

The Word of Truth Ministry Presents

Special Full Length Studies

#SS15

IS IT GAIN TO DIE ?

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Foreword

In this treatise I hope to provide the answers to two questions which come to me more often than all others that are related to man's nature and destiny. These questions are:

1. What did Paul mean, what idea did he wish to convey to us, what did he desire us to understand when he said, "**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain?**"

2. What did Paul mean, what idea did he wish to convey to us, what did he desire us to understand when he spoke of "**having a desire to depart and be with Christ?**"

My readers will agree that the answers to some scriptural questions can be simple, direct and in few words. The answers to other questions may be complex, therefore, cannot be set forth in a simple manner or with few words. It is sheer folly for one to expect a simple answer to every question. If the question is not a simple one, no simple answer can be given. We must not be like the little girl who wanted to secure a tiny elephant which could live in the house of her dog, lately deceased. Elephants just do not come that small. Neither will God's truth always fit our minds. Our minds may need to be enlarged to receive the truth.

In regard to the first question stated above, I could answer it (and I do) simply, directly, and in few words by saying the context shows that Paul meant us to understand by his statement that for him to live would be Christ's gain, and for him to die would be Christ's gain, and by *gain* he meant Christ's magnification.

In regard to the second question, I could answer it after the same manner by saying that one of the unique privileges God gave to Paul was the right to choose at any time

to leave this earth, ascend where Christ was and be forever with Him.

These would be (and are) simple and direct answers stated in few words. However, every time I have ever given them I find that simple answers in few words are not what my questioners desire. They want full explanations in all detail. They desire to know why I believe these things, and how I arrive at these conclusions.

In order that all who read this pamphlet may know why I believe these things, and how I arrive at these conclusions, this pamphlet presents every detail that seems essential.

If my conclusions in regard to this portion of Scripture are the truth (and I believe they are), let no one expect to enter into the truth for just the price of this pamphlet and the time required for one reading. Truth is not that cheap. Let no one fail to give whatever time, consideration and prayer that may be required to enter into a full and accurate understanding of any portion of God's Word. Only by so doing can one judge if these words are in accord with the word of truth.

IS IT GAIN TO DIE ?

Some readers, glancing at the title of this pamphlet, may say, "Why ask such a question? Does not the Bible plainly state that to die is gain? Why not just accept the teaching of the Word of God, and let that settle the matter?" To all such 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. [In regard to this Sir Robert Anderson bluntly declares "To die is gain is the evil creed of a suicide. The Apostle never said that!" He recognized that these were just four words, ruthlessly amputated from a verse in order to form one more pious platitude for Christendom.]

The prophet Jeremiah sets forth the great sin of Israel and the punishment that was to come upon the people because of their persistence in it. This punishment was to be so terrible that it would bring about an abnormal desire among the people who did not perish by it.

"And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family." Jeremiah 8:3.

It is well known that under certain conditions the state of death is preferable to life, but such a preference is abnormal, brought about by conditions over which man may have no control. The normal desire of man is to live, for he knows that life is to be preferred to death, and he does not believe that death would be any gain.

It has been my custom and practice for many years to ask of God that He preserve me in life, and to thank Him for having done this very thing. This is no empty request, and the thanks rendered to Him are honest and sincere. I am deeply appreciative of the fact that He has preserved me and is preserving me in life, because I do not believe that to die is gain.

The first mention of death in the Bible sets it forth as being a divine penalty imposed upon the first man because of his sin (Gen. 2 :17). The second reference to it shows that Eve understood death to be a punishment that would come from disobeying God's command. The third occurrence of the word *death* came from the lips of the slanderer who insisted that it would never take place (Gen. 3 :4). When the revelation of God concerning death is complete, we learn that it came in by sin, that it is the companion of sin and that it is an enemy which will be destroyed.

The religion of Christendom is a systematized denial of all this, making death to be the hope of the faithful, and presenting it as a thing attractive in itself and earnestly to be desired. This erroneous view is supported by inferences drawn from certain texts removed from their contexts. The false assumption drawn from these inferences has superseded the plain scriptural teaching concerning death. It gives all credit for bringing the believer into glory to sin which came in by death, and it takes it away from resurrection which came in by Christ.

One grossly perverted statement that is always called in to testify that death is a glorious thing and greatly to be desired is four words taken from **Philippians 1 :21** - "**to die is gain.**" Over and over we hear that the Bible teaches that to die is gain. With the exception of a few would-be suicides no one believes it is gain to die, yet very few are brave enough to even question whether the Bible actually teaches this or not. Those who know the Bible teaching in regard to death, know very well that the Word of God does not teach it is gain to die. They know this in spite of the four words extracted from Philippians 1 :21 which are constantly used to contradict *it*. Using the same methods, taking five words from another passage, it would be possible to show that God said and the Bible teaches, "Drink ye, and be drunken." And if more proof is needed we could amputate five words from another passage and show that the Bible teaches us to "eat, drink and be merry." [These perversions of Scripture are taken from Jeremiah 25:27 and Luke 12:19] However, those who know their Bibles know very well that the whole burden of Scripture teaching upon the subject is temperance in all things. We would repudiate any teaching of intemperance that is based upon a few words from a text which has been severed from its context.

There can be no greater inconsistency among Christians than that of professing to believe a thing when every act of life shows that they believe and practice the very opposite. What value can there be in one saying that he believes to die would be gain when every act of his life cries out and says he believes death to be a tragedy? The word *gain* signifies an increase to what one has which is of profit, advantage or benefit. How many readers of these lines believe that death to them would be a profitable thing, beneficial in every way, advantageous from every standpoint? How many really believe that to die would be gain?

When the mother sends her child to school with specific instruction in regard to exercising, watchful care at the crossings, she does this because she does not believe that it would be gain for her child to die. She would not exercise such care if she believed to die is gain.

Parents who are sending their sons into military service do so with the fervent hope that they will be preserved in life and return to them again. They pray to this end. They do this because they do not believe to die is gain. Yet many of them have the feeling that the Bible teaches it.

I would comfort all such by saying that the Bible teaches no such thing. It teaches:

"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 any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Ecclesiastes 9 :4-5."

{Many sincere teachers of the Word have mistakenly led their followers to repudiate in advance all statements in regard to death that come from the book of Ecclesiastes. C. I.Scofield says, "Inspiration sets down accurately what passes, but the conclusions and reasonings are, after all, man's." This makes the book to be an inspired record of man's fallible reasoning and thinking. I repudiate this conception in its entirety, and accept wholeheartedly the testimony of this book in regard to its own truthfulness and correctness. If we accept the testimony of the Bible as to its own inspiration, we must accept the testimony of Ecclesiastes as to the truthfulness of its reasonings and conclusions. This is found in Ecclesiastes 12: 10}.

When one presents, by spoken or written ministry, the teachings of the Bible in regard to the character, nature and meaning of death, he will discover that the one question most apt to come from his hearers is, "What about Paul's words 'to die is gain?' "

The correct answer to this question is, "to die is gain" are just four words, separated from the statement in which God has placed them after that statement has been separated from the body of truth in which God has placed it. It is only by the most ruthless amputation from the body of truth that these words can be made to teach that death is a profitable thing, therefore, an experience to be desired.

[A few moments of honest meditation upon this passage would make any sincere believer doubt the truth of the popular interpretation of it and cause him to diligently seek its true meaning. As popularly understood the two parts of Philippians 1 :21 are contradictory. If to me to LIVE is Christ, then to LIVE is gain. If to me to DIE is Christ, then to DIE is gain. If to me to LIVE is Christ, then above all things I want to live. All who love the Lord Jesus Christ and desire His glory will agree with this sentiment.]

It is not my purpose in this pamphlet to explain these four words. It is my purpose to put these four words back into the statement where they belong, also to put that statement back into that portion of the Word from which it has been extracted. Then the whole portion will be expounded, and the meaning of the part will come from the meaning of the whole. In doing this, it will provide an opportunity to deal with the words "having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better," which also appear in this portion.

The exposition of this portion will be governed by two of the greatest and most important principles of Bible interpretation. The first is the principle of the symbolic use of all words which appear in the Scripture, [This conception does not exclude figurative language or figures of speech. The Bible is full of these. To take a figure literally is to deny the idea that the figure is intended to convey. A figure of speech is a symbol, used to express an idea:] and the second is the principle that the meaning of any text is governed by its context. My first task will be to consider these two great principles and firmly establish them in the mind of my readers.

Let us constantly remember that the greatest fact in the universe in relationship to God is the fact that He has spoken. In speaking to man He did not use the medium of art or of music. He could have revealed Himself and His truth through these things, but did not do so. If He had done so, then, we should be interested in all art and all music and the laws that govern these, just because God had laid hold of these mediums to express His thoughts.

Since God has seen fit to use the medium of words, we should be interested in words, what words are, what they do, what can be done with them, the laws that govern their usage, the legitimate departures from these laws that increase the power

of a word or the force of an expression. If we can gain a better understanding of the vehicle which God used to convey His thoughts to us, it will help us to understand more accurately His thoughts and increase our enjoyment of them many fold.

The Symbolic Use of Words

Words are but symbols which we use to express our ideas. Every mother who has taught her child to speak can readily understand this. A ball is held before the child and a certain sound is made repeatedly until the child learns to associate that sound with the object. The mother desires that the child shall learn that that sound is to be a symbol representing the object, so that when the child desires a ball he will make that sound. At the age of five or six the child is sent to school where he learns that four written characters stand for that symbol. He now knows that the moment he sees the four characters "BALL" he is to think of that object. This is what is meant by the symbolic use of words. What a word symbolizes is the true meaning of that word. *Ball* means a round object, not a thing to sit upon. *Chair* means something to sit upon, not a round object. If these symbols were confused, understanding between men would not be possible.

The symbols which men were using to express their ideas and convey information were laid hold of by God to express His ideas and to convey information to us.

Among men today we find words used in a manner so that no ideas are expressed, no information is imparted. I have seen synagogue meetings in which Hebrew was used which none present understood except the rabbi. I attended a service in a Catholic church where Latin was used and none understood it except the priest. The result was that no information whatsoever was communicated to those present, and no one came out any wiser or better informed than he was before he went in. This use of words is known as the contra-symbolic use - a thing entirely foreign to the Word of God.

In order to better understand the symbolic use of words it will be well for us to consider their contra-symbolic use in ritual. Many readers will at once associate the word ritual with a church, but they must remember that a lodge has rituals, and that there is a ritual on a football field. The ritualistic utterances that are heard in churches, lodges and in the stadium are usually made up of words which have symbolic meanings at other times, but when they appear in these rituals this significance has disappeared altogether and a new and strange meaning seems to have been given to them.

Take for example a high school football game. Both sides are extremely desirous that their team shall be victorious. As the game progresses one side gets near to the goal, and a desperate drive is being made for a touchdown. From the stands there comes a yell -"Smash'em, Bust'em, that's our custom."

Now the word *smash* has a definite symbolic meaning. It expresses the idea of dashing or crushing a thing to pieces. The word *bust* is a common slang symbol expressing the idea of breaking open. However, when these words are used at a football game they do not express these ideas, their symbolic meaning has disappeared, and they may mean anything the users desire them to mean ---- such as make a touchdown or a badly needed five yard gain.

Take also the example of a lodge meeting. The chairman introduces the speaker of the evening "our most worshipful master, supreme, exalted potentate, brother John Smith." This is usually followed by wild applause.

Now all these words have symbolic meanings, they were intended to convey certain ideas, but they do not have such meanings and convey no such ideas in a lodge room. There is not a man in that lodge who believes any such thing about John Smith. By these high and mighty words they mean that he is a good fellow whom they have elected to office.

In making the foregoing statements I am neither criticizing nor objecting to the practice of using words in contra-symbolic manner when it is done at such places as lodge meetings or football fields. However, I do raise my voice in protest against the very common practice of taking the words of God and giving them some contra-symbolic meaning which is entirely foreign to the idea that God intended they should convey.

The taunt of the infidel that one can make the Bible to mean anything he desires it to mean is both true and false. It can be made to mean anything one desires it to mean if the symbolic meaning of words is ignored and contra-symbolic meanings given to them. It will mean what God intended it should mean, it will convey to us His ideas and communicate unto us His thoughts, if we hold fast to the symbolic meaning of the words that He used. [When words are used in a symbolic manner, we mean exactly what we say or what the figures imply. When words are used in a contra-symbolic sense we say one thing and mean another. Some systems of theology hold that God did this very thing. He is supposed to have said *Israel*, but meant the church; *kingdom*, and meant the church; *Canaan*, and meant heaven; *life*, and meant salvation; *death*, and meant life] It will be well for us to consider a few examples.

Some Examples

In John 14:3 we find the explicit words of the Lord Jesus wherein He said, "**I will come again.**" These words have symbolic meaning. They convey in simple manner a definite unmistakable idea. If I should use these same words of myself, everyone would know just what I meant. The statement would not be open to interpretation. Nevertheless, these words of our Lord have been given at least four ritualistic meanings. They have been made to mean the destruction of Jerusalem, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the advance of the gospel, and the death of a Christian. [In the early days of my ministry I gave a message in an English Lutheran Church. One pastor had served this church for more than a generation. It seems that he had specialized in giving contra-symbolic meanings to words and passages of the Scripture. In the course of the message I had occasion to use the word *gospel* numerous times, and to refer to the second coming of Christ three or four times. It was plainly evident to me that my message did not make sense to them. The confusion of their minds was plain upon their faces. It was not until the service was over that I discovered that the word *gospel* meant the ten commandments and the beatitudes. and the second coming of Christ meant the death of a Christian]

Most of my readers will be quite familiar with the contrasymbolic meanings given to the words found in the so-called great commission found in Matthew 28 :19-20, so that it will fit into the missionary ritual. "**Go ye therefore**" means to stay at home and give money to missions, "**teach all nations**" means preach the gospel to individuals, "**baptizing them**" does not refer to its antecedent, the nations, for this is made to mean baptize those individuals who profess to believe, "**I am with you always**" means that He is not here at all but far away in heaven. All this results in just one more sad example of the perversion of Scripture by giving a contra-symbolic meaning to words that God intended should be symbols to express His thoughts.

[The time will yet come when a missionary nation, Israel, everyone of them knowing the Lord from the least to the greatest. will take this commission and fulfill it in the actual symbolic meaning of these words. They will go into all the world, they will teach all nations, they will baptize those nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Lord will be with them to the end of that eon]

In Philippians 1 :23 we find the words "**having a desire to depart and be with Christ.**" Everyone of these words have a definite symbolic meaning, as all readers will admit. However, the symbolic meaning of these words is seldom if ever given to them. A contrasymbolic meaning has been attached to them which makes Paul to have said one thing and meant another. He said "depart and be with Christ" but he meant, according to many, to die. The result of this word - - jugglery is that Paul is supposed

to have said that he desired to die, which is far better. If I should be in a foreign country and tell my friends there that I desired to depart and be with my wife, they could not possibly think that I referred to dying, unless my wife were dead. However, when Paul spoke these words Christ was not dead. What idea he intended to convey by these words will be considered later.

The Principle of the Context

The absolute necessity of considering every passage in the Word of God in the light of its context is such that ignoring of contexts in any act of interpretation is at best a stupid practice. At its worst, it can be a vicious practice. Every sentence and every verse has something going before it and something following after it. This is called the context. The context is regarded as being essential even in the case of human writers. Contexts sometimes indicate so clearly what we mean that often we do not even have to say what we mean in order to be understood.³ [For example: A. My car will not stop as quickly as it should; there must be something wrong with my clutch. B. You mean the brake, don't you? A. Yes - didn't I say brake?]

Complaints are often made by public speakers and writers that only a part of what they have said is quoted, where if the whole had been quoted the point referred to would have had a different meaning. Every public personage has experienced the common practice of critics who tear a few words out of their statements to make them the basis of a completely misleading account. [Woodrow Wilson's "make the world safe for democracy" is a classic example of this. If the message in which these words occur is carefully read it will be discovered that Mr. Wilson firmly believed that a German victory would affect the United States disastrously. He did not feel that this democracy could exist in a world order in which German militarism was one of the dominating forces. This democracy could not continue in such a world order. "The world" he said "must be made safe for democracy." It was Mr. Wilson's sad fate to have this striking statement dragged from its context, then misinterpreted and made the slogan of his supposed policy. Today, his noble life is regarded as a failure because he did not make the world to be a group of democratic, peace-loving nations. This was not his purpose or policy. He led this country into the first World War in order to make the world a safe place for this democracy. That he did not fail is seen in the fact that this democracy still lives twenty-five years later. Today, we are at war again because we do not feel that this democracy of ours would be safe in a world dominated by either the Japanese or the German military]

Inasmuch as the correct understanding of every statement in the Bible is dependent upon full consideration of the context, we must ever be on guard against those

teachers of the Word to whom the context is not manifestly essential, and we must beware of any teaching that is not based upon it.

Having considered and established these things we are now ready to consider what Paul meant when he said "to die is gain," and "having a desire to depart and be with Christ." This meaning will be found by strict adherence to the principles that Paul used his words as symbols to express his ideas, and that these words must mean whatever is indicated by the context.

The Passage Concerns Paul

If the reader will examine it, he will discover that the pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* appear twenty-one times in Philippians 1:12 to 26. The things spoken here concern Paul. They were not spoken of Peter, James or Timothy. They express no truths in regard to you or me. When this epistle was written Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Just when or where his arrest took place is open to question. Nevertheless, we can be sure that as he went about his divinely appointed task of proclaiming the gospel, he was taken into custody and placed in prison in Rome. One would think that this would stop his ministry and bring an end to the progress of the gospel, but it did just the opposite, He was able to announce triumphantly to the Philippians that the things which had happened unto him had turned out to the furtherance of the gospel rather than hindering it (Phil 1 :12). It had become well known among the Imperial Guards and to all others that Paul was a prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ, and not for any crime which he had committed. Phil. 1 :13.

The majority of the brethren were made confident in the Lord as they witnessed the way Paul patiently endured his imprisonment and the results which came from it. His example fired them with zeal and they were much more bold to speak the gospel without fear than they had ever been before. Phil. 1 :14.

Following these statements Paul discusses briefly the motives of those who were preaching Christ, then states that he is able to find cause for rejoicing in the ministry of every man, just so Christ is preached. Phil. 1: 15-18.

He further states his deep conviction, (to return to his previous thought), that the knowledge of those nearest to Caesar that he was not guilty of any crime, linked up with the prayers of the Philippians, would result in his deliverance (salvation) and a bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is in accord with his expectations and premonitions, that no matter what comes to him, he shall never have any reason to be ashamed, but with all boldness as always Christ shall be magnified in his body, whether it be by life or by death. Phil. 1 :19-20.

The last statement here should be noted carefully, It is his final thought before he makes the statement, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He speaks of Christ being magnified in his body. We must not lose this grand thought - *the magnification of Christ*.

The word *magnify* means: to increase the importance of; to increase the value of; to increase the dimensions of; to enlarge; to amplify; to extol. Of course it is evident that Paul could not do this of Christ toward God, but he could and did do it of Christ among men. Of this, he is supremely confident. Therefore, with all assurance he says: **as it has been in the past, as it is now, even so it shall be in the future, Christ shall by me be extolled, be made of more importance, be enlarged, be amplified and be greater among men.** This would be true if they let Paul live, it would be true if they put him to death. Therefore, he states, that Christ will be magnified in his body whether it be by life or by death. This is then followed by the majestic statement:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil. 1 :21.

This statement has two parts. The words that compose it are simple, and easily understood. The first word (for) shows that it is not an independent statement, but it depends on what has been said before. The word *for* is a conjunction and means: because, since, seeing that, or owing to the fact that. Any of these can be substituted in place of it since it is a symbol standing for all these ideas.

The words *to me* signify that the things stated are true in relationship to Paul. To speak these words as if they were scriptural statements true of us is pride, presumption and hypocrisy. **The use of the words *to me* limits this passage to Paul alone.**

The idea expressed in the words *to live* is easily understood, inasmuch as we have lived this day. Christ is the name of the Son of God, used by Paul when he desires to emphasize the now exalted One.

These words are easily defined, nevertheless, when they are put together the words "For to me to live is Christ," do not form a complete statement. In order for them to convey a definite idea they must be extended, interpreted, enlarged or explained. Apart from this they are meaningless, no matter how often they are quoted in religious circles as a ritualistic utterance. Such utterances do not need to mean anything, they do not need to make sense.

I have heard groups singing over and over a four line chorus, three lines of which are the words "For to me to live is Christ" repeated three times. I am convinced that if they were asked exactly what they meant by these words, just what ideas they desired to convey, they would have been unable to answer. And if they had tried to answer they would have been forced to extend, interpret or enlarge their statement. These words can have no meaning until this is done.

Since extension, enlargement or interpretation is positively demanded in order for these words to have any meaning, just who shall extend them? Who has authority to interpret or enlarge upon them? The answer is - no one has. Let all men keep their hands off this statement. Let them be extended and enlarged by carrying into them the thought of the context. This thought is the magnification of Christ. Therefore these words mean:

"For to me to live is Christ's magnification."

In understanding this statement in this way, we do nothing more than to carry forward the thought which is clearly stated in the context. This statement as a result becomes full of meaning. However, we do not need to supply the word *magnification*, since Paul himself has supplied the word we need. All we need to do is maintain the thought of magnification, no matter what word is used

In the words "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," we have an *ellipsis*. This means that words have been omitted which are obviously understood, but necessary to make the construction grammatically complete. [In Matthew 14:19 we read that the Lord Jesus "gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude." The last statement does not make sense. As it stands it reads as though Jesus gave the disciples to the multitude. The ellipsis is supplied from the foregoing statement and we read it "gave the loaves to the disciples. and the disciples gave the loaves to the multitude." Would any want to say that in doing this we add to the Word of God? No, - for all we have done is to carry forward the thought] One of the strange things about this verse is that in it we find the figure of speech *ellipsis*, while the verse itself is the figure of speech *chiasm*. This may sound very complex to some of my readers, but I shall try to make it exceedingly simple. *Chiasm* is the name of a figure of speech which indicates a cross over of ideas. It has many forms. To illustrate it, I shall construct one of the same form we have here.

If I state: “ **I will not go out tonight**”, it becomes evident at once that I have not bound myself very tightly. This may mean that I will not go out of the house, or it may mean that I will not go out of the city; or it may mean I will not go out of the state. Now, without adding a single word to it, I will make an additional statement in connection with it -- -- “**I will not go out tonight, I will stay in the house**”. This additional statement binds me to not go out of the house, even though I did not say it. The thought carries backward. Few would recognize in these simple statements a *chiasm*. There is an exchange or cross over of ideas or thoughts between the two sentences which form this statement. Each one makes a contribution of thought to the other so that what I have actually said is this:

**I will not go out (of the house) tonight,
I will stay in the house (tonight).**

This is what we have in **Philippians 1 :21**. The word *gain* supplies the same thought that is in the word *magnify*. Thus the statement would read:

**"For to me to live is Christ's (gain),
And (to me) to die is (Christ's) gain."**

This is in complete harmony with the subject and the Notice how accurately this fits in the How of the thought. phrase of this portion will show this.

It is in accord with my eager expectation and hope that I shall never have reason to be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as it has always been before, even so now Christ will be magnified in my body whether it be by life or by death. For me to live is Christ's gain and to me to die is Christ's gain. But if I continue to live in the flesh, the magnification of Christ will be the result of my own labors.

The Choice Between Two

At this point a new thought enters into Paul's message to the Philippians. He says **"What I shall choose, I am not making known."** [The word translated "I wot" is *gnorizo*. It is used eleven times by Paul in Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Ephesians 1:9.3:3. 3:5. 3:10. 6:19. 6:21. Philippians 4:6, Colossians 1:2.7, 4:7, 4:9. There is but one meaning for *gnorizo* and that is *to make known*]

The word *choose* is a common word, used every day in ordinary conversation and requires no defining. But for the sake of emphasis, let us remember that it means *to make a selection*. If we go back to discover just what Paul is speaking about, we face an insurmountable difficulty. At the time these words were spoken, Paul was in prison and was soon to go on trial for his life. If they let him live Christ will gain, if they put him to death Christ will gain. However, he has no choice in these matters. Of course, it is true that he could choose to die, then make the choice effective by suicide, but he is not speaking of a choice between life and death. What Paul is speaking of here cannot be found by going back, it must be discovered by going forward.

As we go forward we begin to discover what he is speaking of at once for he says, **"For I am in a strait between two."** [I am quite familiar with, and have given full consideration to, the interpretation of this verse which suggests that Paul was "pressed out" of the two possibilities, those of living and dying, by a third -- the return of Christ. The twelve occurrences of the word *sunecho* shows that it does not mean to press out, but rather to hold in. "For I am held in constraint by reason of the two." This is a good translation]

After this he sets forth the two:

1. Having a desire to depart and be with Christ - which was far better for Paul.
2. To abide (remain) in the flesh, which was more needful, therefore better, for those to whom he ministered.

The choice was between departing and remaining, being with Christ or being with Christ's people, that which was better for him and that which was better for them. This choice was not between life and death, for "**departing to be with Christ**" is not death.

Seldom, if ever, have I made the statement that "departing to be with Christ" is not death but what some hearer has immediately asked - "If it is not death, then what is it? It can be nothing but death."

My answer to this is that while there is no record in the Bible of anyone ever departing to be with Christ, there are three records of men departing to be with God, and none of these departures had any connection with death.

There is the case of Enoch. He departed to be with God, and he did not die. The record is that he was translated that he should not see death.

Then there is the case of Elijah. He departed from this earth to be with God. This was not death, for he did not die.

The third case is that of the Lord Himself. He died, rose from the dead, was seen alive on earth for forty days. After this He departed to be with God. This was by ascension, not death.

These three cases are sufficient to prove that since departing to be with God is not death, departing to be with Christ is not death. It is not right to ignore the symbolic meaning of the words "depart and be with Christ," then give them a contra-symbolic meaning in order to provide a euphemistic term to be used in the ritual of funeral services.

In order to accurately understand this passage, we must ever keep in mind that this portion of the Word concerns Paul, and Paul alone. He was the only one who could ever choose between departing to be with Christ and remaining upon earth. It will be difficult at first for most of my readers to realize that this strange thing could be true of Paul. How could it be true of him, and why should it be true of him that he could choose at any time to go just as Enoch went? This is the question most readers will ask, and which I shall try to answer. It can only be answered by establishing certain great scriptural truths in regard to Paul personally. These truths need to be firmly fixed in our minds.

Paul

It must be clearly recognized that, personally, Paul is almost unknown to us. We know less of him than of any other important character in the Bible. His message is given in detail, but very little is told us of him. The New Testament contains no history of his life, no record of his birth and none of his death. Any records that we have of him are strictly limited to those features which illustrate the truth, show its trend, or enforce the message which is being set forth. If it is not in some way related to his message or ministry it is not told. If we take any statement made in the Acts or the epistles concerning Paul, we find that it is in some way related to the truth he is proclaiming or the ministry he is performing.

Another important fact that must be recognized is that certain great experiences in the life of Paul, and certain great truths that were true of him are revealed to us in a few brief words. These few words are all we have, and there is no additional light anywhere to add to these terse declarations. Since these things are not set forth in many words, and since they are almost hidden, they are not known or recognized by most readers of the Word. Yet, they are unmistakably there. They must be accepted or believed on the basis of these terse statements. There is no corroborating testimony. Let us consider a few examples - first of all, as to his experiences.

1. **"If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." 1 Cor. 15 :32.** It is not generally believed that Paul ever fought with beasts at Ephesus. The statement is usually considered hypothetical. However, here is a positive statement which even gives the city in which the event took place. If we read every detail of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, there is no hint of this, neither can any other reference to it be found in the Bible. Many are inclined to feel that if some unusual event such as this did take place, there would be more complete and definite records of it. The careful student will quickly discover that this is the way most of Paul's great experiences are treated in the Scripture. Nevertheless, solely upon the basis of this one statement, I do not hesitate to believe that this record is true, and that the experience actually took place.

2. **"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one." 2 Cor. 11 :24.** This is the only reference to these five frightful experiences. There is no other record of them in the Bible. The history recorded in Acts does not suggest any place where these floggings occurred. He was beaten by the Romans at Philippi, but it states here that these were "of the Jews." That these actually took place must be accepted and believed upon the sole foundation -of this one statement.

3. **"Thrice I was beaten with rods." 2 Cor. 11 :25.** One of these beatings is recorded in Acts 16. There is no other record of the other two. That he was beaten with rods these two times in addition to the one recorded there must be accepted and believed on the basis of this terse statement.

4. **"Thrice I suffered shipwreck." 2 Cor. 11 :25.** Not one of these is found in the Acts account of Paul's experiences. The one recorded there (Acts 27) happened long after these words were written. Faith will not hesitate to believe that these three shipwrecks took place, even if the only evidence is four words in the Word of God. We would like to know more, but since we do not, we believe what is revealed.

5. **"Caught up to the third heaven." 2 Cor. 12 :2.** There is no record of this anywhere else in the New Testament. Nothing like it ever happened to any other person. That it actually did take place must be believed because of this one passage. True faith does not hesitate to accept it.

These five statements are sufficient to demonstrate that certain great experiences in the life of Paul, some tragic in their nature and some glorious, must be accepted and believed wholly upon the basis of a few words. Furthermore, there are certain great truths that were true of Paul, and of Paul alone, that are revealed in very few words and must be believed and held wholly upon the basis of these terse declarations. We will consider five of these. The student can supply many more.

1. **"One born out of due time." 1 Cor. 15 :8.** Just what this means is not the burden of this present study. It is cited as a great truth, true only of Paul, set forth in very few words.

2. **"To save sinners, of whom I am chief." 1 Tim. 1 :15.** He was the foremost, the very first of sinners. If this is true of Paul, then it cannot be true of anyone else. If he was first, all others are after him.

3. **"A pattern to them which should hereafter believe." 1 Tim. 1 :16.** This is true - he was the pattern believer. It is another personal truth, true only of Paul.

4. **"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." 2 Cor. 12 :7.** This was given because there was danger of Paul becoming exalted through the abundance of revelations given to him. All readers of the Word will wish he had extended this statement which reveals a great truth, true of him personally, and none but him. Nevertheless, we believe that this was true of him on the basis of this terse reference alone.

5. **"I bear in my body the marks of the Lords Jesus." Gal. 6:17.** This simple remark has caused much speculation. What these marks were we do not know. But we do, know that whatever they were Paul bore them in his body. This one statement settles that.

The Power to Choose

With the foregoing statements fixed in our minds, we are now ready to consider another great truth that was true of Paul, and him alone. This truth is founded upon just one statement. There is no additional testimony. It was in the power of the Apostle Paul to choose at any time to leave this earth and to depart [[The greek word for depart is *analuō*. It is found twice in the New Testament, in Phil. 1 :23 and Luke 12:36. The substantive form, *analysis*, appears in 2 Tim. 4:6. In Luke 12:36 the word is translated return. Our word *return* is so closely allied to the word *depart* that it cannot be used without inferring a departure. When we return to a place, we must depart from where we are. If we return a thing to its elements (dissolve) we cause it to depart from what it is. The word *anoluo* can mean either *depart* or *return*. depending upon the context in which it is found. Our English word *anal*,... comes from it. In analysis, we separate a thing into its component parts. Therefore, our word *analyze* contains both the ideas of depart and return. In Philippians 1 :23 Paul could not have been speaking of the return of Christ when he used the word *depart*. If Christ has returned and Paul had been suddenly raptured, the Philippian saints would have been raptured also, therefore, Paul could have been in no dilemma in regard to being separated from them. In Luke 12 :36 *analuō* should have been translated *depart* instead of *return*. Do this, and the meaning of the verse will not be altered in the least. The ruler departed from the wedding and came to his house. To say he returned from the wedding and came to his house is needless repetition]] and be with Christ. He spoke of not making known what he would choose, so he must have had the power of choice. **He could choose to depart and be with Christ, or he could choose to abide in the flesh and continue his ministry of magnifying Christ. Again, I insist, this does not mean death.**

Enoch went to be with God, but he had no choice in the matter. Elijah departed to be with God, but the right to choose the time was not granted him. It was given to Paul to choose to depart or remain - not to live or die, but to be translated or to remain upon the earth. Some may hastily repudiate this by saying, "If he could do this, why did not he do so? He acknowledged it was far better. Why did he remain on earth?" The answer to this is that while it was far better for him to depart and be with Christ, but it was more needful for the people of God that he remain. Paul is one man who never thought of himself. The glory of Christ and the needs of God's people were always uppermost in his mind.

It is a well established principle of interpretation that no doctrine must ever be founded upon a single passage of Scripture. I accept this principle, and do not ignore it in my treatment of this passage. I am not trying to found some doctrine upon this one

statement. I am simply trying to establish in the minds of my readers a great truth in regard to Paul. This truth is found only in one place, and it is expressed in very few words, but it is true nevertheless. He spoke of making choice, so it must have been within his power to choose. He sets forth the two alternatives. He could choose to depart and be with Christ. This was far better and was earnestly desired. Or, he could choose to remain in the flesh. This was more needful for God's people. Having this conviction, he knew that he would remain with the people to whom he ministered.

Upon the basis of a few words my readers will readily and heartily accept that Paul fought with beasts at Ephesus, that he was beaten five times by the Jews, that he was shipwrecked three times, and that he was caught up to the third heaven. Furthermore, upon the basis of terse statements they will accept without hesitation the truth that Paul was one born out of due time, that he was the chief of sinners, that he was the pattern believer, that he had a thorn in his flesh, and that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Why, therefore, can it not be just as readily accepted upon the basis of the few words in Philippians 1 :22-23, that Paul could choose to depart and be with Christ. The difficulty seems to rest solely in the traditional and contra-symbolic use made of these words to describe the death of God's people. This has clouded the minds of God's people, and caused a fog to surround the words which wholly blots out their simple, plain and true meaning.

Why Should This Be True

The question will naturally rise in the minds of most readers of these lines as to just why it was given to Paul out of all others to have the power to choose, if he desired, to depart and be with Christ, to enjoy, if he chose, the same experience that Enoch and Elijah enjoyed. The answer to this is not difficult to find.

When God sent Ananias to restore Paul's sight, He stated that He would show Paul "**how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.**" Acts 9 :16. From this we learn that before Paul began his ministry, God gave him a preview of his life insofar as his sufferings were concerned. He knew in advance all that he would pass through, so that no suffering could ever come upon him unexpectedly or as a surprise. He knew that every year would be one of intense suffering, with no hope of any change in sight. Paul began his ministry with no hope of ever receiving anything at the hands of men except suffering and persecution. He could not be successful before men, but he could be faithful to God. This, he set about to do.

These sufferings are not revealed in detail, and it seems that there is no record of most of them. Some details are given in Acts, but the record there is by no means complete. Here was a man by no means strong in body, often suffering from some form of physical infirmity, yet enduring such frightful sufferings that they have no parallel in history. The record that is set forth of some of these in 2 Corinthians 11 should be read carefully, each statement meditated upon, so that we might understand in some measure how much he suffered. Consider these:

In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

No other man of God of Paul's time could write a catalog of suffering such as this. No one has ever suffered like that since Paul's time. If the generally accepted chronology is correct, Paul suffered all these things in the space of twenty years: from the time of his conversion to the time this was written. No Israelite in the time of Jacob's trouble will suffer as much in that three and one half years as Paul did in any equal period of his life. This statement is made in full recognition of the fact that the great tribulation is of such intense nature that no flesh will be preserved unless those days are shortened.

Paul, the pattern believer, was chosen by God to be the one great example of just how much a man could willingly and joyfully suffer for the sake of His name. In regard to faithfulness, service and suffering, Paul's record is unparalleled and unapproachable. After God had shown him what great things he must suffer, He then caught him away to the third heaven, even to paradise, and gave him a view of the ultimate goal of the universe. This vision was for him alone, for he was not permitted to tell the things he had seen and heard. Since no one else had ever been called upon, or ever would be called upon to suffer as he had, no one else stood in need of seeing or hearing the things that he saw and heard. He could speak from experience and actual knowledge when he said "**the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.**"

Furthermore, in order that Paul's sufferings should be endured willingly, rather than something forced upon him with no way out, God made it possible for him to choose

at any moment of his career to depart and be with Christ. This, without doubt, must have been a continual desire and temptation with him. As he stood upon the deck of a ship soon to be broken to pieces by the waves, how tempting must have been the possibility of departing to be with Christ, rather than to be plunged into the sea. As the blows rained down upon his bleeding back, what a temptation for him to have cried out to God, told Him he had taken all he could stand, and have departed to be with Christ. If he had done this, he would have vanished from earth before another blow could have descended upon him. However, he did not do it.

The question arises at once, "Why did he not do this? If he had this power, why did he fail to use it?"

The answer is at hand. This would have taken him away from his work of magnifying Christ by his labors and ministering the word of God to His people. Not one of God's people were ever weak without Paul feeling this weakness in himself, none were ever offended without him feeling it (2 *Cor.* 11 :29). If he departed to be with Christ, his efforts on their behalf would come to an end. It was far better *for* Paul that he depart and be with Christ, it was more needful *for* God's people that he remain in the flesh. This being true he remained in the flesh. Truly, here was a man whose one concern was the glory *of* Christ and the blessing *of* His people. Such unselfish devotion to the Lord and His people will always stand out as the greatest example *of* sacred history. All honor to this faithful servant, to whom so much honor is due.

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy he told his beloved son in the faith that he was about to be offered, and that the proper season *of* his departure was at hand. In Philippians 1 :23 the word *depart* is related to the words "and to be with Christ." In 2 Timothy 4:6 it is related to "being offered," also to having finished his career. In the later reference it seems evident that it refers to his departure from this earthly scene, that is, to his death. His course was finished, the battle had been fought, the faith had been kept. As the greatest *of* all God's saints, he awaits his reward. There was nothing he loved *more* than the manifestation *of* Christ. He cared less *for* self than he did *for* Christ's people. He refused to be separated from them in life. He will be with them in resurrection and blessing.

THE END SS15