
**“A Christ Centered Perspective”
(Philippians 1:18b-30)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

Perspective really does change everything doesn't it? Having the right perspective physically may give the amateur photographer the perfect shot. If she weren't situated in the right place, in the right angle, with the right lighting, without that perspective the shot would be lost.

Perspective changes everything in relationships. To understand all the variables that might be affecting what the other person is saying makes all the difference. Is he speaking from the pain of a past experience? Is he physically tired causing him to be grumpy and irritable? Does she have a hidden agenda? Do you know him to be generally manipulative or sincere? What's his communication style? And so on... When you have those elements of perspective in a relationship it can make the difference between agreeing and misunderstanding. Perspective is very important.

The same thing can be said about our lives, especially our lives as Christians. From what perspective are we approaching the way we live out our lives? I think generally it can fall into two categories. When it comes to living or life, it's be happy. Whatever it takes, be happy. Whether the means to happiness is through riches or through drugs and drink or through people or through sex or through personal accomplishment, I think that's the basic goal of people in this life.

And when it comes to death, it's the great unknown. It's to be avoided at all costs. It doesn't matter how many doctors or pills or treatments I have to get, avoid death. Delay death.

And aren't those two things, life and death, the two most important things in our lives? Aren't these two things the areas in which we have the most questions? Questions like, why am I here, why am I alive? What's my purpose in this life? How am I to live this life? And of course that huge question, "what happens when I die?" Aren't these the most important questions?

The bible gives us the ultimate answers to these ultimate questions. And the problem is that most people and many Christians don't know or have forgotten what those answers are. So what is the Christian's perspective on these questions supposed to be? In a nutshell, our perspective in life and in death must be Christ-centered. Let's look at today's scripture.

ESV Philippians 1:18 – 30 ^{18b} Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. ²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of

the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Paul is in a very precarious situation as he writes this letter to the Philippians. He began being under house arrest which was still prison, but not too bad of a set up. But during the course of his two year imprisonment he moved from house arrest to a Roman prison cell. And he's there not because of some terrible crime, but rather because of the false accusations of his fellow countrymen, who wanted to put a stop to him as a Christian missionary. And it's from the confines of dark, dirty, pest infested, filled with the stench of human everything that he writes what people for centuries have called the letter of joy.

That's the perspective, the situation from which Paul is writing. He she be outraged, embittered, angry. All of those expressions we would all understand, but Paul's perspective is not any one of those things. The expression you find over and over, again and again, in every chapter of this short letter is JOY. He says it at the beginning of this section we just read. He says,

Yes, and I will rejoice,

Why or how is he able to say that? Perspective. How do you and I get a hold of a perspective that even if darkness follows us the rest of our days, if jobs are lost, when we experience poverty and wealth, health and sickness, births and deaths, friendships and loneliness, marriage and divorce, when we experience all of these great and terrible moments in life...how do we say, "Yes, and I will rejoice!"?

First of all there is no way we can humanly do that. It's not in us. It's impossible by our own will to have that type of perspective when facing personal darkness. We can't muster that up by ourselves. In order for this perspective, this joy, to come from within us, it has to first come from without us. What do I mean by that?

There's a word that appears repeatedly throughout this passage. Paul can hardly write another sentence without including this word. It's repeated seven times explicitly and at least another three or four times implicitly. What word is that? CHRIST. The key to perspective in life and in death is not a way of life, it's not found in a Tony Robbins seminar, it isn't found within myself, it's not found on the self-help section of Chapters. Perspective is found in a person. It is found in Jesus Christ. So that's what I mean that this perspective must first come from without. It must first come from encountering personally in our deepest being, the person Jesus Christ. We get introduced to him. We understand that we've been living life as rebels against him. We repent and turn from our sins. We accept and believe that Jesus Christ died on a Roman cross to purchase the forgiveness of the sins of the world and rose from the dead. And then we ask him to enter our hearts and become our Lord and leader.

It's only when we meet Jesus like this that we can have this perspective of joy come out from *within* our hearts.

So there are two Christ-centered perspectives that Paul gives in this passage.

Perspective #1: Living is always good because to live is to live for Christ by serving him.

There are different ways to live. Many people live for themselves. They live their lives from birth to death and everything in between for themselves. It's for their success, for their pleasure, and for their happiness that they live. Anything that impedes that goal, get rid of. Anything that enhances that goal, get more of. And that's the way many people live out their existence. We call people like that self-centered.

A few years ago Kobe Bryant had a commercial and the tag line of the commercial was "believe in yourself." Is that not the stupidest and most anti-God and idolatrous statement? I mean think about it...believe in what about yourself? Your finite strength? Believe in your finite wisdom and intelligence? Believe in your own personal standards of morality? Human history has known far too many murderous dictators who lived by that mantra. Believe me, you don't want to believe in yourself. You're not that great. And you can do a lot better than yourself.

Think about it...believe in finite immoral little ole me? Or believe in infinite, morally pure and just and loving God? So I don't think living for yourself is the way to go.

Some people live for others. All of their lives they live to please people. They make sure they don't offend anyone. They make sure all the right words are said. They avoid conflict at all costs. Or they'll take on a martyr complex, place themselves in a position of self sacrifice and suffering, getting a twisted form of satisfaction in doing so.

Others is just another one of you. And we already found out that "you" aren't that great.

So how do we live? We live for Christ. That is the way to live. Why? Because Christ is the creator. And the creator decides the purpose for his creation. The inventor, designer, builder of the car decides what the car will be used for. This one for moving a family. This one for economy. This one for speed. The car doesn't say that. The Hyundai Accent, no matter how much he wants to be built for speed...it just ain't going to happen. The Smart Car, no matter how much it wants to be a people mover for a family of five...too bad. So God being our creator, he gets to decide for what purpose we are to live. And his purpose is that we live for him and for his purposes. So what are those purposes?

Paul says it in several ways throughout this passage.

- by living I get to honor Christ in my body. The body is the arena in which, through which I honor Christ. Romans 12:1 says similar words, doesn't it? (20)

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

- to live is Christ (21)
- to live means I get to be a part of producing fruitful labor for Jesus. (22, 24-25)
- I get to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. (27)
- I get to suffer for the sake of the gospel of Christ. (29-30)

You are here on the earth, living at this time in history, born into a particular race, from a particular family, of a particular gender, things we had no control over, by the way...and living in this

city...with this job...with this economic standing...with these particular gifts and talents for a singular purpose! To honor Christ by serving others, particularly in sharing and advancing the gospel message that God loves sinners. Accept it, embrace it. If you reject it, all you're doing is fighting against the will and purpose of Almighty God.

That's the perspective that will allow us to go through any trial with joy. That's the only perspective that will allow us to live a fulfilling and purposeful life while we live.

Perspective #2: Dying is always good because to die means I get to be with Christ.

- Not only living but dying is also a means to honor Christ (20)
 - o seeing various folks on their deathbeds.
- to die is gain (21)
- dying is the longing of a Christian's heart (24) and is the better choice because we get to be with Jesus.
 - o One of the greatest words spoken by Jesus was when he was hanging on the cross, looking over at a criminal that was also being executed. And the criminal said to Jesus, "Jesus remember me when you enter your kingdom." And do you remember how Jesus responds? "Today, you will be with ME in paradise." What is the most powerful word in that sentence? Every word packs a wallop. "Today", "You", "Paradise". But perhaps the most powerful word is ME. That's what's going to make paradise paradise. That's what's going to make living and dying worth it.

One author points out something really interesting about heaven. "It is interesting that the New Testament nowhere speaks of believers going 'to heaven' when they die. Instead, they go to be 'with Christ'. (Phi. 1:23)

Paul is not some melancholy escapist saying, "Life is so tough. Prison sucks. Ohhh, I just want to die." And I know there are times we feel that way, when we think death must be better than life. But that was not Paul's motivation for death. Paul's motivation for death was not escape, but gain. What's he going to gain if he dies? What's it going to be that you and I gain when we die? What is it that will make going to heaven so wonderful? Listen to the words of Paul, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."

The longing of his heart, the deepest desire of his being is to depart. Living is good. I get to work for Jesus. But dying is better. Then I get to be with Christ...which is better by far!

Why is being with Christ better...by far...than living? I mean, is that how we think? How many minutes of the year are we thinking that? How often do we dream of dying, not the falling off a building dream, but the dream that longs and aches to die so we could be with Christ?

Our ultimate life purpose, our fulfillment is not found in some accomplishment or some task to be completed or some destination to arrive at. Our purpose, our fulfillment is found in a relationship. Think of it logically for a second. What is it that really gives us the most fulfillment in life. It's not dollar signs, it's not computers or clothes or things or grades, it's people. It's relationships. So in this life, if it's human relationships that are most meaningful, doesn't it make sense to believe that the most important thing in the entire universe is our eternal relationship with God, with Christ?

Let me read some verses that talk about heaven and our relationship with Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:12 ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

John 14:3 ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

John 17:24 ²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

1 John 3:2 ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Friends, even in dying, it's all about Jesus. That's to be our perspective.

Conclusion:

Guess what. *As a Christian we can't lose. We are in a win-win situation.* Listen to these verses that speak about this. Romans 8:31 -- "If God is for us, who can be against us." Romans 8:37 -- "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us." 1 Corinthians 15:57 -- "But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." If you're a Christian, you can't lose. It's because of Christ that we can have this perspective that whether we go on living or die, we can rejoice.