



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Discerning God's Will—Philippians 1.21-26

FEBRUARY 21, 2011

PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

Don Garner / PO Box 302703, Austin, TX 78703 / don.garner@capitolcom.org www.capitolcom.org

INTRODUCTION

“Change is a’comin’,” of this we are sure. Time and again we find ourselves at a crossroads in life. Sometimes life will choose a new direction for us. At other times we make the choice. In both cases we will try to evaluate the pros and cons of the direction our lives may take in the future. Still we realize how limited we are when it comes to evaluating the future. There is just so much we don’t know.

How do we make the decisions which will determine direction our lives will take? How do we accept the changes life brings, when life seems to make the choice for us? How do we discern God’s will in the midst of challenging situations with uncertain and, or, what appear to be undesirable outcomes?

If we could see our life circumstances from God’s limitless perspective, with His perfect wisdom, and had His power to bring about any outcome, what would we choose? I have heard God’s will defined as “exactly what we would choose if we knew all the facts.” As we learn to see our lives from a broader perspective, and grow to appreciate what God is doing in our lives and the lives of others, we will grow in our ability to discern His will in our circumstances.

Philippians 1.21-26—For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

I. FOR MY SAKE (21, 23)

As far as it concerns him and him alone, Paul considers death to be means of great gain—it is far better. Paul is not considering which is the most preferable of two bad options, but between that which is good and that which is better.

DEATH AS GAIN

For Paul, death was gain in that it brought with it more intimate fellowship with Christ, more full enjoyment of his inheritance in Christ, more full realization of his position in Christ, and being perfected in Christ-likeness. The same is true for every believer. How could this be seen as anything but a means of great gain for anyone who valued these things?

To die is gain only when to live is Christ. Every believer is called to die unto their own goals and desires—to their own will and live unto Christ. This is a life in which the purposes of Christ in and through us are paramount. Knowing Christ and being conformed to His likeness are to become the chief aims of the believer. When this is so, to die only completes this process and thus becomes the prize of every Christian.

DEATH AS LOSS

It is natural for us to think of death as loss. Death looms over us as that certain conclusion to our lives. Death involves a fear of the unknown and is disconcerting to say the least. It also involves a separation from loved ones. And there is the death event itself, that can often be a painful experience. No doubt, Paul faced all these concerns as well, and recognized them as undesirable. Relative to these concerns, death is loss.

Yet for most people, death is seen as a total loss. Death is separation from all they know and love. It is THE END. Without the hope that buoys the believer, death is the ultimate nemesis. The perspective on life held by the believer allows him to the ways that the loss of death is eclipsed by its monumental gains.

BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER)
OR THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAYS @ 8:00A.M. IN THE MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

Texas

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II. FOR OTHERS' SAKE (21-22, 24)

While Paul found death preferable as far as it concerned him alone, he looked beyond himself to the impact this outcome would have on others. Death would be of great benefit to him, but to continue on in the flesh would be great gain to fellow believers. Proclamation of the gospel and attending to the spiritual needs of others were very compelling factors in Paul's analysis of his future.

Life for Paul is all about Christ's work in and through Him. If Paul's natural life is prolonged it will certainly result in abundant spiritual fruit. Paul longed to see Christ-likeness take form in the life of believers. He viewed his life as a drink offering being poured out upon the service and sacrifice of other believers. For others' sake, Paul's continued ministry would result in spiritual growth, rejoicing, and fellowship.

Paul considers his future in light of his usefulness to God for the advance of the gospel. Our thoughts of the future are often filled with hopes for material gain, achievements and acclaim. Are you motivated by the thought of simply being useful to God for others' sake.

III. FOR GOD'S SAKE (25-26)

"And being confident of this I know..." Paul had not placed his confidence in his own prognostication regarding the outcome of his impending trial. His confidence was in God alone and he was fully resigned to any outcome with the knowledge that God would be glorified in and through him.

"Not my will, but Your will be done." This prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of His crucifixion demonstrates the essential factor in discerning God's will—namely, dying to our own will in the matter before us.

God has a plan for advancing His purposes in you. He will use every circumstance of life, relationship, decision, success, and failure to mold you into the image of His Son. He will also advance His purposes in others through you. It is not for you

or I to make a calculus of his workings or the outcomes of them, only to trust and obey. Your responsibility is faithfulness rather than to seek to manage or manipulate outcomes. That is His alone.

CONCLUSION

George Mueller was a minister in England in the 19th century who answered God's calling to found orphanages. Mueller had a process for discerning God's will when faced with the decisions that he faced in operating the orphanages. "I seek at the beginning to get my heart in such a state as it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, no matter what it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is." Mueller gave practical application to the truth Paul lays before us in this passage.

It was Jim Elliot, the missionary to the Auca Indians, who said, "He is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Elliot ultimately was martyred, killed by the ones with whom he sought to share the life changing message of the gospel. For him, like Paul, to live was Christ and to die was gain. May it be so for you and I as well.

"Change is a'comin'," of this we can be sure. We do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. As a believer, you can face a very uncertain future with a calm that demonstrates your confidence in God to work out His purposes in your life.

Have you died to your own will and taken His as your own? Do you seek great things for yourself or is your life given over to seeing Christ magnified? Is Christ the sum and total of your life? Does He define your existence? Does the prospect of fruitful labor as a minister of the gospel drive you on? Do you long to see Christ formed in others?

By God's grace, may the answers to these questions become, yes, for each of us.