

Many people claim that all religions seek the same answers. Some picture religion finding God in the way that a group of blind men might describe an elephant. One man feels the elephant's trunk. Another feels and describes its leg. Yet another might describe its head, and so on. Each man is unknowingly describing a part of the elephant. Put their descriptions together and you have an elephant. So too, if we put all of the world's religions together we finally arrive at God. But no one can complete the picture!

It's arrogant nonsense! To say that each blind man is describing part of an elephant needs some sighted person to see the whole elephant. And who can do that? It's the one who says that all religions are the same. In other words, we Christians are blind. So too are all other world religions. We cannot see the elephant as a whole. But the arrogant person who sees that all religions are the same has this complete and total knowledge. How arrogant can you get?

Only the God of the Bible has total knowledge. The Lord Jesus says (John 14:6), "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***" Because of this claim, Christians are accused of being arrogant. But is it really an arrogant claim, that we have peace with God and know Him personally? Not at all! For, it isn't based on anything we have done. Arrogance centres on our own achievements. Salvation—entering into a right relationship with God—is all of God's mercy and grace.

Here's the difference between Christianity and any other system of belief. Other religions try to find God through good works. We Christians know that we're right with God through the work of Christ alone. The other religions say, 'Do this and you might find peace with God'. Christianity says, 'It's done'. Christ's finished work on the cross is the only basis of our right standing with God. And it's not arrogant to make that claim. You and I contribute nothing to our salvation. We have no good works to boast about. Our only boast is that Christ has paid the price for our sin. He has redeemed us and reconciled us to God. Christ is our hope. He is our peace and our joy. Our future is secure, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 1:12-18 we saw the peace and security that Paul enjoyed. Even while suffering in prison, he preached the gospel to the guards and to the brethren in the church. This in turn encouraged them to ***speaking the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.***

Now some ***preached Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. . . in love.*** But that's of no great concern to Paul. For ***Christ is preached.*** Paul rejoiced in the knowledge that where Christ is preached ***it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*** (Romans 1:18).

And for us, it's just the same. We have confidence in the power of God's word. We read in 1 Peter 1:23, ***For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.***

United to Christ by faith, the apostle Paul was secure. So his circumstances didn't prevent him from his work of evangelism. It was ***in Christ*** that he was confident to preach. Now we don't know how many responded to the call of the gospel. It doesn't matter to us either, for we look to God in Christ to soften hard hearts. What does concern us is that the gospel be proclaimed.

So Paul isn't worried about his future. It's sure and certain. Listen to 3:12b, 14, ***I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. . . I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.***

What do you think of the future? Do we even have a future? Many people answer, 'No!' They worry about the threat of a nuclear accident that could destroy the earth. Others worry about the outbreak of war in the Middle East or in Asia. On the other hand, some others are more positive. They find hope in the goodness of man and in modern technology. If only such a hope had any sound basis for the future.

We might be tempted to put our hope in modern technology. But that's not Christian hope. Friends, hope for you does not lie with any woman or man, but with God. Because God is the King of the universe, we can have confidence in the future. Your true confidence and mine can only be found in God and His grace. For, it's in God that we have hope that lasts beyond this life and on into eternity.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians has now moved from the past through to the future. Remember 1:12? There, he said *that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel*. From there he moved to the present, *the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly... Christ is preached . And because of this I rejoice*.

Now Paul turns his thoughts to the future. He writes with confidence. Christians are confident in all situations. Well, what are the grounds of Christian confidence?

1. We have confidence in salvation

1:19, 20, *for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 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.*

Do you remember Job in the Old Testament? He lost his children, his possessions and his health, but not his faith. Hear what he says in Job 19:25-27. *I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

Job had suffered disaster heaped upon disaster. Yet he had confidence in God. OK, he didn't know how it would work out. But he knew that God would save him. He knew that God was at work in his life.

That's what Paul is saying to us here in Philippians. Listen to his confidence. *I know that... what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance*. The word *deliverance* could refer to his salvation. *I know that this will turn out for my salvation*. *Salvation* is perhaps a better word to use rather than deliverance. He knows that he has been saved in the past. That's when he trusted in Christ. He knows that united to Christ by faith his right relationship with God is secure. And he knows that in the future his salvation will still stand firm.

Paul is sure of being right with God. How do we see that confidence? Note verse 19. First he is confident that the Philippians are praying for him. There's only one thing that a Christian can covet of another and that is prayer—that we pray for one another.

Second, he says, 'I know that my salvation is secure. I am saved from the power and penalty of sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.' He writes in Galatians 2:20, *The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*. Third, he has the Spirit of Christ. And as a Christian, Paul says (4:13), *I can do everything through him who gives me strength*.

What is the result of this confidence that Paul has? Note 1:20. *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*. His eager expectation and hope is that he will not be ashamed to exalt Christ in life or in death.

Now, the word *hope* sounds a little doubtful, doesn't it? What Paul is saying is this: Hope for you, friends, is always based upon trust in God. His eager expectation is a concentrated and intense hope that strains forward like a runner crossing the finish line. You've seen how runners push their head and chest forward at the end of a race. Consider the recent Olympic Games and you'll see what I mean.

In other words Paul is confident. He's sure of his salvation. He's sure that the Spirit of Christ lives in him. And, because of the prayers of faithful Christians - Christ is exalted in his life. Whether he lives or he dies, no matter where he is or what he does, his future is good. He has the courage to go on and Christ will be glorified.

But the basis of his hope is only in, and always in, Christ. Job knew that he needed some way that he, a sinful man, could stand before God. He cried out for a go-between, a mediator to bridge the gap (Job 9:33, 34), *If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both. Someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more*. Job's cry was answered, but not for many years. The bridge was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, the God-man, fully God and fully man has bridged the gap between God and sinful man.

Do you have that same confidence? Do you know Christ as the One who has bridged the gap between you and a holy and perfect God? If you do not know Him, turn to Him. Admit that you need the Lord Jesus. Ask that He will forgive you for your sins. Receive Him into your life. Prayers like that He delights to answer. Then and only then can we know salvation, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Then you and I can say with Paul, *Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.* That brings me to my second point.

2. We have confidence in death

1:21-24. *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*

In the second century Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna. The vivid account of his death demonstrates his deep faith in Christ. In the manner of his death we see an imitation of Christ. He was an old man when he was arrested in AD 155. At first he had tried to evade arrest by moving from one secure farmhouse to another. Eventually, he was caught and arrested. The Police Commissioner tried to persuade him to give up his faith, ‘Where is the harm in just saying Caesar is Lord and offering incense and so forth when it will save your life?’ But Polycarp refused to deny his faith in Christ.

He was led into the arena. There, the governor said to him, “Take the oath and I will let you go. Revile your Christ.” Polycarp replied, ‘*Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?*’ In his dying words, Polycarp blessed and glorified God.

Death cannot separate Paul from the love of God or from the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s unafraid of death. Here we have the privilege to see into the mind of the apostle Paul. He’s in two minds. *To live is Christ, to die is gain.* If he goes on with his life there is much *fruitful labour*. But his desire is to die, for that means he will be *with Christ, which is better by far*. There really is no question as to where Paul would rather be. But on the other hand there’s work to be done.

Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart... but it is more necessary for you (Philippians) *that I remain in the body.* What a dilemma. He seems to be ‘caught between a rock and a hard place’. Hemmed in from both sides he doesn’t appear to know which way to turn, he can’t move. Like a ship at anchor in a storm he wants to break away from his moorings and set sail for heaven. Another part of him holds on to life on earth. But Paul knows that to go to be with the Lord is the easy way out. There is yet *fruitful labour* for him.

What about us? How does Paul’s honesty affect you and me? If you are young and healthy then the answer is probably, ‘Not much.’ But some of us are older. We’ve lost loved ones. Sometimes, we find little meaning in life. Some may even have lost their way. Why go on? Wouldn’t it be better for the Lord just to take me home to be with Him in Paradise?

No! Not if there is work to be done. And there is. The gospel is yet to be spread throughout our land, throughout our world. You may be sick, you may be on your last legs. You may even need reviving on the operating table – but while you have fruitful labour to be done you’re not ready to go to be with the Lord. When you can say, as Paul did (2 Timothy 4:7), *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*, then you’re free to go to and be with the Lord. Even then, it’s in God’s timing, not yours or mine.

Paul is ready to meet Christ, but not yet. It was different for Jesus. He’d completed His labour through His sacrifice on the cross. His time had come. Polycarp could go no further. His sacrifice greatly encouraged other Christians. Sometimes the sacrifice is to die for your faith. At other times it is to live on knowing that there is *fruitful labour* ahead.

Now I am not trying to tell you how long you should live, that would be ridiculous. What I am saying is that we should all strive to go on living while we can do fruitful work for the Lord on this earth. Your life is in God’s hands. How you live it and how long your life is, is between you and God. Yet here is the guideline, God requires that your and my life be fruitful.

As I may have probably said to you on previous occasions: ‘You may be a tired Christian, but there is no such thing as a retired Christian.’ Your Christian work and witness is never complete until the day that you see Christ face to face.

And that brings me to my third point.

3. We have confidence in life

1:25, 26, *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, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.*

We Christians are called to stand alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One such man was Noble Alexander, a Cuban pastor. He spent over twenty years in a Cuban prison for his faith. While he was in one prison, he led a prayer group. The guards sometimes fired into the middle of the circle to disrupt the service. Most of the men would not move, but continued to sing and pray while the shrapnel tore into their flesh.

Now Paul wasn’t being tortured in prison, though suffering for Christ was no stranger to him. But just as Noble Alexander had confidence in life, so too did the apostle Paul. Convinced that his labour had not yet come to an end, he knew that he would be freed to continue in the Lord’s work.

His release would serve three purposes. First, the Philippians would progress in faith. Paul’s future ministry among them would confirm that it was necessary for him to be released. Second, was their joy in the Christian faith. Paul longed to share in that Christian joy that they experienced. The Christian life is one of joy. Joy is one of the great themes of Philippians. Their joy will only increase. Or here in 1:26, their joy will overflow.

Remember that Paul writes this letter from in prison. Yet, as we saw last week, he writes (1:18b) *Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.* Being joyful in the Lord doesn’t mean absence of the trials of life. But, it does mean that we have the assurance of Christ that He is with us.

And so we read in Romans 8:1, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* And again, in 8:38, 39, *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Third, the Philippians’ joy is in Christ Jesus. As Paul writes in 3:3, Christians *glory in Christ Jesus.* Christ is our hope, the One in whom we glory. And so we glory in the cross, because it speaks of Christ.

Have you been able to see what I’ve been driving at in these two weeks? Perhaps what Paul wrote to the Corinthians might help. 1 Corinthians 10:31, *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* Paul writes in Philippians 1:20 that all of his endeavours are to *exalt Christ in my body.* Everything that Paul does for God’s glory he does in union with Christ. And for us, it must be that way too. It’s true that we rebel against God. We fall short of His glory. But in the end God will be glorified on earth as He is glorified in heaven. And God is glorified in His saints, those who are in Christ. Outside of Christ we cannot glorify God. We cannot even begin to please Him.

Union with Christ not only assures of eternal life, but it also gives us confidence in death, and in all of life. That confidence is not in ourselves, but in Christ, who holds us in His hands.

The focus of these verses might appear to be upon Paul. But that’s not really true. These verses centre on the hope we have in Christ. (In verses 19-26, the name of Christ has occurred five times.)

Christian friends, Christ your only comfort in life and in death. Because of Christ we face life and death with confidence. Yes we thank God for modern technology and for the increased quality of life that we can now enjoy. But Christian hope, your confidence and mine, is firmly founded on God in Christ for our salvation, now and in the future.

May the name of the Lord Jesus be exalted among us today and for ever more. Amen.