His grace, and gather souls to Him. “Christ shall be magnified in my body,” he said, “whether it be by life or by death.” Philippians 1:21, 20” {DA 549.3}.

Monday: To Die Is Gain – Read Philippians 1:21-22; what did Paul mean by to die is gain? We need to understand the sentiment of Paul from previous verses. We read in verse 12: “But I would ye should understand brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” Whatever might befall him it should be for the furtherance of the gospel. That was the sentiment of Paul. Then we come to verse 21: “For me to live is Christ.” According to the sentiment in verse 20, for him to live would magnify Christ. “And to die is gain.” Not to Paul, but to the cause of Christ. Paul is not weighing the matter here to see what the greatest advantage to him would be, but he has told us already that whatever happens to him is to further the gospel. In verse 22, he says, “But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.” To Paul, to continue living, “the fruit of my labour” was to magnify Christ and further the gospel.

Paul did not look on death as a blessing, or from which he was to receive any benefit. If left to make a choice, he knew not which he would choose; he wished to lie passive in the hands of Christ, and let the event come, life or death, that would tend most to further the gospel.

Tuesday: Being Confident – Read Philippians 1:23-24; what does Paul mean when he says that “to depart, and be with Christ” is “far better”? Paul desired to be translated into heaven straightaway like Elijah, and that is far better. If you doubt this conclusion, then let us examine this together. We already understood that, left to make a choice whether to live or die, Paul said “what I shall choose I wot not” – that is, he knew not what to choose. But he had a desire for what? To live? No! To die? No! But desire “to depart and be with Christ.” Well, say you, that was death. No, it was something far better than living in the flesh, in a mortal body, or dying. If he continued in the flesh, “bonds and afflictions” were his portion. If he died, “the dead know not anything” and he would not be in a condition to receive a reward, but would only rest in hope. But there was something he did desire, that was worth obtaining, “to depart and be with Christ,” not by death but bodily. If you claim that the strait in which Paul is placed, is betwixt living here in the flesh and departing and being with Christ, then you make him contradict himself; for he says of those two betwixt which he is in a strait, “which I shall choose, I wot not,” but he did “desire to depart and be with Christ.”

It is manifestly absurd to suppose that the apostle Paul expressed an earnest desire to die, immediately after saying that he did not know what he should choose. To suppose that when he said that he had a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better, when he had just said concerning life and death, “What I shall choose I wot not,” is to accuse him of the inconsistency of saying, ‘I do not know whether I should choose to live or to die, but I should much prefer to die.’ Paul did not know whether life or death would best glorify the Lord, whether to live here and preach the gospel, or to die a martyr and thus further the gospel, and therefore he left the whole matter with the Lord, who alone could know, and did not trouble his mind about it. Paul had no choice in the matter. But there was something which he desired as far better than either one, and that was to be with Christ. And being with Christ is something that cannot be gained, either by remaining on this earth, or by dying.

Paul desired something better – translation, and a change to immortality. He had the history, though brief, of good old Enoch, who “walked with God 300 years and was not, for God took him.” And of Elijah who “was carried up by a whirlwind into heaven.” He desired to be a partaker of this blessing and their joys, “to depart and be with Christ.” Paul did not desire to die, or to be unclothed (see 2 Corinthians 5:4), but he desired to become immortal. For further study, we may learn regarding Paul’s desire, by reading 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.

Wednesday: Stand Fast in Unity – Read Philippians 1:27 and compare John 17:17-19; what do both Jesus and Paul say is indispensable for unity in the church? Truth! “The time has come when things must be called by their right names. The truth is to triumph gloriously, and those who have long been halting between two opinions must take their stand decidedly for or against the law of God. Some will take up with theories that misinterpret the Word of God and undermine the foundation of the truth that has been firmly established, point by point, and sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The old truths are to be revived, in order that the false theories that have been brought in by the enemy may be intelligently met. There can be no unity between truth and error. We can unite with those who have been led into deception only when they are converted” – Ellen White {20LtMs, Lt 121, 1905, par. 10}.

Thursday: United and Fearless – Read Philippians 1:27-30; how does our unity and “striving together for the faith of the gospel” relate to fearlessness? We are to be united in truth and not in error. We are to individually choose Christ, but “not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” – even reproach and death. “God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Philippians 1:29. And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor” {DA 224.5}.