

# THE MARKS OF THE GREAT CHRISTIAN BELIEVER PHILIPPIANS 01:20–26

## *Introduction*

If a man has ever lived a life of commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ, it was Paul. Remember, he was in prison facing a capital crime with his deliverance looking almost hopeless. Death was staring him in the face. This passage is one of the great passages of Scripture. Many believers have adopted verse 21 as their life verse. Many have committed their lives to pursue either verse twenty or twenty-one. This is the personal testimony of Paul: the marks of the great Christian believer.

- I. One great expectation and hope: to exalt Christ in his body (v. 20).
- II. One great commitment in life and death: Christ (v. 21).
- III. One great dilemma: to live or to depart to be with Christ (vv. 22-23).
- IV. One great willingness: to serve sacrificially (vv. 24-26).

## ***I. Philippians 01:20 Believer's Expectation and Hope***

The great Christian believer has only one great expectation and hope — to exalt Christ in his body.

1. Note the words *eagerly expect* (apokaradokian). It means to gaze into the distance with the head erect and outstretched just like a watchman on a tower. It is aiming one's attention at an object with concentration, eagerness and intensity. It is turning the eyes away from everything else and focusing upon one object and one object alone. It is total concentration upon a person's desire.
  2. Note what Paul's expectation and hope was. Remember Paul was in prison being charged with a capital crime which carried with it the penalty of death. The one hope of most prisoners would be release from prison or else to have the death penalty reduced to a lesser punishment. But note Paul's "eager expectation and hope": to exalt Christ in his body. Paul's mind was not upon his terrible plight and circumstances; it was upon Christ — upon exalting Christ in his body. As a prisoner he wanted to guard his body from...
    - wondering and questioning God
    - becoming discouraged and depressed
    - becoming complacent and lethargic
    - becoming inactive and undisciplined
    - denying and turning away from God
    - reacting and cursing God
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Paul knew the weakness of the human body, how it tended toward doubt, questioning, self-centredness, pride, boasting, self-satisfaction, indulgence, extravagance, habit, lethargy, complacency, laziness, enslavement, bondage and neglecting and ignoring God. Since his conversion, Paul had totally committed himself to exalting Christ. And there was only one place where Christ could be *exalted and seen*, that was in his body. The only place that men can see Jesus Christ living is in the body or life of a person. Jesus Christ was no longer on the earth; therefore, He could not be seen unless Paul and others allowed Christ to magnify Himself through their bodies. Paul knew this; therefore, he gave his body to Jesus Christ.

3. Note the reference to “by life or by death.” Paul was facing death. He did not know if he was going to die or continue living. If he was to be executed, he wanted to be as faithful as ever and to exalt Christ in death. If he was to be declared innocent and set free, he wanted to continue to exalt Christ in his body.
4. Note why Paul wanted Christ to be exalted in his body: that he might not be ashamed in anything. Paul knew that he was going to face the same thing that every believer is to face: the judgment seat of Christ. He knew that everyone of us has to give an account for what we have done with our bodies while on earth. In fact, Lehman Strauss points out that it had been only about four years earlier that Paul had written the piercing words (*Devotional Studies in Philippians*, p. 81):

**2 Cor 5:10** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

When believers face Christ in judgment, the experience will not necessarily be a delightful one.

=> There will be some believers who will be ashamed.

**1 John 2:28** *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

=> There will be some believers who will suffer loss and look like a burned out building.

**1 Cor 3:13-15** *His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

This is what Paul meant: he did not want to be ashamed when he stood before Christ. He loved Christ with all of his heart, for Christ had done so much for him. Therefore, his one expectation and hope was for Christ to be exalted in his body. He wanted Christ to be honoured both in his life and in his death. Above all, he did not want to be ashamed when he stood before his wonderful Lord. (See notes and *Body*, Rom. 12:1.)

**Luke 9:23-24** Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

**Rom 6:13** Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

**Rom 12:1-2** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**1 Cor 6:19-20** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

## II. **Philippians 01:21 Believer’s Purpose in Life**

The great Christian believer has one great commitment in life and death — Jesus Christ. Paul declares two phenomenal statements:

1. First, “To me to live is Christ.” What did he mean by this? He meant at least five things.
  - a. He presented his body as a living sacrifice to Jesus Christ.

**Rom 12:1** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

- b. He struggled to yield the parts of his body — every part of his body — to Christ as a tool for righteousness.

**Rom 6:13** Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

- c. He struggled to control his mind — to control every thought and to focus every thought upon Jesus Christ and the great virtues of life.

**2 Cor 10:5** We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

**Phil 4:8** Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

- d. He committed himself to work for love and justice within all of society.

**Mat 7:12** “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

**Mat 22:39** “*And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”*

- e. He gave his life — every moment of it — to reach and minister to as many people as possible during his journey upon earth.

**John 20:21** *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

**Mat 20:28** “*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

**Luke 19:10** “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*”

**Acts 1:8** “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

**Thought 1.** What does life mean to you? Why are you living? What is your great purpose in life?

- => Are you living for money and possessions (clothes, houses, cars, property)? If so, what do you do in a few years when you die — if you escape accident or disease? What do you do if you lose it? When that day comes — and it is coming, there is nothing in heaven or earth that can stop it — if you have lived for money, what good will it do you?
- => Are you living for comfort (a good job, a nice place to live, plenty to eat and enough money to do what you desire now and at retirement)?
- => If so, what happens when disease, accident, tragedy strikes or old age comes? And one or the other is coming. It cannot be stopped. If you have lived for comfort, what good will it do you?
- => Are you living for a position? If so, what do you do when you are edged out, removed, demoted, transferred, bypassed, face disease or accident? What good will position do you?
- => Are you living for family? If so, what do you do when the family has transferred, moved away, or when the various family members die? And it happens to every one of us. What good will family do you when you face Christ?
- => Are you living for recognition, honour, popularity, recreation, gratification, sensuality — whatever? What do you do when you face the crises of life and then in the end come face to face with death? At that moment if not before, what good will anything on this earth do you?

2. This brings us to the second point of Paul. He declares “to die is gain.” He knew better than to base his life upon these things. He knew that everything upon earth was aging and passing away including man himself. Therefore, Paul reached out for a Saviour, a Person who could save him and give him an eternal world that would never

age or pass away. This is the reason he grabbed hold of Christ. Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son whom God sent into the world to reveal the truth of another world to us, a world that is permanent and that has no corruption — no aging — no passing away in it. Therefore, Paul grabbed hold of Christ when he found out...

- that Christ saved men from sin, death and condemnation.
- that Christ made it possible for men to live forever with God in a new heavens and earth.

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

**Rom 14:8** *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

**2 Cor 4:11** *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

**Gal 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

**Phil 1:21** *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

**Heb 11:13** *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.*

**2 Pet 3:13-14** *But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

**1 John 3:14** *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

**Rev 21:1** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

### III. **Philippians 01:22–23** *Believer's Dilemma*

The great Christian believer has one great dilemma — to live or to depart and be with Christ. The word *depart* (anulusai) is descriptive. It has a twofold meaning that speaks to the believer's heart.

1. It means to break up; to loosen as in breaking camp and loosening the ropes of the tent. It is the picture of breaking loose; packing up; and moving on to a new location.



The same picture is true of the believer when he *departs* this life. He is not ceasing to exist; he is simply breaking loose and moving on to a new camp-site, in fact, a perfect camp-site.

2. It means to loosen the moorings of a ship, weigh anchor, and set sail for another port. Again, the believer does not cease to exist, he simply loosens the moorings of this life, pulls the anchor up, and sets sail for God's eternal presence.

Paul says that he is caught between two great desires:

=> One desire is to live a life of fruitful service for the Lord Jesus Christ.

=> The other desire is to depart and go on to be with Christ which is far better.

The natural mind wonders and questions how a person in his right mind could ever want to go ahead and die. The reason is simply answered: the genuine believer does not die; he never tastes death. He is transferred into the presence of Christ. Immediately — quicker than the blinking of an eye — the believer is transported into the perfect world of God which is named heaven. The believer is perfected — never again to experience pain, suffering, sin, corruption, infirmity, weakness, deformity, disappointment, fear, loss or death. He will be perfected to work for Christ throughout the new heavens and earth, and he will serve and worship Christ for ever and ever. The promises of God to the believer are phenomenal: they just explode the human mind. It is for this reason that the believer can declare: "To die is gain."

=> There is the promise of never dying and of living forever with Christ.

**John 3:16** *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

**John 5:24** *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*

**2 Tim 1:10** *But it [God's grace] has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

=> There is the promise that is most dear to the heart of every faithful believer, the promise of being with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself forever and ever.

**John 14:2-3** *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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."*

**2 Cor 5:8** *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

**1 Th 4:16-17** *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the*

*dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

⇒ There is the promise of receiving a glorious body just like our Lord's glorious body.

**1 Cor 15:50-53** *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*

**Phil 3:21** *Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

**Col 3:4** *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

**Mat 13:43** *“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”*

⇒ There is the promise of being made an heir of God.

**Rom 8:16-17** *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

⇒ There is the promise of ruling and reigning with Christ forever and ever.

**Mat 25:23** *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’”*

**Rev 22:5** *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

Promise after promise could be listed, and reason after reason could be given as to why the faithful believer sometimes aches to go on to be with the Lord. As Barclay so aptly says, it will be a glorious day of *union and reunion* — a glorious day of union with our wonderful Lord and a glorious day of reunion with all our loved ones who have gone on ahead of us (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 34). The only word that can adequately express all that God has prepared for us who know Him is the word that is the same in all human languages: *Hallelujah!*

**Mat 24:44** *“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

**Mark 13:35** “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.”

**Luke 12:35-36** “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.”

#### **IV. *Philippians 01:24–26 Believer’s Ministry: To Serve Sacrificially***

The great Christian believer has one great willingness — to serve sacrificially. This is an interesting statement by Paul. Sitting there in prison waiting for the trial which would determine whether he lived or died, something happened to Paul. Either through thinking about the needs that existed in the world and in the churches, or through some sense from the Holy Spirit, Paul became convinced that he would be found innocent of the false charges and released from prison. But note why: it was not for his sake and enjoyment of life, but so that he could continue to minister.

The point to see is Paul’s heart — how it longed to reach people for Christ and to meet the needs of a world that reels under the weight of desperation.

**Rom 14:19** *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

**Rom 15:2** *Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.*

**Eph 4:11-12** *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. ■*