

THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS: LIVE FOR CHRIST

1 ¹²Now I want you to know, brothers, that the things that have happened to me have [actually] resulted in the advancement of the gospel. ¹³It has become evident to the whole Praetorian guard and to everyone else that I am a prisoner for Christ. ¹⁴Furthermore, due to my imprisonment, many of the brothers have become much more confident in the Lord, taking it upon themselves to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵Some are preaching Christ out of envy and for the sake of strife, but others [are preaching] with good will. ¹⁶The latter are doing so out of love, knowing that I am standing [trial] for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷But the former are proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition, not with a pure motive; [they are seeking] to stir up trouble for me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What about all this? My only concern is that in every way, whether from false motives or in sincerity, Christ is being preached—and in this I rejoice.

Furthermore, I will also rejoice ¹⁹because I know that, through your prayers and the help provided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of all this will be my deliverance. ²⁰This is in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death—²¹because for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²But if I continue to live in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me, so I do not know what I shall choose. ²³I am torn between the two. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but for your sake it is more necessary for me to remain in the body. ²⁵Being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue to remain with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that by me—[that is,] through my presence with you again—your confidence in Christ Jesus will abound. (Phil. 1:12-26)

Introduction

I paged through my high school yearbook one day, glancing at the senior pictures of my classmates and taking note of their ambitions. Let me share with you some of the ambitions to which my classmates aspired:

- Bob wanted to become an engineer
- Dave wanted to become an accountant
- Ken wanted to become a teacher
- Tim wanted to become a psychoanalyst
- Pete wanted to become a neurosurgeon
- Cathy wanted to become a fashion designer
- Robert wanted to become a Marine Corps drill instructor
- Rich wanted to become a politician
- Henry wanted to make money
- Lois had very little ambition
- Grace's ambition was to understand
- Dan's ambition was fulfillment

Did they achieve their goals? Did they attain success?

I was paging through another book and came across two fascinating life histories. The one was that of a true “Renaissance Man;” a builder, a landscaper, a connoisseur of fine music, a man who had it all; and yet, this was his testimony:

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of trees in them. ⁶I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. ⁷I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. ⁸I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasures of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. ⁹I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. ¹¹Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had labored to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (Eccl. 2:4-11)

The other was that of a university-educated scholar who had lost his standing in his academic community and now found himself a political prisoner, this is his testimony:

I know that, through your prayers and the help provided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of all this will be my deliverance. ²⁰This is in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death—²¹because for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:19-21)

As we examine this next passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, let us consider the one true formula for success: A Life Lived for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Live for Christ, ...and You Will Never be Disappointed (vs. 12-21)

In verse 20 the Apostle Paul speaks of his confident hope and expectation: *“in no circumstance will I be put to shame.”* The Greek term (αἰσχύνομαι) translated, “put to shame,” can also be rendered, “to be disappointed.” The main idea conveyed by this word is that of being confounded, defeated, or reduced to a state of humiliation and ruin. But Paul is confident that in the ultimate sense, such shall never happen to him. He has the same confidence as that expressed by the Psalmist: *“To you, O Jehovah, I lift up my soul; ²in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. ³No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame”* (Psl. 25:1-3a.)

Paul goes on to explain the positive aspect of his confident expectation: *“Christ will be exalted in my body.”* Note that his hope is not that he personally shall be honored, but rather that **Christ** shall be honored, indeed, exalted in him.

Consider the dimensions of this conviction: How far does it reach? What does it include? Nothing less than all the circumstances and events of life—whatever happens: *“in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”* (Phil. 1:20.)

The apostle’s conviction is reinforced by past episodes in his life. In verses 12-14 he relates how his imprisonment, intended to silence the gospel, has actually resulted in a greater propagation of the gospel. By virtue of Paul’s testimony in prison the gospel is reaching a new audience, the Praetorian Guard (a contingent of elite Roman soldiers.) By virtue of Paul’s faithful witness even as a prisoner, more Christians are taking courage to speak out for Christ, so now Paul’s witness is multiplied by that of the Roman Christians. In verses 15-18 Paul relates that even though there are those who are preaching the gospel from ulterior motives—hoping to incite Roman opposition against Paul by publicly proclaiming that Paul is preaching that Jesus, not Caesar, is the true Lord over all—they are nevertheless preaching the gospel and thus inadvertently helping to advance the cause of Christ despite their true intentions.

Paul’s conviction is rooted in his commitment to Christ; his conviction is *“in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death—²¹because for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil. 1:20-21.) Christ is the supreme object of the Apostle Paul’s desire. Is He also the supreme object of our desire? Consider the Psalmist’s testimony: *“Whom have I in heaven [except you]? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you”* (Psl. 73:25.) When the Psalmist writes of God, *“there is none upon earth that I desire besides you,”* he is testifying that there is no one on a par with the Lord; no one holds an equal status with the LORD. Consider, too, his testimony in Psalm 63, *“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water ... ³... your love is better than life, my lips will praise you”* (Psl. 63:1,3.)

Not only is Christ is the supreme object of the apostle Paul’s desire, He is also the supreme objection of his devotion. Is He also the supreme object of our devotion? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:15, *“[Christ] died for all, so that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and rose again.”*

Because Christ is the supreme object of the Apostle Paul’s life, he can declare, *“for me to die is gain.”* He can confidently make this assertion, because he knows that, as a Christian, death will bring him into a deeper, purer, more direct and undistracted communion with Christ. Are we able to make the same testimony

and to do so for the same reason? Can we testify with the Psalmist: *“Oh send out your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. ⁴Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy”* (Psl. 43:3-4)?

Live for Christ, and you will never be disappointed in the ultimate and eternal sense:

But as for me, I look to Jehovah, I wait in hope for God my Savior; my God will hear me. ⁸Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, Jehovah will be my light. ⁹... He will bring me out into the light; I will see his justice. (Mic. 7:7-9)

II. Live for Christ, ...by Accepting His Will for His Sake (vs. 22-26)

Consider the Apostle Paul’s present circumstances: he is in prison at Rome waiting the day of his trial. He will soon stand before Caesar and the decision shall be made as to whether he will be released or executed.

Now consider the apostle’s desire: *“I have the desire to depart and be with Christ; for that is very far better”* (vs. 23.) Such is his desire because he has confidence in what awaits him as a Christian, together with the Psalmist he can declare, *“In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore”* (Psl. 16:11.) He takes seriously Christ’s prayer for His people: *“Father, I desire that those whom you have given me may also be with me where I am, so that they may behold my glory”* (Jn. 17:24.)

Next consider Paul’s dilemma: Execution means departure out of this world into the immediate presence of Christ, which, for Paul, as one who has been redeemed by the shed blood of Jesus the Messiah, is very far better than life in this world. But release from prison means continued fruitful labor for Christ (vs. 22) and a much-needed ministry to the church (vs. 24;) for the church, Paul’s release and continued ministry will contribute to their progress and joy in the faith (vs. 25.) Paul’s dilemma is to choose between what is *“very far better”* (for him personally) and what is *“more necessary”* for the sake of Christ’s church. It is a dilemma between his desire for Christ and his devotion to Christ.

Now Paul reveals his decision: Being confident that a continued ministry will be necessary and beneficial to the church, the apostle is sure that Christ’s will for him is to accept his release from prison and carry on his ministry, and Paul is willing to accept Christ’s will for his life (vs. 25.) The reason for Paul’s decision must be found in his great declaration recorded in verse 21: *“for me, to live is Christ;”* this means accepting Christ’s will for Christ’s sake.

Live for Christ, by accepting His will for His sake:

... [Christ] died for all, so that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and rose again. (2 Cor. 5:15.)

Conclusion

Many people living in their twilight years suddenly realize how empty and pointless their lives have been ... They have climbed the ladder of success, only to discover that all along it had been leaning against the wrong wall. (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/14/93) In contrast to such a life, the Apostle John exhorts the Christian, *“Do not love the world or the things that are in the world ... ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever”* (1 Jn. 2:15a, 17.)

In the final analysis and in terms of eternity, this is the only formula for success: Live for Christ.