

CHRIST, OUR LIFE

A SERMON

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“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21

OF the natural man it may be said, “For him to live is sin, for him to live is enmity against God, for him to live is death; and for him to die is damnation.” But those who know the Lord and have him on their side, can adopt the language of our text, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” I know not a more dignified account in few words, throughout the Bible, of the Christian’s life than this. It is as though the apostle had said, “All other matters are so inferior, are so temporary and so trivial, so corrupt, compared with this great subject of eternal glory by Christ Jesus, that they seem scarcely worth mentioning when I mention his name; and, therefore, ‘for me to live’, my whole existence is swallowed up in this one great glorious person Christ Jesus, ‘for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.’”

Now there are two points or principles which we shall notice out of the many contained in these words.

First, *It is a life of opposition to sin.* Second, *It is a life of present pre-eminent and permanent interest in Christ.* These two ideas will naturally include all others which are suggested by the text.

Now, in the first place, it is a life of opposition to sin generally and specially. To enter heaven as approvers of sin, in any one shape or form, is utterly impossible. Nothing that defiles or makes a lie can enter therein. Sin entered into a war with God in paradise. It has continued that war against him in opposing the gospel, in opposing prophets, apostles, and ministers, and all the people of God, in opposing his wish, and in persecuting and crucifying his dear Son; and therefore, the Lord determined to bring his people into such a position as to make them loathe and hate and detest sin in every shape and form. Now let us look a little closely into the reasonableness of this hatred to sin. Before the fall took place, the Lord, knowing that the fall would take place, made a positive declaration concerning the consequence of the sin by which the fall should take place. Now did the Lord abide by that declaration, or did he not? Well, we see that he did abide by that declaration. The declaration was, “The day that you eat thereof you shall surely die;” and then an after declaration was necessarily included in that, “Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return.” Now we will suppose, for one moment, that the Lord had not abode by that declaration, but had admitted sin into the nature of Adam, and into the garden of Eden, admitted sin to mingle with the commandments of his holy law, God himself then must have lived in fellowship with sin. The creature belongs to God; here is sin setting aside the law of God, and therefore, in effect setting God himself aside. Now then, for the Lord to side with this, he himself must sit down contentedly to see the devil and sin have their own way. But was it possible for this to be the case? No. Therefore, this sin, while it is dreadfully destructive to man, is infinitely hateful to God. Then if

you come on to the deluge, what was the general deluge but a declaration of heaven's hatred to sin? What was the overturning of the cities of the plain but a declaration of Jehovah's abhorrence of sin? What was the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea but the same thing? What were all the judgments that came upon the Jewish nation, their captivity from time to time, and even their present condition, but a declaration of God's hatred to sin? And if you look, indeed, all through the world, no, if you come down to perdition itself, what is that place where it is said that they blaspheme God, that they gnash their teeth, and gnaw their tongue, that their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched, what are all these but general, open, and eternal declarations of God's hatred to sin? Sin, you see, from its very nature, corrupts everything; and if it were possible for sin to get into the love of God, that love would become passionate immediately, and would be as boisterous as the stormiest sea on earth, and not to be depended upon. If sin were to get into his power, it would misdirect it. If it were to get into his *wisdom*, it would baffle it. If sin were to touch him in any way whatever, it would spoil him. But as sin cannot touch him, he therefore cannot be spoiled: and he has, as we shall presently see, in the boundless love of his heart, placed his people where they cannot be spoiled either, where they cannot be spoiled in their circumstances, in their possessions, or in their prospects. Shall they, in this position, side with sin against him, or shall they side with him against sin? The question is very simple, shall they live with him as approvers of sin, or shall they live with him as approvers of him and haters of sin? We know which must be the result. Now, if we come down to experience upon this matter there are two ways in which the Lord makes his people hate sin; one is by chastisement, and the other is by making the Lord Jesus attractive to their mind and precious to their souls. Now the first method is by chastisement. The Lord will never, while they are in this world, cease to chastise his people and hence the threatening's in the Bible against sin are of the most dreadful description. Many of these threatening's shall be brought against the people of God, not destructively, but chastisingly; yet, as I shall presently show you, on some occasions the children of God appear, as it were, to be destroyed, and the adversaries appear to escape punishment. I will give you examples of both these cases. I say that some of the threatening's of God which shall be brought against the adversaries destructively shall be brought against the Lord's people chastisingly, so that each one shall be led to say, "you have chastised me sore but he shall not stop there, he shall say something else, "you have not given me over unto death."

Now I will give you two circumstances in Jeremiah. In the twentieth chapter you have an account of Pashur, a prophet, opposing Jeremiah and contending for the abominable systems which were upheld and practiced among the Jews; and there is a threatening brought against this prophet, and you find part of the same threatening brought against the Lord's own people. We find the two threatening's walk side by side till they get to a certain distance, and then, when they arrive at that point, the one threatening goes on, and the other stops.

"And you, Pashur, and all that dwell in your house, shall go into captivity: and you shall come to Babylon, and there you shall die." Here is a solemn threatening of heaven against Pashur destructively. Now, then, the Lord said to his own people, "you shall go to Babylon, you shall go into captivity." Thus, the threatening's travel side by side. But now notice the solemn stop. "There will I deliver you, there will I redeem you." And therefore, it is, you see, that the Lord will make his people know what it is to be in such captivity to their sins, to be in such captivity to the flesh, to be in such captivity to the devil, to be in such captivity to the world, and to be so miserable in that state, as to fear that they shall be eternally lost, and to feel, as it were, willing if they had them,

to give ten thousand worlds to be delivered from this dreadful thralldom. For the threatening's of God seem to be against them; they fear that all is against them and are led to exclaim that their hope and their strength are perished from the Lord. By and by salvation comes instead of condemnation; redemption instead of subjugation; approbation instead of wrath; return from captivity instead of death therein. Then the mercy of the Lord appears wonderful. But take away this chastisement, take away this suffering, take away all that makes sin a burden, you take away the hatefulness of sin; and therefore, the Lord, I say, will bring the threatening's of his word against his people, the same threatening's as he will bring against the enemy, with this mighty difference, the one is for the destruction of the adversaries, the other for the chastisement of his people. The Lord's people may be brought apparently into the same circumstances as the adversaries, may sink apparently into the same troubles, but only to a certain extent. On the other hand, the adversaries will appear sometimes to escape, and the Lord treat his people as though they were the only persons on earth whom he hated, whom he despised, and was determined to destroy. Now I will bring you several circumstances to illustrate this point. First, here is a man of God sent to Bethel to prophecy against the golden calf; he did so faithfully, but he is decoyed by a false prophet. And for this reason, the Lord chastises his own prophet, but the false prophet, is not chastened. He lives in all the honor and splendor imaginable. Now, judging from appearances, it was much better to be the false prophet than the true, for the true one was cut off while the false one was spared. Yet who would not rather be the true prophet? Eli is chastened and cut off. The idolatrous Corinthians can go on worshipping their Bacchus and practicing all kinds of abominations; yet when the Lord's people are guilty of the same thing, many are sickly, and some fall asleep. We are thus judged of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world. So then "for me to live, is Christ." The Lord by this chastising work will bring abominations to light; he will make us feel with regard to these abominations, that they are thorns in our eyes, that they are goads in our sides, that they are something against which we cannot stand. We are obliged to loathe ourselves in our sight. And happy, thrice happy are the people thus favored; for however painful, it shall surely by and by become pleasant. Hence it is written, "Happy is the man whom God corrects." Therefore, despise you not the chastising of the Almighty. "For me to live is Christ." The Lord will take care to mortify, and crucify, and make us miserable in everything out of himself, that we may rest nowhere but in Christ Jesus the Lord. Oh! then how great is the mercy amidst all our infirmities to be able to say, that there is not one sin of any description for which our souls do not cry to him for the pardon, and the very annihilation of, in his own time. And sure, I am, that where this real misery is felt, the boundless riches of saving grace are the only remedy for that man. He feels that sin is a mighty plague; he feels that it is rooted in his heart, in his whole person; he feels that he is altogether lost and ruined, unclean and abominable, and that by sin.

I know not how it is with you; but I really sometimes wonder how the Lord can love us, how he can continue to show us mercy, how he can continue to watch over us for good and to abide in us. I sometimes wonder at this when I feel the abominations which exist in my own nature. But then I remember the precious blood of his dear Son, the precious righteousness of his dear Son, the everlasting covenant which he has formed. When he reveals these things and attracts our souls, and brings us to himself, how gladly do we run away from our captivity, how gladly do we surmount our abominations, how gladly do we embrace the Great Redeemer, how gladly do we acknowledge the sweet anointings of the Holy Ghost, and say, "O Lord, who is like unto you, that pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin?"

So then, one feature in this life is that it is a life of opposition to sin; and you know very well, where the opposition is to begin and where it is to end too. Where is that? say you. Why, in self. You may depend upon it, all the formal opposition you make is nothing. It is all very good in a national point of view, and in a moral point of view, but we want to come to this one question, that when it is a life of opposition to sin, it is a life of *heart opposition* to sin. It does not begin with asking you the question, "Is your mind great, is your mind mighty, is your heart expanded to embrace a knowledge of all the operations of the world?" No, it puts a question simpler and infinitely more important. "*Is your heart, right?*" That is the question. It does not ask you whether you have little knowledge or great love, little faith, or great faith. "*Is your heart, right?*" It is not a life of mere formality. It is our very souls that stand in opposition to the abominations that lurk within; and the following scripture is as clear to me as A B C; and all the infidelity of my nature, and all the infidel learning of the world shall never beat me out of this, that "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, so that I cannot do the things that I would," and as sin gets in my way I hate it. It gets in my way and will not let me see the face of my heavenly Father; it gets in my way and will not let me go to Christ; it gets in my way and will not let me prize spiritual things; it gets in my way and hinders me in my dearest desire, my best company, and my highest interest, so that I cannot do what I would. But we bless God, for all this there is a remedy, that the Lord God. omnipotent reigns, and that grace shall reign over this, and thus sin shall be continually opposed until it is taken out of the way, as to the guilt of it, and it shall also be taken away by and by as to the power of it. So then, "for me to live is Christ." There is every reason why I should like living near the Lord. There are so many advantages in living near the Lord, though the Lord only can enable us to live near, that I am quite sensible of the love, and salvation, and power of God, in order to our living in him and upon our inheritance. Well, then, "For me to live is Christ." This life is a life of opposition to sin.

Well, now, what was the Savior's life, what that of prophets and apostles, but a life of opposition to sin? What was the laborious life of Christ? opposition to sin. What was his atoning death? opposition to sin. What was the mighty work of the Holy Ghost in the apostles? opposition to sin. What has been the work of faith from that day to this and will be as long as there shall be a church on earth? opposition to sin. Yes, to be sure. Well, then, Christ is that with which we are free from sin. We have something to oppose sin with.

Is there death in sin? Christ is our life by which we shall overcome that death. Is there guilt in sin? Christ is our pardon to overcome that guilt. Is there uncleanness in sin? Christ is our sanctification by which we overcome that uncleanness. Is there darkness in sin? Christ is our light by which we overcome that darkness. Is there deception in sin? Christ is the truth by which we overcome that falsehood. Is there poverty in sin? Christ is the treasure by which we overcome that poverty. Is there, in a word, boundless and endless misery in sin? Christ is that unlimited and eternal mercy by which we overcome it. Therefore, the life we live is by the faith of the Son of God. "For me to live is Christ."

Secondly: Then, not only is it a life of opposition to sin by Christ Jesus, but *it is a life of present interest in God*. Now, how does the Lord make it a life of present interest in God? You remember how it was with the Jews. If they were pretty easy in their own circumstances, they did not care much about his word; therefore, they said it was not time to build the temple of the Lord. But if the Lord had stopped the bottles of heaven, if the Lord had stopped the fruits of the earth, if it

became manifest that they would have none of these things, the time came fast enough then, depend upon that. The Lord knows how to give a present interest. Let this come home to our feelings. The Lord brings his people into prison, takes hold of their consciences, and makes them feel that they are prisoners. Well, is it too soon to be delivered? No, poor creatures: their language is: "I want deliverance *now*" He makes them feel that they are lost: is it too soon to be saved? No; "I could wish that the day of salvation were *now*" He makes them feel that they are lepers: is it any too soon to be cleansed? "Wash me and I shall be clean." He makes them feel that they have nothing but filthy rags to cover them, and say, is it any too soon to be clothed in new raiment? "Lord, do you clothe me in the garments of salvation, cover me with the robe of righteousness." He brings them into a state of solitude, and makes the poor man think there is none like him: is it too soon to have fellowship with God? "No," says the man, "none too soon." And such as these come under the following language: Ruth said, "Let me *now* and glean, (not stop; let me *now* go and glean) in the field of him in whose sight I shall find grace." And Elijah said, "Let it be known *this* day that I am your servant;" let it be known *this* day. We know there is an appointed time; but I do not like too much contentedness in waiting. There was one of my converts (I say one of my, he was not one of God's), he said, "I am quite content to wait for the pardon of sin." I said, "Oh, that proves that you have not been born of God; if you had been, you would not be so contented to wait." I do not like too much contentment. This is one of the chief troubles of the child of God. The man who is born of God wonders that he can be as contented as he is.

The Lord makes these matters of present interest. Now the wicked cannot feel interested in these things; and the Lord says, "They that seek me early shall find me." Now all the Lord's people seek him as soon as they are born, that is, when they are born from above, not before. "When a man is born from above, there is a spiritual longing for spiritual things. The Lord begins to make us feel our interest in these things, by bringing us to feel our need of them. "For me to live is Christ." Now look at these two principles. We are by the Lord Jesus Christ living with God against sin, instead of living with sin against God; living with the Holy Ghost against the foul old serpent, instead of living in the scorpion folds of that old Leviathan; instead of living there, we are living with the ever blessed God. Oh, if I may use such a common place phrase, it is a glorious change of sides, it is an infinite mercy to be on the Lord's side. I do so like the language of the text because it is Spiritual. "For me to live is Christ." Our present interest in these things is by Christ Jesus. Now you do not want to put religion off; you are, on the contrary, afraid that it will put you off.

What a wonderful difference it makes! Some people say, "I cannot think how you can like so much religion." They know not that this is like saying, "I cannot think how a man in prison would like to be delivered. I cannot think how a sick man would like to be healed. I cannot think how an insane man would like to be cured. I cannot think how a man in trouble would like to be relieved." But they, poor creatures, cannot enter into these things. "But for me to live is Christ."

Not only present opposition to sin, and present interest, but preeminent interest. Now, look at the words "all in all" and "fulness," applied to God, to Christ, and to the people of God, and just look at the preeminence given to the Lord's people in this matter. Now, Christ is said to be "all and in all," because nothing is done without him. God is said to be "all and in all." Christ, being God, is not in that character excluded, but included, and that God ultimately would be all and in all.

The fulness of God is in Christ Jesus; and the Lord's people are called the fullness of Christ in the second chapter of Ephesians.

Now, if you ask what is that pre-eminent, that special and peculiar interest which God our Father has in this world, and indeed anywhere, we say it is his people in Christ Jesus; all other things are minor considerations. If you ask what the Redeemer's preeminent interest is, what was his preeminent object in coming to this world, and what is still his preeminent object, we will say, the eternal glory of those people who are the children of the everlasting Father, whom he is not ashamed to call brethren. If you ask what is the preeminent object of the Holy Ghost in all his teachings; why, it is to unfold the realities of an invisible and eternal world, to glorify the dear Redeemer, to bring into our hearts the eternal love of God, and to make us feel, that while we have mortal bodies we have immortal souls.

If you ask what our object is, when in our right minds, the answer is, in the text, that for us to live is Christ. While I live, what do I wish to think of? Christ. What do I wish to be predominant in my desires? Christ. Upon what object do I wish my affections to be most ardently fixed? Christ. About what do I wish to be most concerned? Christ. With whom do I wish to be most in company? Christ. Therefore, you will find that there are two characters denoting preeminence given to Christ, and to his people. He is called "firstborn;" so are they. The firstborn is a name of preeminence to denote their heirship, and to denote their preeminence and dignity; that there are no creatures honored as these are. Then the Lord Jesus Christ is also called, the "first fruits of them that sleep;" heirs of God, kings, and priests to God, to be conformed to the Redeemer's image. Why, what are all other interests compared to this? Well might the man of God pour contempt upon all human intrusions into these things. Why, as a minister of God, I feel that I stand upon that which will bear me up, that which will never leave me, that which will aggrandize me when time, and the things thereof, shall be no more. It is a great interest which we have in God. Are we not loved with great love? are we not taken up into great dignity? are we not saved with great mercy? Were we not redeemed at a great price? were we not called by a great power? and have we not great mercies? "For me to live is Christ" a life of opposition to sin, a life of present interest in Christ, a life of permanent interest in Christ. He thus manifests the love of his heart, brings us into fellowship with himself. What a glorious interest we have in God! I am unhappy if I do not feel this interest every day. Here is election going through the world; I want to walk with it. Here is predestination going through the world; I want to walk with it. Here is redemption travelling through the world and gathering up its objects; I want to feel its emancipating power. Here is the Holy Ghost travelling through the world; I want to feel my interest in his quickening power. Here is God passing through the world, and looking here and there, and gathering up here and there an object; and the question arises, whether we are taken by him or cast away. God will never cast away his people. These things are going on, and we want to feel that we are going on with them. Where is predestination going? To heaven. Where is election going? To heaven. Where is justification going? To heaven. Where are his people going? To heaven, for them to live is Christ. It is a glorious interest. Bless the Lord for ever and ever, for giving us to know his name.

Not only is it a present interest and preeminent interest, an interest which surpasses all others, but it is also a permanent and eternal interest; and on the ground of the eternity of this interest, is founded the latter part of the language of our text, "For me to die is gain." Let the emphasis rest upon the word "me." "For me to die is gain." But for that man who knows not the Lord, for that

man to die is loss; he loses his all. Be he prince or noble, be the person male or female, old or young, foolish, or wise, obscure or popular, when the man dies, he has lost his all. Therefore, the Savior might well say, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?" The Lord God Almighty, of his great mercy, make us taste more and more of his love, for really other things are little and trivial when they are set side by side with him.

Now let us take a four-fold view of this gain. In the first place, we shall gain superior endearments. We desire to be thankful, as I often tell you, for the natural ties and natural endearments which we have in this world. They are great mitigators of our trouble in a natural point of view, and we desire to be thankful for them. I really prize human friendship when I meet with it even in a man who does not know the Lord, so that he is not an active persecutor of the truth; if the man be friendly, I like that friendship. In this world we form one great family, and nature necessarily sympathizes with itself, and sure I am that those who know the Lord will not be lessened by their knowledge of the Lord in their attachments but will be increased in those respects. Yet when we compare these natural ties and endearments with those ties and endearments which are to be realized on the other side of the river, we may well feel willing to depart without any regret, for it will be gain. Oh! the endearment we shall gain in the infinite love of our God, and the society of the spirits of just men made perfect. The immortal company of angels and prophets to whom we now feel a union, apostles and martyrs whom we now love, we shall mingle with them there, and dwell with expanded minds in the ever rolling and never-ending endearments of eternity, infinitely surpassing all others. Secondly, you see how strictly the words apply to the death of Christ. Now we are under a great deal of subjugation in this world, in a civil point of view, and in a domestic point of view. But when we die, we shall gain complete dominion; all our foes shall be dead as a stone, and not one sin shall ever move its tongue against one of us.

The next thing we shall gain is fellowship with God. No more solitude, no more walking alone. We have but little of this now. Here is one of the great privileges of preaching the everlasting gospel. Oh! when a sermon brings you into fellowship with God, it has done great things for you; and if a minister be the means of this, and you are not ready to hide his weakness, (I do not mean that you should sanction ungodliness, but if a minister be the means of bringing you into fellowship with God, even though it be only for a few moments, and you make it your business to get hold of a word that can be said to his prejudice), it is to your lasting disgrace. There are two or three ministers whom I have heard with power, and I have had fellowship with God in hearing them, and although I have heard them spoken against, I am not thereby moved, though other people speak of their weaknesses it is not for me to join with them in so doing. I know that they are men of God with whom I shall have fellowship forever.

For me to die, then, is gain. We shall gain superior endearments; we shall gain an entrance into heaven; we shall gain full possession of eternal glory. Now, then, look at the way in which we come to this. Christ Jesus had endearments in this world, natural endearments. He loved, even as man, Lazarus and Martha and Mary, and many more, no doubt. He wept as man over the Jewish nation, and most pathetically. In a word, he had all the sinless sympathies and perfections of human nature, and therefore, there was something pleasing to him as man, in the humble and little services of those who were around him and loved him. Yet when he died all these sympathies ceased in a way, perhaps, which I cannot explain. When he rose from the dead it was utterly impossible for

human woe to touch him. No more weeping at the grave of Lazarus, no more travelling and becoming weary, he rises out of these into endearments infinitely beyond them.

But when he accomplished this great work, he was in solitude no more. So, you and I, by this, enter into fellowship. Then if you come to possessions, the Redeemer travelled through the world as having no where to lay his head. Now such are his possessions that he is comforted on every side. Therefore “for me to live is Christ, and to die is infinite and eternal gain.”

I cannot but drop one word more relative to this subject. Now as our interest is eternal, and must go on, nothing can stop it, yet it is one thing to speak of this in the spirit of presumption, and another thing to speak of it in the spirit of filial fear and real love to God. Hence how awfully have the apostle’s words in this epistle been misrepresented, where, in speaking of the erroneous systems and bad motives, he says, “Some preach Christ even of envy, hoping to add affliction to my bonds.” What then? “Much in every way. Whether in reality or pretense, Christ is preached, and I do rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” Oh! the awful abuse of these words. Some say, “You should not oppose false systems, for Paul said, that as long as Christ was preached, he would therein rejoice.” Then, if this interpretation be true, we must put the Bible aside, we certainly must, if this interpretation be true. What becomes of all the opposition which prophets from age to age brought against false systems? If Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached by false doctrines, what becomes of the Savior’s ministry, which throughout tended to overturn the systems setup against the eternal Sovereignty, and to establish his own name? What becomes of the apostle’s epistle to the Galatians, wherein he tells us he would that those were cut off who troubled them with false doctrine? What becomes of his declaration, that they are false apostles, ministers of Satan? What, then, *does* the apostle mean? We cannot rejoice in these things. Again, if there is a man in this place who contends that the apostle rejoiced in false doctrine, so that Christ was preached, I reply, you make the apostle rejoice in sin; and if he rejoices in one sin, he may rejoice in another. That is not the apostle’s meaning. His meaning is this: “These men may preach Christ out of envy, they may do this, or do that, or do the other, whether in the sanctuary or in the world, but what then? Christ is preached by the Holy Ghost in opposition to all these damnable systems, and I will therefore rejoice; not rejoice that men preach lies about Christ, not rejoice that they deny the sovereignty of God, not rejoice that they derogate from his person, but rejoice that they belong to the family of the Most High.” I rejoice that amidst all these abominations the Holy Ghost is preaching Christ to the souls of his people. God has begun a good work, which shall go on, and not only go on, but make all these abominable systems subservient to his great design. He rejoiced not in the preaching of these abominable systems, but that God makes all things work together for good. Oh! do not tell me that the apostle rejoiced in sin.

There cannot be any letting go where the work is real. So, then, “For me to live is Christ.” The apostle, then, rejoiced that Christ was preached by the Holy Ghost, and that none, not all these false systems put together should counteract Jehovah’s designs, for his work should go on, Israel should prevail, for all Israel should be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and should not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end.

Thus, then, in simplicity, I can truly say in sincerity, and I can truly say from experience, I have talked to you a little concerning Jesus Christ being our life; our life in opposition to sin, he would

keep us here steadfastly; our life of interest in God, he would keep us here preciousy; our life of permanent interest in God, he would keep us here unceasingly; our eternal life, by which we gain. The Lord keep us herein and enable us to glorify his dear name. Amen