

“Key Ingredients for Lasting Joy” Philippians 1:18b-26, Sermon Notes
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Philippians 1:18b-26

As you make your way back to Philippians 1, I wanted to draw your attention to an interesting illustration I saw in an article this past week

The point of the article was to show that fruit in the Christian life can be easily counterfeited. And this was illustrated in the lives of two men in the church

The first man, was not only unfaithful to his wife, but was unfaithful to his wife with someone else’s wife

To make matters more complicated, his adulteress became pregnant with his child. This man then has her husband murdered in an attempt to cover up his actions

Now let’s consider the second man. This man spent years studying the Word of God. He boldly went into hostile lands and proclaimed the message of salvation. He even casted out demons and healed the sick in Jesus’ name

He also had a very intimate relationship with Jesus Christ

It would be hard to imagine two piles of fruit more radically diverse. And our spiritual instincts tell us that the first man is most likely an *unbeliever* while the second man is most likely a faithful *believer*

Yet we would be wrong on both counts if we made this assumption, because of course the first man is King David, the second man is Judas Iscariot

Leaving David aside and just considering Judas, measuring fruit can be a difficult process because it is possible to have counterfeit fruit, counterfeit virtues

And this is readily apparent when it comes to the Christian virtue of joy. After all, the concept of joy is not unique to Christianity

Everybody wants joy, and there are even many in the world today who are joyful and would affirm that they have joy, they have true happiness

But what is this counterfeit version of joy the world has? It’s often a superficial and ungrounded cheerfulness, it’s merely an emotion of great delight, a positive response to pleasant circumstances

But believers are called to have a different kind of joy. A joy that is the result of a deep-seated confidence which recognizes that all is well between me and the Lord and he is working out everything for my good and His glory

Genuine joy is a state of gladness in the heart. One author put it like this: Joy is a happiness based on unchanging divine promises and eternal spiritual realities.

Granted, joy is expressed differently and looks differently in each person's life depending on their personality and temperament

But the *reasons* for true joy are universal, and the *way we attain* true joy is universal

This is the topic we come to this morning. Paul is going to show us how to have genuine joy. Stated differently, he's going to give us safeguards against counterfeit joy

Notice where we left off last week in Philippians 1:18, "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice."

So, Paul says, I'm currently rejoicing because Christ is proclaimed, whether in pretense or in truth, and now the second half of verse 18: "yes and I will rejoice. I will keep on rejoicing."

Why Paul? What will enable you to keep on rejoicing? What will cause you to have genuine joy and not the counterfeit version of joy, which is entirely dependent on pleasant circumstances?

Well, at the beginning of verse 19 we see that ever-important word show up in bible interpretation, the word "for." In other words, what's the reason I will continue to rejoice? What will enable me to choose this path of joy?

In the following verses he gives us 3 key ingredients for genuine joy

The first key ingredient for genuine joy is a confidence in the Lord's redemptive sovereignty: verse 19, "for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

First, let's recognize what "this" is there in verse 19. "This" is his present circumstances, his impending trial before Caesar, his suffering, his imprisonment, the brothers inflicting harm upon him by preaching with impure motives and slandering him

"This uncomfortable set of circumstances will lead to, or will result in my 'deliverance.'"

Now, this "deliverance" could be referring to a number of different things and it's hard to be definitive here as to exactly what he's referring to

Is he referring to his personal conviction that he will be released from prison, and in that sense delivered?

Is he referring more to an idea of *vindication*, which is another way this word can be translated? In this sense his deliverance is this: "I'll be proven in the right in my court case before Caesar,"

"I will be vindicated and proven righteous in light of the slanderous accusations of the brothers preaching with impure motives?"

Or, is Paul anticipating martyrdom and therefore this deliverance is a reference to his final salvation as he departs to be with Christ?

Now, some of those options are more convincing than others, but as I said, it's hard to be definitive as to specifically what Paul has in mind with this deliverance

It is the *principle* however that is instructive for us. The principle is the same as we see in Psalm 34:19, "many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord *delivers him* out of them all."

That can't mean "delivered" in the sense of *removing* all affliction. That doesn't fit with the testimony of the rest of Scripture or our own experience

So it must mean a spiritual deliverance. Sufficient grace and wisdom the Lord gives His people to endure through affliction

The Lord's faithfulness to use the affliction for our redemptive good, to not allow the affliction to ruin us, to preserve us in the midst of affliction

That's the principle here. It's a recognition that the Lord is using this affliction, and working in this affliction for my good

In fact, Paul uses this same word "to know" in another passage which talks about God confidently working for our good in our affliction

A very familiar verse to us: Romans 8:28, "and *we know* (we have absolute confidence) that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose."

This is Paul's confidence in Philippians 1:19. The Lord's redemptive sovereignty in his life

I may be in prison, bound, chained to a guard 24 hours a day. I may have Christian brothers out there preaching with impure motives, causing me grief and trying to make my life more difficult, but God has ordained these things for my good, this will lead to my deliverance

That's a key ingredient for genuine joy. Paul interpreted his current affliction through the grid of God's redemptive plan for his life

But, as you know, it's not exactly natural, it's not easy to walk by faith in painful circumstances. No one can naturally rejoice in the midst of suffering in their own strength and will power

Likewise, Paul knows he can't do this in and of himself. This deliverance is going to be accomplished... Notice the rest of verse 19, "... through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

See, Paul was not what we might call a "hyper-Calvinist." To be sure, Paul obviously embraced and emphasized the complete sovereignty of God in all things.

But he never emphasized it to the degree that other clear teachings in Scripture were neglected. Like man's responsibility, like the fact that God uses means, like prayer, to accomplish his sovereign ends

Here is an example of that. Paul was totally convinced that God will deliver him, that God would cause him to remain a bold and faithful witness, he was totally convinced that God was working all things for his good and all of these difficulties would lead to his final salvation one day

And yet at the same time he recognized that the Lord uses *means* to bring about his promises and his sovereign plan

Two of those means are represented here: the first one is prayer, specifically the prayers of the Philippian church

Paul was thoroughly dependent on the prayers of God's people. Just a couple of quick passages to further illustrate this:

Paul arguably wrote the letter of Ephesians in this same prison context and he tells the church in Ephesians 6:19 ff, "and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

Paul needed the support of the body of Christ to be faithful. He didn't let his pride keep him from praying and keep him from asking the churches to pray on his behalf

And notice, not only the prayers of the saints but also, end of verse 19, "the supply or provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

Now, all believers have the Spirit of God dwelling within them from the moment of their conversion

But I don't believe Paul is referring to that idea here. I think he is referring to a unique ministry of the Spirit here

Namely, the provision *given by the Spirit*, the help or support *supplied* by the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit is going to supply me with what I need to be delivered and accomplish verse 20

Namely, "that I will not be put to shame in anything (so I won't deny Christ, I won't have any reason to be ashamed before him), but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or death."

That was Paul's agenda. That is what Paul says the Spirit of Christ will help him with

After all, Paul is finding himself in several contexts where in and of himself he might cower in fear

He has an impending trial before Caesar approaching. He's constantly chained to a Roman Soldier

And he wants to be bold and he doesn't want to compromise, even when it might cost him his life. Where is he going to get this strength, this boldness, this wisdom, this clarity to preach and defend the gospel as he ought?

Well, turn over to Luke 21:12-15, "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake..." That's exactly what happened with Paul

Notice verse 13, "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. 14 So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15 for *I will give you* utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute."

That's what I believe Paul is referring to in Philippians 1:19. This very ministry of Jesus Christ *through the means of the Spirit* to equip him and strengthen him to make a bold defense and proclamation of the gospel before the Gentiles

Now, just a quick side note on that verse: That's not saying that Christians and preachers and evangelists should never prepare a message or think beforehand about what they're going to say

Sadly there are some who take this verse to mean "we don't need to prepare a message for Sunday morning, we just need to let the Spirit guide us."

Well they are missing the point of that passage. First of all, Paul and the other apostles didn't have the New Testament canon and therefore Spirit was still speaking through apostles and prophets. This promise was necessary for that time period in redemptive history

Secondly, it wasn't given to us as an excuse to be lazy and neglectful in preparation, but rather it was given as a *comfort and promise*

Jesus is saying to his disciples that there will be times when you are so afflicted, so persecuted, so fearful, and here's why you don't need to be anxious, to worry about what to say. "I'll be with you and I'm going to give you the words to say."

So, back to Philippians 1, Paul was confident that the Spirit would supply him with the courage and clarity to speak as he ought

He was not self-sufficient, his confidence was not grounded in himself, it was grounded in God's promise to support and strengthen him

So, taking the big picture of verse 19, this is a key ingredient for our joy. This is the first pillar which must stand strong in your mind

An absolute confidence that when you are afflicted, when you have that nagging trial that won't go away, God is not only sovereign but He is using that very affliction for your good

Counterfeit joy doesn't recognize the hand and purpose of God in our difficulty. Counterfeit joy walks by *sight* in the difficult moments. It has horizontal vision as it becomes consumed with the *tool* God is using, instead of God's purposes behind the tool

It becomes consumed with the difficult child, the difficult spouse, the difficult situation at work, the difficult physical affliction, the financial problems, or whatever it might be

And sure, counterfeit joy might *reluctantly* affirm God is sovereign, but it has no confidence that God is using His sovereignty the best way

Counterfeit joy denies either the wisdom of God – God is sovereign but he doesn't know the best way to get me to glory

Or it denies the love of God – God is sovereign, he just doesn't care about me, or he's angry at me and that's why my life looks like this

So, because counterfeit joy doesn't have this confidence, it is found wanting in the difficult moments of life. It turns quickly to bitterness, anger, discontentment, lack of gratitude

Paul certainly could have fallen prey to those temptations if he had counterfeit joy. But because he was confident in God's redemptive sovereignty, that God is always working for my redemptive good he had genuine joy

This is the first key ingredient for genuine joy

The second key ingredient for genuine joy is a commitment to exalting Christ no matter the cost: Verses 20-21, "20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Genuine joy is directly related to our all-consuming life ambition, our life goal

Why am I calling this an "all-consuming life ambition?" Notice what Paul says here in verse 20, "it is according to my earnest expectation and hope..."

The word for "earnest expectation" (ἀποκαρδοκίαν) literally means "to stretch your head." So this is a concentrated, intense gaze. Just like what you do when you really want to focus on something and you are trying to get a better look, you stretch your head and narrow your focus

The word for "hope" is not hope in the way we use the word hope. "I hope it doesn't rain today." "I hope we're going to have dessert tonight."

That's mere human hope, it's simply what we desire to happen but it is entirely unrelated to our confidence of what will happen

Biblical hope, however, is not a mere desire of what we would like to happen, but a *confident expectation of what will happen*

So these two terms are not mild, this is not just well-wishing on the part of Paul. No, he says that it is my deepest focus and deepest longing, my earnest and confident expectation...

In other words, this is my all-consuming life ambition. And then he lists the content of this eager expectation and hope both negatively and positively:

Negatively, verse 20, "that I will not be put to shame in anything." What's this shame Paul has in mind here?

Well, for Paul, shame was not self-centered, it had nothing to do with embarrassment, which is how we may have become conditioned to think about shame in our culture

For example, suppose it's raining on your way into church, you trip and fall in some mud in the parking lot, you walk in all wet and dirty and everyone is staring at you and you feel ashamed because it is so embarrassing. That's a common way we think about shame today

But notice for Paul there is only way shame would come upon him: Verse 20: "I will not be put to shame in anything, but now, (here's the contrast, here's the opposite of being put to shame), "but

that with all boldness Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or death.”

So, for Paul to be put to shame would include failing to trust the Lord. It would mean he would cower in fear, he would fail in being a bold witness for the gospel, basically that he would do or say something that would be inconsistent with the gospel

We could say it this way: Paul had a Christ-centered view of shame. Shame should only be present when we are guilty, and being guilty means we have done something to dishonor Christ, we’ve failed to glorify Christ either in life or death

Paul could have had a self-centered shame. I’m so ashamed to be in prison, I’m a laughingstock of the early church. The brothers in verse 17 were to attempting to make him feel ashamed

Paul’s joy could have easily been taken if he had a self-centered view of shame. But his all-consuming life-commitment made that impossible. Because misplaced shame is a result of living for man’s approval, and Paul’s commitment proved otherwise

In verse 21, he explains the commitment in the previous verse. Verse 20, “I want to magnify Christ in my body, whether by life or death.”

How I can say that? How can I accomplish that? Here’s the reason, verse 21, “for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Interesting phrase there in verse 21: “to me to live... and then there’s no verb, no preposition, the original text just says, “to live Christ.”

And we supply, rightly so, the verb “is” to make it readable in English. But the meaning is: To live *equals* Christ

20th century preacher and theologian Martyn Lloyd Jones said about this phrase, “this is the most thorough test we can ever encounter of our profession of the Christian faith.”

Why can he say that? How can he say that a mere two words in the original text is the most thorough test we can ever encounter of our profession of the Christian faith?

Well one reason is because it quickly exposes any *artificial versions* of Christianity

This little phrase, “to live is Christ” simply isn’t compatible with the ways the church of the past couple of centuries has taught us to think about salvation and saving faith

We’ve been taught to think about saving faith the same way we think about mere facts in the world

The sun is 93 million miles away from Earth. I know that to be true
The earth is covered by 71 percent water. Yep, that’s true, I agree with that

And then we take that type of belief and carry it right into the gospel: Do you mentally agree that Jesus is the Son of God and died for your sin, and rose again? Great! You’re saved

That’s how we’ve been conditioned to think about saving faith

Interestingly however, this is the way James warns us *not* to think about saving faith in James 2:19, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

James says if all you have is a mental persuasion of correct doctrine about God, it’s a step in the right direction, you do well, but don’t pat yourself on the back just yet, because if that’s *all you have* you have made it to the level of the demons

The demons know facts, they agree with the facts, the demons in Scripture had better theology than anyone. They recognized Christ for who he was long before anyone else

And by the way, the demons at least had a response. They had a reaction, “they shudder” James says

So why don’t the demons in James 2 have saving faith? They hate what they know to be true. Their correct theology doesn’t correlate with their lives

Demons live for themselves and their own glorification

Back in Philippians 1:21, Paul says, “to live is Christ.” That’s what it means to be a Christian. So I don’t live for myself and my own glorification, which is how I lived as an unbeliever, I now live for Christ and his glory

To live is Christ. This means life only finds meaning in Christ. Life is filled up with, occupied with, summed up with Christ. Everything I trust, love, hope, obey, follow... is inspired by Christ and done for Christ

Indeed, we can see that Lloyd Jones was spot on: “this phrase is the most thorough test we can ever encounter of our profession of the Christian faith.”

Because unlike some of the unhelpful ways we’ve been conditioned to think about salvation, this phrase is only compatible with genuine Christians

A genuine Christian is someone who so lives for Christ that if the resurrection never happened, that person is to be pitied above all men

That’s exactly what the world should think about us if we are living the way we ought. Paul even says that if you want to turn over to 1 Corinthians 15:13-19:

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain (Paul says ministry is pointless) your faith also is vain (your faith is irrational and pointless if Christ has not been raised from the dead).

¹⁵ Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”

And now listen to this, “¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

What's he saying? Christians should be living for Christ in such a way that if they prove to be massively misguided, if they've believed a hoax, they are in a most pitiable condition

Because, the implication is they would have wasted their lives. All of their time, energy, and resources were consumed on some lunatic named Jesus who is still dead in his grave

Several years ago, Sovereign Grace music released a song called "All I have is Christ." And I remember going to a website several years ago to listen to that song and there was a comment section under the song info

And most of the comments were positive as believers were expressing how thankful they were for this song and how much they liked it

But then I happened to notice a negative comment from an individual. They wrote this: If all you have is Christ *then you have nothing*

And I thought, exactly. That's exactly how the world should view us. You are fools, you have nothing if your life is Christ

And that's a good question to ask ourselves: Am I so living for Christ that others would pity me if the resurrection ended up not being true? Am I so living for Christ that my life causes the world to say: *you're wasting it?*

Now, notice, we not only magnify Christ in our living exclusively for Him, we also magnify Christ in our dying, notice end of verse 21 there, "and to die is gain."

So, let's just note the parallel ideas here in verses 20 and 21. The parallels between living and dying

Notice verse 20 again: "Christ will be honored in my body whether by life..." How is Christ honored in my body by life? He answers that in verse 21, "for to me to live is Christ."

That's how I achieve my goal of magnifying Christ if I am living

Back to verse 20, "Christ will be honored in my body whether by life, *or by death*. How is Christ honored in my body by death?

He answers this in verse 21, "to die is gain." Do you see that connection? Do you see what this implies about how we magnify or glorify Christ? He is magnified in my death *because I experience death as gain*

Why is death gain for Paul? If we're not careful we might read these words and think something like this: Death is gain because death releases me from all difficulty and misery, all of my troubles are done with

I'm released from my corrupt body. I don't have to deal with any of my problems or trials anymore. No more prison, no more persecution. That's why death is gain

Now, to be sure, death certainly does accomplish those things, but we should consider that even pagans understand this and recognize death as gain in this sense

In other words, what unbeliever couldn't say that? "Soon, my earthly misery and earthly troubles and earthly pain will be gone. I won't have to deal with my problems, or difficult relationships. As soon as I die those things come to an end, therefore, to die is gain."

That can't be what Paul means when he says "death is gain" because that doesn't exalt Christ? How is Christ made much of when we view death merely as an escape from all earthly troubles?

So when Paul says "to die is gain" his focus is not, "I'll no longer have to suffer, I'll no longer have to deal with malicious people in the body of Christ, I'll no longer have to deal with the Roman government, or prison, or the threat of martyrdom, or my physical ailments."

No, he's saying that death affords me the longing of my heart, death provides me with an *enrichment* of my relationship with Christ. Death is gain because I get more of Christ

And that's exactly what Paul is emphasizing. How do we know? Notice the text again in Philippians 1:21, "to die is gain." What do you mean Paul? Skip ahead to verse 23, "having the desire to depart and *be with Christ* for that is far better."

He didn't say, "to depart and have all of my troubles come to an end." "To depart and never have to deal with my problems again, for that is far better."

No, those things are certainly true, they are certainly benefits believers enjoy in heaven, but that's not what makes heaven, heaven

You see in Paul's understanding, death equates to the fruition of his ultimate life ambition. Death is a graduation, a culmination, a moment of celebration

Life which is lived for Christ is not destroyed by death, it is enriched by death

Indeed, there is no greater joy, no greater pleasure, no greater context imaginable, for the Christian, than to be in an intimate and unhindered relationship with Christ

Now, the thief on the cross passage is used to support basically any doctrine in Christian theology, so we'll use it here to support this idea:

What did Jesus himself say to the thief on the cross when he was converted in his last hour before death? "Truly, truly I say to you: *today* you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43

Paradise is used interchangeably in the Scriptures with heaven. What makes paradise, paradise? What makes heaven, heaven?

Well, we see a similarity between what Jesus says to the thief and what Paul says of himself: Listen again to what Jesus said to that recently converted thief on the cross: "Today you will be *with me* in paradise."

Several years ago I read a quote in a John Piper book that I have never forgotten: He writes:

"The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all

the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven if Christ were not there?"

And to clarify, no, this doesn't mean that believers aren't to desire and look forward to the eternal state where there will be no sickness, no tears, no pain, no curse, no sin to deal with

No, I think it is appropriate to long for and desire and joyfully anticipate a new heavens and new earth where there is no longer any curse. The Scriptures do draw our attention to those things and highlight those things

The point is, that we are to honestly consider if we would truly be disappointed and unsatisfied in heaven, *discontent* if we were to arrive there and find out that we get all those things, *but Christ*

We can see the balance of this if you want to turn over to Revelation 21:21, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying,"

Now, notice what is emphasized first about heaven: "Behold, the tabernacle (dwelling) of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them," [[Yes we will see God in heaven – note 22:3-4, the face of God and the Lamb. However, God the Father has no body, He is Spirit, and the same is true of the Holy Spirit]]

That's the best part about heaven. That's what should ultimately thrill us and satisfy us

But the other things, the added bonuses are not irrelevant. Notice verse 4, "and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; for the first things have passed away."

So, yes, by all means, everything the Scriptures speak of when it talks about death and heaven should excite us and we should look forward to those things in heaven

But if we more excited and thrilled about those things, than the fact that God himself will dwell among us, how can we be confident that we love Christ above all of those things?

Back to Philippians 1. Paul said, to die is gain, because that means I experience Christ in a greater way than I can while living on earth

Now, before we move on too quickly from verse 21, let's see what happens if we insert something else in there for the word "Christ." In other words, death can only be gain to us if living is Christ

That means *death is loss* if we are living for anything other than Christ. Here's what I mean by way of illustration if we were to change around the words of verse 21:

To live is being successful in life. Then to die is loss.

To live is having a nice family, a nice house, a nice job, then to die is loss.

To live is being wealthy, then to die is loss.

To live is being well-liked, then to die is loss.

To live is being powerful and influential, then to die is loss.

To live is possessions, then to die is loss.

To live is to live long and age well, then to die is loss

Why is dying loss if you are living for those things? Because death *permanently severs* your relationship with all of those things. *Death becomes a threat to your true love*

Death is gain in your life *only* if death doesn't permanently sever you from your true love

It is this all-consuming commitment in life, to glorify Christ no matter the cost, which caused Paul's joy to be genuine

No circumstance, not even death itself can take away genuine joy because there is no circumstance, including death, where we cannot exalt Christ

This is the second key ingredient for genuine joy – a commitment to exalting Christ no matter the cost

The third and final key ingredient for genuine joy is considering the church above yourself

This will be verses 22-26, "But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again."

Our passage takes an interesting turn here. In verse 21, Paul gives his "win win" situation where "to live is Christ and to die is gain." I can't lose either way. My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better, but I'm wrestling with that desire because of what it might mean for the church

This is the dilemma Paul now faces, and we get to eavesdrop on the inner turmoil he is experiencing

Notice first of all, in verse 22, "but if am to live on in the flesh." So, if I am to remain alive... this equates, this will mean "fruitful work, fruitful labor."

There's Paul's purpose again in life. In other words, being alive, for Paul, *equated* with fruitful labor for Christ

And even the Apostle Paul is perplexed. Notice the middle of verse 22, "and I do not know which to choose." Now, this doesn't mean that Paul had a choice in the matter. Literally, the verse can read this way: "and I cannot tell which I prefer."

He's saying that if he were given the choice I don't know what I would choose. I really cannot tell what my preference is

Notice verse 23, "but I am hard pressed from both directions." I've got pressure pushing on me from both sides and I feel trapped

Why? Verse 23, "having the desire to depart and be with Christ for that is very much better..."

Notice that Paul used what we might call a “triple comparative” to describe his desire to depart and be with Christ: “for that is *very much better*.”

He didn’t say “that is better.” He didn’t say “that is much better.” No, “very much better” thus indicating it is so beyond any other possible experience. It far exceeds anything in this life

So much for the doctrine of purgatory. Paul doesn’t give any indication he is anticipating going to a miniature version of hell to have his remaining sins purged before entering into the presence of Christ

Also, so much for the doctrine of soul-sleep, which says that when Christians die in this period, known as the *intermediate state*, we are unconscious until the Lord Jesus comes back to resurrect our bodies from the grave

No, believers who have fallen asleep, are presently alive, conscious, in the presence of the Lord in this intermediate state

A couple of other passages to illustrate this: 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul says “I prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

Again Paul says that when believers are absent from the body, when they die, they go to be at home with the Lord

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 is a great summary of this: For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, *we will live* together with Him.”

That’s why Paul can say what he says in Philippians 1:23, “I have a desire to depart and with Christ,” *immediately* is the idea

But his personal longing is conflicted with another desire: Notice verse 24, “yet to remain on in the flesh (which means, to remain on, suffering over and over and over in many different ways) to remain on the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”

Genuine joy is directly related to preferring others above ourselves. Here is Paul willing to delay crossing the finish line in his own race, so to speak, so he could help serve the needs of the Philippian church

What is better individually for me, in a narrow sense, is not always what is best, it’s not always what is necessary. To depart and be with Christ, that is very much better, *for me as an individual*

But to remain on in the flesh, is more necessary for you, the church

Here again is an illustration of the tension that every follower of Christ should experience. The longing to be with Christ because you love him so much, and the longing to be with and serve God’s people because you love them so much

That’s a succinct way to describe a believer

Notice verses 25-26 as Paul comes to a conclusion about what he thinks will happen: “having become convinced of this (having become convinced that it’s more necessary for me to remain for your sake), I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith...”

Now, Paul’s not speaking of certainties here, there’s no indication that he had received fresh revelation from God indicating that he would remain alive and be released

I believe this is Paul’s personal conviction based on his evaluation of everything. The word for “I know” doesn’t mean infallible knowledge, it can just refer to Paul’s confidence that because he still has ministry to do he will remain alive

What’s going to be his agenda when he does continue his ministry among them? Notice the middle of verse 25, “for your progress and joy in the faith.”

I’m convinced I’m going to be vindicated and set free, and when that happens, I won’t skip a beat in ministry, it will be for “your progress and joy in the faith.”

Notice that connection between joy and faith. Real growth in the faith will result in genuine joy in the faith. Growth without joy is counterfeit growth. Joy without growth is counterfeit joy

In other words, the more you truly grow in Christ, the more joy you will have. Why? Because the more like Christ you are, the more you are consumed with Him and the trials and difficulties of your life fade further and further into the backdrop

Also, the more you grow in Christ the less you are consumed with yourself and the more you are consumed with the needs of others

Perhaps you’ve recognized this in your own experience as a Christian? The more you are focused on yourself, your trials, your life, your problems, to the degree that you are consumed with self, the harder it is to have joy.

Self-focus smothers joy. On the other hand, the more you are consumed with others, their needs, their trials, their burdens, the more joy you have

After all, Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). You are in a more prosperous position, a position of maximum divine favor, when you are a giver

That’s why genuine joy is related to considering the church above yourself

The ultimate purpose of Paul’s ministry is found in verse 26, “so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.”

Now, that verse makes it seem like their confidence is in Paul, but the text literally reads this way in this order: “in order that your boast might abound in Christ Jesus in me on account of my coming to you again.”

The point is, as Paul lived on fruitfully, their joy and confidence would overflow in Christ, because of Christ in Paul, because of Christ’s work in Paul

When I come to you again, Paul says, it will be an opportunity for you to glory and boast in Jesus Christ for the way He has delivered me, preserved me, vindicated me, and caused the gospel to advance and grow through my imprisonment

This is what led to Paul's joy. He considered the church more significant than himself. He's the one suffering, he's the one in prison, and he's considering their spiritual growth, he's considering their needs above his own

Even when it came to two competing desires, neither of which would be wrong or sinful, Paul modeled for us how to consider the church, God's people, as more significant than ourselves

Now, as we draw to a close one final thought: Maybe you have sat here the past couple of weeks as we have gone through this section in Philippians 1 thinking to yourself: "This is great and all, but that's just Paul talking about his ministry."

"Of course an *Apostle* would have this level of commitment and devotion, but I'm not an apostle, I'm not called to ministry like that. I'm not a pastor, I'm not a missionary. God certainly doesn't expect *everyone* to have this type of radical mindset, to have these types of gospel-centered priorities?"

"After all, Paul didn't have a wife, a family, a mortgage, a regular job, of course he had this type of commitment to Christ because he literally had nothing else. So the Lord doesn't really expect all believers for all time to imitate Paul in these things."

Are you sure about that? Glance over at 3:17, "Brothers, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."

Listen to 1 Corinthians 4:16, "be imitators of me."
1 Corinthians 11:1, "be imitators of me as I am of Christ."

Paul is certainly under the assumption that his life and ministry are to be emulated by the church

Furthermore, there is an interesting parallel between Paul's mindset here and the mindset he calls the church to have over in Philippians 2:3-7, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

But Paul knew that He is not the ultimate standard, Paul always points us to someone much greater than himself

Notice 2:5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Have the same mindset of Jesus Christ? That's a command to the church

The text says, Jesus existed in the form of God, He was obviously not bored with the fellowship of the Trinity. And if a plan of redemption for sinners had never been made, He would not have been wrong, He would not have sinned in any way had He not chosen to humble Himself and become a man

In the same way, Paul wanting to depart and be with Christ was not a sinful desire

But if Paul was merely looking out for his own interests, he wouldn't have the battle going on inside him. It would simply be, "I want to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. Who cares about anyone else, who cares about the church, I've suffered enough. I'm close the finish line, just let me go."

But Paul is following the example of Christ. The text says Christ didn't regard equality with God a thing to grasped, to be clung to, instead, the principle is: he considered the church more significant than his own personal desires

Paul, said I need to remain on in the flesh and minister to the church

Jesus said, I need to add flesh to myself, add humanity to myself, and die for the church. It is far more necessary for the church that I do this than remain with my Father

So, Paul is modeling right here in chapter 1, what he is going to go on to call the church to obey over in chapter 2

And it is all built on the foundation of Christ Himself, who chose the path of ultimate joy, by not considering His own interests as something to be clung to, but considering the church more significant than Himself

So, you want to ensure your joy is the real thing? That it isn't a counterfeit joy that can easily be possessed by the world?

Consider these 3 key ingredients for genuine joy:

Confidence in the Lord's redemptive sovereignty. Fully embracing his sovereign plan for your life, repenting of unbelief in His infinitely loving and wise character. That will cause you to rejoice

Commit yourself to exalting Christ no matter the cost. Your all-consuming life ambition, your life goal is to make Christ look great. That will cause you to rejoice because there is no circumstance in life or even death itself that can prevent you from accomplishing that goal

And lastly, **Considering the church more significant than yourself.** Consistently redirecting all of the focus you're naturally tempted to give to yourself, and getting lost in the needs of others, that will cause you to have genuine joy