

Joy in Spite of Circumstances
Philippians 1:22-26

But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. ²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you. ²⁵ And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, ²⁶ that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again¹

I. Paul's Condition Considered

v22 But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor p

Flesh ([sarx \[word study\]](#)) (see also [Chart contrasting in the flesh vs in the Spirit](#)) here refers not to one's fallen humanness ([Ro7:18](#), [7:5](#)) but to physical life ([2Co10:3](#); [Gal2:20](#); [1Pe4:2](#)). Paul is referring here to remaining in this world.

The following discussion is adapted from W E Vine's discussion of the various meaning of sarx in the New Testament. The specific meaning of any Greek word is always determined by the context and that principle is especially critical in correctly interpreting the meaning of sarx.

Flesh according to W E Vine "has a wider range of meaning in the NT than in the OT." The following summary of NT is based primarily on W E Vine's analysis but has additional notes obtained from a variety of sources too numerous to mention...

(a) The substance of the body. The material that covers the bones of a human or animal body. Whether of beasts or of men.

"All **flesh** is not the same **flesh**, but there is one [flesh] of men, and another **flesh** of beasts, and another **flesh** of birds, and another of fish." ([1Co15:39](#)) Paul speaks of the amazing variety of earthly bodies God has made. We need only look around us to see the virtually infinite assortment of created beings and things. The flesh of men is absolutely distinct from the flesh of beasts, the flesh of birds, and the flesh of fish. In short, all flesh is not of the same kind. In context Paul is saying that if God is able to make different kinds of bodies for men, animals, birds, and fish, why can He not make a different kind of body for us at the resurrection? He has arranged all things in nature in the differing degrees of glory and so has power to bring about the state of glory to be manifested in the resurrected bodies of believers. Note: Differences in degrees of glory in the believer's glorified bodies is not in view.

Fruitful (2590) ([karpos \[word study\]](#)) refers literally to fruit or produce both of trees and plants and of the earth. Karpos is often used (as in the present context) to describe the natural result of what has been done and so can refer to a deed, an activity or the result of deeds.

Don't miss what he just said...spiritual work is not easy but is work and it is hard work. Epaphroditus almost died in the "work of Christ" ([Php 2:30-note](#)) Spiritual fruit may be converts to Christianity ([1Co 16:15](#)), deeds, praise to God ([Heb 13:15-note](#)) -- whatever is of eternal value. That kind of fruit comes from hard work, which is the natural activity of the godly on earth.

AND I DO NOT KNOW WHICH TO CHOOSE: [kai ti haireomai](#) (1SFMI) [ou gnorizo](#). (1SPAI): ([Ge 21:26](#); [39:8](#); [Ex 32:1](#); [Acts 3:17](#); [Ro11:2](#))

Choose (138) ([haireomai \[word study\]](#)) from **haireo** = to take a particular position for oneself) means to make a choice of one or more possible alternatives and so to choose, select or prefer.

In the middle voice **haireomai** means to take for oneself (the pronoun "oneself" indicating the reflexive aspect of the middle voice) and so to choose, elect or prefer. It means to make a choice of one or more possible alternatives.

Haireomai can mean to choose, for the purpose of showing special favor as in Thessalonians

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has **chosen** (**haireo**) you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. ([2Th 2:13](#)).

II. Paul's Condition Confounded

v 22 yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better.

²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you.

I am hemmed in, as it were, a wall on this side and a wall on that (Lightfoot)

Hard pressed ([4912](#)) (**sunecho** from **sun** = with + **echo** = hold) literally means hold together and is a picturesque word which serves to heighten the magnitude of Paul's dilemma.

Sunecho means to be hemmed in on both sides and was used of a traveler in a narrow passage or gorge, with a wall of rock on either hand, unable to turn aside and able only to go straight on. The picture is that of a man pressed on both sides. The idea is not urging or driving, but shutting up to one line and purpose, as in a narrow, walled road. Literally Paul is saying "I am held together, so that I cannot incline either way". There is an equal pressure being exerted from both sides, from the desire for continued life and from the desire for death & to be with Christ. Paul was perplexed, held in, kept back from decision. There was a strong pressure bearing upon him from both sides, keeping him erect and motionless. Hard pressed means to be required to make a difficult decision between two possibilities—that of going home to heaven or that of remaining on earth as an apostle of Christ Jesus.

Francis Patton (1843–1932) a former president of Princeton University observed that whereas the high watermark of the Old Testament was [Psalm 23:4](#), that of the New Testament was [Philippians 1:23](#). David was willing to go, but wanting to stay, but Paul was willing to stay, but wanting to go.

HAVING THE DESIRE TO DEPART: ten epithumian echon (PAPMSN) eis to analusai (AAN): (Lk 2:29 Lk 2:30; Jn 13:1; 2Co 5:8; 2Ti 4:6)

The desire (1939) (epithumia [word study]) means passionate desire and most of the NT contexts are negative (and so it is often translated "lusts") but in this context clearly the "lust" is positive. There is an equal pressure being exerted from both sides, from the **strong desire** for continued life and from the **strong desire** for death into the presence of Christ. Paul was perplexed, held in, kept back from decision. There was an intense desire and strong pressure bearing upon him from both sides, keeping him erect and motionless.

The **Puritan Thomas Watson** wrote,

Spiritual things satisfy; the more of heaven is in us, the less earth will content us.... Fly aloft in your affections, thirst after the graces and comforts of the Spirit; the eagle that flies above in the air, fears not the stinging of the serpent; the serpent creeps on his belly, and stings only such creatures as go upon the earth

Depart (360) (analuo) used here as euphemism of "to die" and in secular Greek was used of loosing the anchor or mooring of a ship so it could depart port and set sail, of striking one's tent as one would do in the military metaphor when "breaking camp" (cf 2Cor5:1). The latter figure may have been the main idea Paul wanted to convey here since he was a tent maker by trade and spoke of the human body as a tent. In the NT, this verb is used twice, first to return from wedding (Lu 12:36) and here in Philippians where Paul says that "setting sail" to a better and a more blessed world is very much better.

William Barclay has this note on "depart" (analuo)

(i) It is the word for striking camp, loosening the tent ropes, pulling up the tent pins and moving on (**read 2Cor 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8**). Death is a moving on. It is said that in the terrible days of the war, when the Royal Air Force stood between Britain and destruction and the lives of its pilots were being sacrificially spent, they never spoke of a pilot as having been killed but always as having been “posted to another station.” Each day is a day’s march nearer home, until in the end camp in this world is for ever struck and exchanged for permanent residence in the world of glory.

(ii) It is the word for loosening the mooring ropes, pulling up the anchors and setting sail. Death is a setting sail, a departure on that voyage which leads to the everlasting haven and to God.

(iii) It is the word for solving problems. Death brings life’s solutions. There is some place where all earth’s questions will be answered and where those who have waited will in the end understand.

Wiersbe adds that **"depart"** (**analuo**) had 2 additional secular usages that Paul may have had in mind:

"departure" was also a political term; it described the setting free of a prisoner. God’s people are in bondage because of the limitations of the body and the temptations of the flesh, but death will free them. Or they will be freed at the return of Christ (**Ro8:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23**) if that should come first. Finally, departure was a word used by the farmers; it meant “to unyoke the oxen.” Paul had taken Christ’s yoke, which is an easy yoke to bear (**Mt11:28, 29, 30**), but how many burdens he carried in his ministry! (**2Co11:22-12:10**.) To depart to be with Christ would mean laying aside the burdens, his earthly work completed. (Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989).

The Bible exposition commentary. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.)

AND BE WITH CHRIST: kai sun Christo einai (PAN): (Job 19:26;19:27 Ps 49:15; Lk 23:43; Jn14:3; 17:24; Acts 7:59; 2Co 5:8 1Th 4:17; Rev 14:13)

The destination for which Paul yearns. There is no soul-sleeping; there is no intermediary probation

FOR THAT IS VERY MUCH BETTER: pollo [gar] mallon kreisson: (Ps 16:10; 16:11, 17:15; 73:24, 73:25, 73:26; Rev 7:14, 7:15, 7:16, 7:17) (Daily Bread)

Very much better - This phrase is a doubly strengthened comparative and as such expresses the highest superlative. More than "better" or "much better," to be with Christ so far surpasses anything in this life that it is "**very much better.**" It's as though Paul could find no superlative adequate to express the comparison between being on earth and being with Christ in heaven & sharing complete, conscious, intimate, unhindered fellowship.

Labor for Christ is sweet, but rest with Christ will be sweeter. Paul was ready to go and willing to wait. Life has its attractions; death has its advantages. Paul desires to live and labor, preferring Christ's purpose.

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The great English Evangelist preacher George Whitfield said

“I am often weary in the work, but never weary of it.”

Remain (1961) (epimeno is a strengthened form of **meno** which means to abide, remain. From **epi** = upon + **meno** = abide) means literally to remain upon and so to stay at or with, to continue, to tarry still. The addition of the prefix preposition **epi** (upon) gives the force of adherence or persistence and hence a more protracted stay. Thus the idea of the phrase "to remain on in the flesh" is to hold on or cling to this life in the body. Personal desire gives way to spiritual need. Always with one eye toward heaven, Paul made the most of each day and so should all believers.

IS MORE NECESSARY FOR YOUR SAKE:
anagkaioteron di' humas:

Vine explains Paul's meaning here

If personal advantage is the consideration it is much better to be with Christ, but if the consideration is that of obligation toward the saints in Philippi, then it is more needful to continue with them still serving the Lord.

This is the mark of a spiritual man who manifests an unselfish great hearted spirit and yields his own comfort, needs and desires to meet the legitimate needs of others. Paul's "heaven on earth" was helping others! While he longed to be with Christ, he eagerly yearned to remain and help these believers grow in Christ.

III. Paul's Condition Concluded

^{v 25} And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, ²⁶ that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again²

And I am confidently certain of this. (Barclay)

And a voice within assures me, that so it will be
(Lightfoot 1)

And having come to this settled conviction (namely, that to remain in the flesh is more needful for you) (Wuest)

That is why (it is probably more necessary for you that I should stay here on earth) I feel pretty well convinced
(Phillips)

Convinced ([3982](#)) ([peitho \[word study\]](#)) is a strong verb, carrying the components of confidence, reliance, and hope. The NT uses (see examples below) in the [perfect tense](#) mean to cause to come to a particular point of view or course of action. The idea is to come to a **settled persuasion** concerning something or to be persuaded. It means to be so convinced that one puts confidence in something or someone. The idea of a settled conviction is the result of a past completed process of turning a matter over in one's mind until one is persuaded of it.

Peitho is used 6x in this short epistle ([Php 1:6](#), [1:14](#), [1:25](#), [2:24](#), [3:3](#), [3:4](#)) and speaks of Paul's settled conviction which is the result of a past completed process of turning this matter over in his mind until he was persuaded of it -- in [Php 1:24](#) he had stated that it was necessary for the sake of the saints at Philippi that he remain on in the body. Paul was confident that the sovereign God was in control, that He had Paul's circumstances well in hand so to speak ([Php 1:19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#), [24](#)). Paul was assured that no

² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Php 1:22–26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

matter what happened to him (remember he is writing from a prison cell!), God would be glorified.

I KNOW THAT I WILL REMAIN AND CONTINUE WITH YOU ALL FOR YOUR PROGRESS AND JOY IN THE FAITH: oida (1SRAI) hoti meno (1SFAI) kai parameno (1SFAI) pasin humin eis ten humon prokopenkai charan tes pisteos: (Lk 22:32; Jn21:15, 16, 17; Acts 11:23; 14:22; Ro1:11, 1:12; 15:18, 15:29; 2Co1:24; Eph 4:11,12,13) (Ro 5:2; 15:13; 1Pe1:8) (Torrey's Topic Joy)

that I will remain, and I will be with you and beside you all to help you along the road, and to increase the joy of your faith (Barclay)

I shall continue here and abide with you all; that I may promote your advance in the faith and your joy in believing. (Lightfoot)

I know that I shall remain and continue alive with you all for your progress and joy in your faith (Wuest)

that I shall not leave this world yet, but shall be able to stand by you, to help you forward in Christian living and to find increasing joy in your faith (Phillips)

I know - The speaks of knowing that is intuitive. He knows intuitively the purpose for which he will **remain and continue** with them - their **progress** and **joy**.

Continue (parameno) is literally to remain near or continue near as Barclay brings out in his translation "I will be with you and beside you". The preposition "**para**" means beside which stresses the place of Paul's abiding. Right by their side

Eadie...

In expressing the idea of his stay (“*Being assured of this, that abiding in the flesh is more needful for you.*”), the apostle, in the fulness of his heart, uses two verbs, first *meno* and then *parameno*...The second verb becomes personal in its reference, “*I shall remain, and remain with.*” Not only should he survive, but survive in their company

Barclay adds that **parameno**

"means to wait beside a person ever ready to help."

Rienecker says that in koine Greek **parameno** conveyed the idea "to remain in service" or to "remain at someone else's disposal" which helps us understand the encouragement this truth must have conveyed to the saints at Philippi.

Proud confidence (glorying) (**kauchema**) is the result of boasting. This verse is somewhat difficult to understand in the NASB translation. The old ASV (1901) is easier to understand:

that your glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again.

A T Robertson emphasizes that

"In Christ Jesus" (see all NT uses of this phrase below) as the basis for the glorying"

Vine writes that

"it looks as if the pronoun “**your**” points to their glorying **in Paul**. But in the original (Greek) the case may be the objective, and the presence of the article with “**glorying**” indicates that the meaning is, “the glorying in you [that is, “his glorying in them”] may abound in me in Christ Jesus.” Either meaning is possible."

The idea seems to be that the saints in Philippi would glory, boast or exult because the one who had taught them about Christ would be with them again and that their "proud confidence" or exulting would ultimately be **in Christ Jesus**, the Source of true **joy** for all believers.

Thus the NIV translates it as

"your **joy** (literally "your boasting") in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me".

The BBE offers a well worded compromise translation

"So that your pride in me may be increased in Christ Jesus through my being present with you again."

Expositor's comments that

"The emphasis is not on the action itself, but on the basis for it. As the Philippians would experience the progress and joy that Paul's labors among them would produce, they would have new and greater reasons for overflowing with joy. This reason for glorying (their "**proud confidence**") would be found "**in Christ Jesus**," Of course, but its immediate occasion would be "on account of me" (en emoi), said Paul. His ministry among them would enable them to see more clearly the riches of their salvation in Christ."

MacDonald adds that

"Through his being spared for longer life and service on earth, the Philippians would have added cause for rejoicing in the Lord when he would visit them once again. Can you not imagine how they would throw their

arms around him and kiss him, and praise the Lord with great joy when he would arrive at Philippi?"

Barnes notes that

"Through the mercy and grace of Christ, if he (Paul) was spared, his deliverance would be traced to Christ, and they (saints in Philippi) would rejoice together in One (Christ Jesus) Who had so mercifully delivered him. Their joy would not only be that he was delivered, but that he was permitted to see them again."