



Daily Devotionals

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PHILIPPIANS 1:19-26 CHOOSING THE BEST

Written by Rev. Dr. Charles D. (Chuck) Alley, Ph.D., Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Va.

¹⁹ For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted 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 go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

The goal of every believer is to spend an eternity with Jesus in the New Jerusalem, the consummated Kingdom of God. So St. Paul rightly says that to die is gain, for that eternal bliss is only available to human beings after they experience the resurrection from the dead. However, this way of thinking is just another manifestation of our sinful nature. After all, to die in order to be with Jesus is the height of selfishness. It does not take into consideration one's neighbors and family. In fact, it does not even regard the will and plan of God. The only thought is to secure the individual's safe exit from this world and the eternal peace of the kingdom. To take any path but the one laid out by God is to walk away from God and thereby jeopardize the very eternal peace that is the object of one's choice.

What is necessary for all believers is to be obedient to God. That obedience in the present circumstances is to "remain in the body." By so doing, we are available to make God known in the world and we are accessible to our neighbors – both those in the Church and those who have yet to come to faith.

Remember the temptations that Satan offered to Jesus in the wilderness after the latter's baptism? In each case, the devil was suggesting that Jesus definitively demonstrate who he really is right at that moment instead of waiting on the proper timing of the Father. But had Jesus succumbed to the temptation he would not have been the Savior of the world. But Jesus chose the best – according to the will of the Father and for saving those who believe. St. Paul chose the best – he

was obedient to God and provided for the growth of two millennia of believers into the joy of Jesus. To choose obedience to God is to choose the best.

Lord Jesus, strengthen me so that I might resist my impatience and desire to find an easier way. May my thoughts and actions always be directed by my desire to follow your will and by a loving concern for my neighbors. Prevent me from worshiping my life – temporal or eternal. Help me to only worship you. Amen.

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