



Following the upward call through Philippians ...

Hard Pressed

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. But, praise God, Christians have been taken out of the domain of darkness and have been transferred into the kingdom of light. Jesus stated it this way: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, *has* eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). In the book of Revelation, saints are described as "those who dwell in heaven" as contrasted to "who dwell on earth" (Revelation 13:6,8).

These truths are communicated so that brethren will understand that

that their deaths really occurred in their immersions and that they really are eternally alive in Christ. "Through death," then, Christ rendered "powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and [delivered] those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:14,15). The dedicated Christian, as was the apostle Paul, has no fear of physical death.

▼ **Interesting choice** — "For to me," avers Paul, "to live is Christ!" How positive is that! But then he adds, "And to die is gain!" His perspective, and the correct one, is that it is better to pass from earthly existence than try to hang around here. "But if I am to live on in the flesh," he comments, "this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose" (Philippians 1:22). If he dies physically, he will cease from his labor, and be absent from the body but at home with the Lord; he will enter the Paradise of which he had some excessively great visions. But if he stays on, he knows he will continue to bear much fruit for Christ.

▼ **Both directions** — Mentally and spiritually, the apostle was in a positive situation. Either way — physical death or physical life — he was a winner. "But I am hard-pressed from both directions," he remarks, "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" (Philippians 1:23,34). Most saints, being a little less mature than Paul, if given a choice to live or to die, would choose to live. But the apostle was "hard-pressed"; he would rather die, but he knew that the Lord was not done using him to evangelize the lost and strengthen the brethren. There were certain character qualities that Paul had, and certain things he could do, that fitted him for the work that the Father had laid out for him. God "had set me apart," he noted in writing to the Galatian brethren, "even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace ... to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles" (Galatians 1:15,16). It was clear that Paul was not being called home until his earthly work was done.

▼ **Convinced** — The apostle was such a willing servant. He could, in his own words, *choose* to be removed from the earth, or to continue on in the labors. Like Jesus before Him, he chose to have the Lord's will rather than his be done; the lost of the world and the churches of the first century still needed Paul's influence. "And convinced of this," he adverts, "I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith" (Philippians 1:25).

Twice the apostle had said, "I know" in connection with his deliverance from prison and his continuing to preach the gospel. That he was "hard-pressed" to make that decision indicates how glorious and awesome even Paradise is. Modern disciples of Christ can take courage from the information Paul gives in this letter. As those also "who have been called by His grace," they can know that for them, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." If they pass from this life, they are big winners; if they continue on, it is for fruitful labor!

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JAY WILSON