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## LIVE OR GAIN

As the Apostle Paul writes his letter to the Philippian church, he declares in 1:15 that he is **“PUT HERE”** for the defense of the Gospel. That’s a remarkable perspective for an imprisoned pastor. It shows he truly believed God works all things together for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

But as he considers God’s purpose for his life situation, Paul makes an even more provocative statement in 1:21 **“for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** Remember, the context of this declaration is his difficult circumstances of imprisonment.

Paul literally faced a life or death future. Who knew how long imprisonment would last? No telling whether he would be condemned to death. So for him, **“life”** meant imprisonment. And **“death”** would mean ultimate freedom, released not only from chains but the bonds of earthly existence.

He was hopeful, for in 1:19 he expects things to turn out for his **“deliverance”** through their prayers and the help of the Holy Spirit. He’s depending on their prayers as the driver of the Holy Spirit’s work. Could it be that YOUR PRAYERS make the difference for believers experiencing trials? This should spur you to earnest prayer on behalf of others.

Paul’s confidence echoes his declaration in 1:6 that **“God who began a good work...will bring it to completion.”** Paul intentionally, consciously, purposefully trusts in God’s plan even as he commits himself, mind and body and soul and will, to the Lord.

Because in 1:20 Paul spells out what’s at stake: **honoring Christ**. Whether he lived or died, Paul wanted Christ to be **“magnified”** in his body. Now! Paul’s testimony wasn’t showing a wallet-sized photo of Christ, it was a full life-sized representation. Christ “made large” through Paul, regardless of circumstances.

Then he declares in 1:21 **“for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** YOU might not be in chains today because of your faith in Jesus Christ. So you might not think you’re facing a life or death dilemma right now like Paul did. But you’d be wrong.

If you are a Christian, like Paul, your union with Christ is not some mere spiritual sentimentality, it is your REAL LIFE. So to go on living is all about being **IN Christ**, even during persecution. But to die will be **gain**, because you will then be **WITH Christ** in heaven. What could be better?

What a choice! In the next verses 22-25, Paul readily admits that **HIS** desire is to depart and be with Christ. He is an old tentmaker, and the word **“depart”** pictures putting away a tent. He wants to be done with his pilgrim campground existence.

But if he remains alive on earth, it means fruitful labor for the Gospel. Others would benefit from his life. He weighs the consequences, makes his decision. Because it is **“more necessary on your account,”** Paul decides in favor of continued persecution, so he can continue to proclaim the Gospel. What a man! Putting the best interests of others ahead of his own! (2:4). Invest now, gain later.

The result? **“Ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.”** That’s good news, because all this can be true of your life too, if YOU live with the mind of Christ.