

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

IS IT GAIN TO DIE?

It has been my practice for many years to ask God that He preserve me in life, and also to thank Him for having done this very thing. This has been no empty request, and the thanks that I give Him are honest and sincere. I am appreciative of the fact that He has preserved me in life, already beyond the Biblical span of "threescore and ten," because I do not believe that to die is gain.

Certainly God has not cheated me by preserving me in life; yet I would have to think this if I believed there was any profit in death. Yet, over and over, I hear Christian people say and insist that it is gain to die. The leading evangelist of our time says over and over, "The Bible says to die is gain."

Of course there will be those who will say: "Why do you ask such a question? Does not the Bible plainly state that to die is gain? Since you profess to believe that the Bible is the Word of God, why not just accept what it says and let that settle the matter?"

To all who ask such questions I would say that while the words "to die is gain" are found in the Bible, that is not what the Bible teaches about death. Death, in the Bible, is set forth as being the loss of the most precious gift that God has given to man. Moses, speaking God's word to Israel, declared, **"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live"** (Deut. 30:19). The prophet Jeremiah, after setting forth the sins of Israel and the punishment that would be theirs because of their persistence in iniquity, declares that this would be of such severity that it would bring about an abnormal desire for

death among the people that did not immediately perish in the holocaust. He proclaimed: **"Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family"** (Jer. 8:3).

These words set forth a truth that is also demonstrated by personal observation. Under certain conditions the state of death is preferable to the state of life. But such a preference is not natural; it is abnormal, one brought about by conditions over which the suffering one has no control. The normal God-implemented desire of men is to live, for life is ever to be preferred to death, and normal men under normal conditions do not believe that death is better than life, or that to die is gain.

The Bible in its first mention of death sets it forth as being the divine penalty threatened, and later imposed, upon the first man because of his disobedience (Gen. 2:17). The second reference shows that Eve understood it to be dire punishment that would come from disobeying God's command (Gen. 3:3), and the third occurrence came from the lips of Satan who insisted that it would never take place (Gen. 3:4). All occurrences that follow in the Old Testament show that death is a calamity of no small kind, and it teaches us that if life is a priceless blessing, then death, which is the deprivation of life, is an incalculable loss.

In the New Testament we learn that death is a calamity, a tragedy (Matt 2: 18), that it entered into the world riding piggyback on the principle of sin (Rom. 5:12), and that it is an enemy that is to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Without hesitation it can be said that Scripture teaches us that the death of a man is the loss of his life, that because of it that which was once a man becomes a dead soul, that death visits every descendent of Adam irrespective of his position or character, that death reigns in a measure from the day of one's birth until the day of his death when it begins its reign in full power, that death is a curse and not a blessing. Furthermore, what the Scripture tells us about death is not spoken in obscure, doubtful, hesitating language, but it speaks with clarity and authority.

However, the prevalent theology of Christendom is a systematized denial of all of this. It is at variance with the Scripture on all these points, and it speaks a confused and contradictory language when it deals with the subject. It actually presents death as being the hope of the faithful, setting it forth as a thing to be desired; and all these erroneous views are supported by inferences drawn from texts that have been separated from their contexts.

Death is made to be the door that will usher the faithful into the presence of God, thus eliminating any need for resurrection from the dead. And, one perverted statement that is always called upon to testify that death is all these glorious things is four words extracted from Philippians 1:21, "**to die is gain.**"

Over and over this is repeated. Nevertheless, it is my conviction that no normal person really believes this, for if they did, then the strength of this belief would be the strength of the death wish of the one who holds it. This would be abnormal. In fact, it would be diagnosed as a form of mental derangement. Yet, very few have been courageous enough to ask if the Bible really teaches this. I, for one, say that it does not, and that these four words have been severed from their context and made to be one more spider web to support Plato's theory that death is a blessing.

Some devout Christians have told me that the high value they put upon staying alive was an actual contradiction of the Biblical words "to die is gain." I would calm the fears of all such by saying that the Bible says no such thing. It says: **'For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they anymore a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten'** (Eccl. 9:4,5).

Personal experience over many years has shown me that when truth from God's Word is presented concerning death, a question that will come from the average listener is: "But what about Paul's words, 'to die is gain'?" And to this my answer must ever be: Paul never said that. These are merely four of his words, taken out of the sentence in which he placed them. And only by a most ruthless amputation from the body of truth can these words be made to teach that death is profitable, something to be gained, an experience to be desired.

In the interpretation of any passage of Scripture the first and foremost principle is that the interpreter must reproduce with exactness the sense of the writer; that is, the thoughts which the author had in mind when the passage was written. Furthermore, the thought of the writer must be interpreted in connection with the context in which it is originally found. To ignore the context is bound to lead to misinterpretation. Philippians 1:21 is a passage of such nature that it demands explanation, interpretation, or exegesis. This I shall attempt to honestly do.

In the statement that immediately precedes this passage Paul declares that it is his earnest expectation and hope that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it be by life or by death. This should be noted carefully, for these are his words just before he makes the declaration: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." We must never lose sight of this context, the grand theme of which is the magnification of Christ.

The word *magnify* means: to increase the importance of; to increase the value of; to enlarge; to amplify; to extol!. Paul could not do this Godward, but he could do this toward men. The magnification of Christ would be the result of his service if he lived, and it would also be the result if they put him to death. Following this he makes the statement which reads in the original: "For to me to be living Christ, and to be dying gain," a fact that can be verified easily by anyone able to follow a Greek interlinear.

Thus it is quite evident that something is missing from both parts of this passage, an ellipsis which the KJV translators recognized and tried to supply by two insertions of the verb "is," which did not work out too well, for the words, "For to me to live is Christ" do not form a complete statement. If taken as it stands it would make Paul guilty of egotistical boasting. In order for this statement to set forth what Paul had in mind, his words must be extended by filling in the ellipsis. But who has the authority to do this? The answer is that no one has. Let all men keep their hands off this statement! If it must be extended then let this be done by the simple, honest process of carrying into it the thought from the immediate context. Then it will say: "For to me to be living is the magnification of Christ."

In the full passage we have two figures of speech. The first is an *ellipsis*, which means that words have been omitted which are obviously indicated from the context, and the second is a figure called *chiasm*, which means that there is intended to be a crossing over of ideas. Since the word "gain" is not a totally separate idea from "magnify," it carried the same force as the declaration in the context. Thus, in Phil. 1:21 Paul actually says:

For to me to be living is gain for Christ, And to me to be dying is gain for Christ.

Since, before this Paul had said to the Corinthians, "I am dying daily" (1

Cor. 15:31), he may have had references to the physical price that he paid in order to serve the Lord. However, the translation I have given is in complete harmony with the subject of the portion and the context. Nothing is added that is not already there, and it accurately fits into the flow of thought. An honest paraphrase of this portion will show this:

This is in accord with my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall never have reason to be ashamed; but with all boldness, as it has always been before, even so now, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. For to me to be living is gain for Christ, and to me to be dying is gain for Christ. But if I continue to live in the flesh, the magnification of Christ will be the fruit of my own labors. Phil. 1:20-22.

Some will strenuously object to any addition to the words of Phil. 1:21, and will charge me with violating the spirit of Provo 30:6. Yet they gladly accept the two additions of the word "is" that were inserted by the *King James* translators.

In conclusion let me say to all who continue to insist that "to die is gain," how about showing your faith by your works and laying hold of this gain?

END ISSUE NO. SB084