

February 1, 2026

Torn between Two Worlds

Philippians 1:19–26

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Have you ever thought about heaven and wanted to go there sooner than later? Paul wrote in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” He didn’t have a “death wish” with dark thoughts of wanting to escape this world; he simply longed for heaven and was ready to go whenever God called him home. Sometimes the weight of this world can cause our heavy hearts to long for our eternal reward. In this study, we will learn more about heaven and living for Christ.

## 1. Context

### a. Philippians is a book about joy.

- i. “Joy” or some form of the word is mentioned 14 times in 4 chapters.
  1. Proportionally, joy is mentioned more in Philippians than in any other book of the Bible.
- ii. Paul rejoiced despite being imprisoned in Rome, Italy for preaching the Gospel.
  1. Paul wrote to the church he planted 10 years prior in Philippi, Greece.
  2. Paul used his prison stay to preach to Caesar’s household, some of whom accepted Christ as Lord and Savior.
  3. God told Paul that he would testify in Rome two years in advance (**Acts 23:11**).
  4. God did not say how He would use Paul in Rome, but He gave Paul the grace to endure every situation He brought him into.
  5. Paul was able to rejoice in God using him to preach the Gospel to members of Caesar’s household (**Philippians 4:22**).

### b. Paul was grateful for the prayers of the saints in Philippi.

- i. The Philippian Believers were worried about Paul; perhaps, they feared he would be killed.
  1. In 64 A.D., persecution against the church would increase under Nero.
    - a. During this time, tens of thousands of Christians died for their faith.
  2. In 62 A.D., when Paul wrote Philippians, there were pockets of persecution against the church which he was caught up in.
    - a. Paul’s first prison stay ended in his deliverance.
    - b. Paul’s second prison stay ended in his beheading.
- ii. Paul comforted the Believers at Philippi by saying all would be well whether he lived or died.

1. **DISCUSS:** How can we rejoice, understanding that whatever way our trial ends, we will be with the Lord?
2. **Philippians 1:19–26** – “[19] For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, [20] according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] 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 again.”
3. **Philippians 1:21** – “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”
  - a. Reasons to rejoice
    - i. God will finish what He began in us.
      1. **Philippians 1:6** – “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”
      2. God does not abandon us after salvation, but rather continues to work in us, encouraging us to press on.
    - ii. God will use our chains for His divine purposes.
      1. **Philippians 1:13** – “It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.”
      2. Paul’s heavenly perspective allowed him to rejoice, knowing his chains brought God glory.
    - iii. To live is Christ, to die is gain.
      1. **Philippians 1:21** – “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”
  - b. Not a death wish
    - i. Paul called death “gain,” implying death is better.
    - ii. But Paul anticipated that he would see the Philippians again.
      1. Paul knew his work was not finished (verses 23–26).
      2. Paul said “to remain in the flesh”—referring to his physical life—was “more needful” for the Believers (**Philippians 1:24**).
    - iii. A death wish and a heaven wish are different.
      1. A death wish is the desire to escape one’s life via suicide or reckless behavior.
      2. People with a death wish have dark thoughts and need prayer.
      3. A heaven wish is the desire to finish well, not to finish early.

4. A heaven wish comes from understanding the heavy burdens of life and a readiness to welcome our departure.
5. A heaven wish does not seek to hasten death but is willing to welcome death when it comes, knowing heaven awaits.
6. **DISCUSS:** How has the hope of heaven helped you rejoice even amid tribulation?

c. Heaven

i. Biblical mentions of heaven

1. "Heaven" is mentioned 255 times in the New Testament.
2. "Heaven" is mentioned over 400 times in the Old Testament.

ii. Heaven is a place of "no mores."

1. Crying, death, and pain are things of this earth.

4. Describing heaven

a. Heaven is the dwelling of God and the eternal home promised to Believers in Jesus Christ who will go there immediately upon death.

- i. **1 Kings 8:30** – *"May You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive."*
- ii. **Psalms 103:19** – *"The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all."*
- iii. **Revelation 21:27** – *"But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."*
  1. Heaven is open to those whose names are written in the Book of Life.
- iv. **2 Corinthians 5:6-8** – *"[6] So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. [7] For we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."*
  1. Heaven is the immediate home of Believers upon death.
    - a. Before the cross, Believers went to paradise.
    - b. Though the Old Testament does not fully unveil Christ, the Old Testament saints offered sacrifices, a symbol for the ultimate atonement that would be found in Christ.
    - c. But after Jesus' victory on the cross, He emptied paradise and brought them to heaven with Him.
    - d. Jesus' finished work on the cross fulfilled the sacrificial system and offers Believers access into God's presence in heaven upon death.

2. Purgatory is unbiblical.
    - a. Purgatory is the doctrine that the dead in Christ will suffer upon death for a while before getting into heaven, and that loved ones' prayers can speed up the process.
    - b. But purgatory is not found in Scripture.
  3. Soul sleep is unbiblical.
    - a. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists believe in soul sleep, a doctrine that says the dead in Christ remain unconscious until Jesus' return.
    - b. However, Jesus' return does not wake up our souls, but our bodies.
  4. **DISCUSS:** How does knowing that you will wake up to see Jesus after you die help strengthen you to live well for Him?
- b. Heaven is located somewhere above the earth, beyond outer space.
- i. **Isaiah 66:1** – *“Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?’”*
  - ii. **2 Corinthians 12:1–2** – *“[1] I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. [2] I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows.”* (NIV)
    1. Paul said *“I know a man”* when referring to a vision he'd personally had, because he was being humble.
    2. Paul likely had this vision when he'd been left for dead at Lystra, after being stoned for the Gospel.
      - a. Paul experienced being in the presence of the Lord until God revived him.
    3. Paul had gone to the *“third heaven.”*
      - a. There are not multiple heavens.
      - b. This is simply first-century language used to refer to the place beyond outer space.
- c. Heaven has streets of gold, gates of pearl, walls of jasper, foundations of precious stones, and a crystal-clear river.
- i. **Revelation 21:18–21** – *“[18] The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. [19] The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones . . . [21] The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”*
  - ii. **Revelation 22:1** – *“He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”*

- iii. **1 Corinthians 2:9** – *“As it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’”*
  - 1. The 1 million colors we can see with the human eye come from mixing three primary colors.
  - 2. Adding only one primary color would allow us to see 100 million colors.
  - 3. **DISCUSS:** How does comparing heaven to earth encourage you to live in light of eternity? What does living with a heavenly perspective look like in your life?
- d. Heaven is illuminated solely by the glory of God and the presence of Jesus.
  - i. **Revelation 21:23** – *“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.”*
- e. Heaven is a place of reunions with loved ones and friends who knew Christ as Savior.
  - i. Matthew 17:3–4
    - 1. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John.
    - 2. When Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus, Peter recognized them and addressed them by name, though Moses and Elijah had been dead for centuries.
    - 3. If Peter recognized the dead in Christ whom he’d never met, how much more will we recognize people we have met?
  - ii. John 21:1–7
    - 1. When Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples recognized Him.
    - 2. Our understanding will only increase, so we will be able to recognize our loved ones.
    - 3. **1 Corinthians 13:12** – *“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”*
  - iii. For the Christian, death is not defeat; death is a graduation to glory.
    - 1. **DISCUSS:** How are you sharing the good news of Jesus’ victory?
- f. If you cannot say, *“to live is Christ,”* you cannot say *“to die is gain.”*
  - i. **DISCUSS:** Who or what are you living for?
  - ii. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote that purpose is found in God.
    - 1. Ecclesiastes is the journal of an old king who realized in hindsight that without God, all is meaningless.
    - 2. **Ecclesiastes 1:2** – *“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”*
    - 3. **DISCUSS:** When did you realize that living for the things of this world never satisfies? How did that change how you live?

- iii. You can have your name written in the Book of Life if you trust Jesus as Lord and Savior.
  1. If we invite Christ to be our Lord, we hand Him control over our lives.
  2. Those who live for Christ have nothing to lose upon death.
  3. **DISCUSS:** How has living for Christ given you stability and boldness foreign to this world?

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)