

Paul's Seven Wishes

by James Smith

Paul's seven wishes are centered on Christ, and he desires to know, win, magnify, be found in, be conformed to, be with, and rejoice in Christ.

Scripture: Philippians 3:8

Topics: "Christian Living", "Christ Centrality"

Description

James Smith preaches on the seven desires of Paul, emphasizing the importance of centering our lives on Christ. Paul's wishes include knowing, winning, magnifying, being found in, being conformed to, being with, and rejoicing in Christ. These desires reflect a true Christian's heart, where Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of all things. The sermon encourages believers to make Christ their all in all, seeking to glorify Him in every aspect of their lives.

Transcript

Wishing is generally fruitless, and sometimes sinful. Resignation is generally better than wishing, and acquiescence in God's will, more so still. But it is natural to desire what we esteem to be good -- and grace only regulates and sanctifies this exercise of nature. Desire is often the effect of knowledge -- and it is the very soul of prayer . Whatever we have , there is much that we need , and, consequently, much that we must desire .

Paul desired seven things especially, and they all referred to Christ, and they are all named in his epistle to the Philippians, and I propose to glance at them. Let us compare our desires with his as we go on, and may the Holy Spirit bless our brief meditation on the subject.

First, he says, "

that I may KNOW Him! " (Philippians 3:10.) Christ had appeared to Paul, he was revealed in him, and was constantly preached by him. Christ was . . .

the object of his trust,

the subject of his ministry,

and the joy of his heart.

But he knew that there was much in Christ with which he was unacquainted. He knew but in part . He desired, therefore, to know more of . . .

the glory of his person,

the riches of his grace,

the magnificence of his work,

the excellency of his natures,

the majesty of his kingdom!

Everything in Christ interested Paul. Creation was good -- but to him, grace was better; but Christ was best of all. He was never wearied of thinking of Christ, speaking of Christ, or learning of Christ. He went on with his work, he went on his way, with the desire constantly rising in his heart, "That I may know Him!"

Beloved, how is it with you? Do you sympathize with Paul in this desire of his heart? Is it your daily wish, ardent desire, and constant aim -- to know more of Jesus?

Throughout eternity we shall be learning Christ!

He is the lesson placed before us in the church on earth;

and he is the lesson placed before the church in Heaven.

Time is given us to learn Christ -- and, blessed be God,

eternity will be given to us to learn Christ also.

Nothing endears eternity to me like this -- it will be spent in learning, enjoying, and honoring Christ!

Secondly, he says, "

That I may WIN Christ !" (Philippians 3:8.) He was not merely satisfied to know Christ, as the property of someone else; he wanted Christ as his own! He was not only willing to receive Christ as a free gift -- but he would win Christ as a prize .

Was Christ to be run for -- then he would run.

Was Christ to be wrestled for -- then he would wrestle.

Were there any means by which Christ could be obtained, however painful, however costly, however difficult -- then Paul would use them!

Did he believe? It was that he might win Christ.

Did he pray? It was that he might win Christ.

Did he preach? It was that he might win Christ.

Did he crucify the old man, mortify the flesh, beat his body and make it his slave? It was that he might win Christ.

Did he suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dung and dross? It was that he might win Christ.

Did he subject himself to stripes, imprisonment, hunger, cold, nakedness, and a martyr's death? It was that he might win Christ.

To possess Christ was his one object, his ruling desire!

Reader, is it your main object and desire?

Are you prepared to part with all for Christ?

Would you take Christ -- in exchange for ease, reputation, wealth, labors, sufferings, yes, even death itself? Paul was; and if you are not, his estimates of Christ and yours cannot be the same.

My soul, I charge you -- let this be your object, let this be your aim, always and everywhere: to "win Christ!"

Thirdly, "

To MAGNIFY Christ !" Hence he says, "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 magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!" (Philippians 1:20, 21)

Paul desired to exhibit and exalt Christ!

If he wrote -- he wrote of Christ.

If he spoke -- he spoke of Christ.

If he suffered -- he suffered for Christ.

If he sorrowed -- it was because professors dishonored Christ.

Christ was to him dearer than the apple of his eye -- and more precious than all things in earth or Heaven! He would live -- if he could honor Jesus; or he would die for him -- if that would honor him more. He felt his obligation. He was inflamed with his love. He was a sacrifice on his altar. He was a vessel for his honor. He would go anywhere, he would do anything -- if he might but honor Christ. Heartily he would say, "Let the name of Paul perish, if the name of Christ can be magnified thereby!"

To him Christ was, in fact, all and all . He died for Christ; the honor of Christ was the end for which he laid down his life.

My brother, how is it with you?

Does your heart cry, "Oh, that I could honor Christ!"

Does your life make this impression on others, "That man aims to honor Christ!"

Is it your daily cry and prayer, "Let Christ be magnified in me, by me, and through me -- in life, in death, in time, and forever!"

Oh my soul, let it be my constant desire and prayer -- that Jesus, my Jesus, may be magnified by me!

Fourthly, "

To be FOUND IN Christ ." (Philippians 3:9). Paul wished to be IN Christ. . .

as Noah was in the ark,

as the man-slayer was in his refuge,

as the jewel is in the cabinet,

and as Christ is in God.

The closest possible union , the nearest and dearest communion -- was desired by him.

If he is accepted by God -- then he desires to be accepted in the name of Jesus.

If he is justified -- then he wishes it to be in the righteousness of Jesus.

If he is sanctified -- then he would be so by the Spirit of Jesus.

He would have Paul to be 'nothing' -- and Jesus to be 'all'.

In Christ, he knew he would be safe.

In Christ, he felt he would be happy.

In Christ, he was persuaded he would be satisfied.

Christ in Paul was his life.

Paul in Christ was his honor.

Friend, are you IN Christ? Is it your ambition to be found in Christ?

If death finds you -- will it find you in Christ?

If justice finds you -- will it find you in Christ?

If judgment finds you -- will it find you in Christ?

In Christ -- you will find God as a Father.

In Christ -- you will meet all the saints as your brethren.

In Christ -- you will find the angels ministering unto you.

In Christ -- death has no sting.

In Christ -- the grave has no terrors.

In Christ -- the law has no claims upon you.

In Christ -- there are no threatenings in God's Word against you.

In Christ -- all the promises are confirmed to you.

How glorious to be in Christ! My soul, let this be your daily prayer, "That I may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law -- but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

Fifthly, "

To be CONFORMED to Christ ." (Philippians 3:10). It was not enough to know Christ, to win Christ, to magnify Christ, or to be in Christ; Paul wishes to be LIKE Christ! He would . . .

breathe his spirit,

exhibit his temper,

copy his example, and

be just like Christ!

He desired to be . . .

like Christ in poverty,

like Christ in suffering,

like Christ in death itself.

Paul desired to be exactly like Jesus!

Meek -- as Jesus was meek.

Patient -- as Jesus was patient.

Loving -- as Jesus was loving.

Useful -- as Jesus was useful.

In every point resembling him!

What admiration of Christ is here!

What love to Christ!

What self-renunciation!

What power of grace!

What a wonderful transformation! How unlike Saul of Tarsus , the Pharisee of the Pharisees, the persecutor of the church, the blasphemer of the Nazarene! What could be more unlike?

Once he saw no beauty in Christ -- now he sees nothing but beauty.

Once he could not bear the mention of his name -- now he never seems happy, but when pronouncing it.

Once he was exceeding mad against him and his people -- now his heartfelt abiding cry is, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings -- becoming like him in his death!"

Dear reader, have you ever experienced any such change?

Are you panting, praying, striving to be like Jesus?

Are you willing to be anything that Jesus was -- that you may be like him?

Are you willing to suffer even death -- that you may be conformed to him?

My soul, this is a very high attainment -- aspire to it! Seek grace day by day at the throne of grace -- that you may so love, so admire, so adore the Savior -- as to desire to be conformed to him in life, in death, and forever!

Sixthly, "

To be WITH Christ ." (Philippians 1:23).

Paul dearly loved his work .

He was greatly attached to the church -- which needed his presence, gifts, and labors.

He deeply sympathized with poor perishing sinners -- who needed the gospel.

But such was his love to Jesus, that he felt himself in a great strait, "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ , which is better by far!" He says nothing about place, or employment, the absence of sorrow, or the possession of joy; his heart was fixed on the person of Christ.

To be with Christ -- this was his desire.

To be with Christ anywhere -- was enough.

To be with Christ forever -- was a sufficient Heaven.

Paul had no idea of the soul sleeping , or of an intermediate state where Christ was not. His idea was, "Absent from the body -- present with the Lord!" Therefore he was willing to lay down his body, to put off the tabernacle -- if by doing so, he may be with Christ. To be with Christ, to him was far better than life with all its comforts . To be with Christ, to him was far better than the world with all its privileges and pleasures . To be with Christ! This is . . .

the flower of bliss,

the crown of glory,

the perfection of happiness.

To be with Christ! Paul could desire nothing beyond this!

My brother, can you sympathize with Paul here? Does not Jesus sometimes come to you? Are not his visits peculiarly sweet? Do you not, at such times -- desire to be forever with him? Do you not? What! a

Christian and a stranger to the visits of Jesus -- or, enjoy the visits of Jesus, and not desire to be with him forever and altogether? How can one understand this? If one tastes of the grapes of Canaan -- one wants to go and see the vineyards . If one obtains a pledge of the inheritance -- one wants to go and take full and eternal possession of it.

My soul, you do at times long to depart and be with Jesus! Oh, that this were more frequently my sweet experience! All saints feel this, and, blessed be God, that promise extends to it, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted!" Paul's desire is now realized; and if we desire as he did -- ours, too will be realized by and bye!

Seventhly, "

To REJOICE in the Day of Christ ." (Philippians 2:16) Paul was constantly looking forward to Christ's second coming, and pointing believers to it. He expected great things then, therefore he longed for it, rejoiced in anticipation of it, and prepared to enter into all its glories and joys.

The Day of Christ is that day specially set apart for his glory, when he will openly wed his church, crush under his feet Satan and all his foes, and appear in his own glory, and in his Father's glory too. Such a day has never yet been seen. Such another period, there never will be.

Paul's desire was to meet all his converts then, and present them to his glorious Master. "For what," said he, "is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?" "That you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life -- in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing."

Jesus is coming to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe; and Paul desired to see all his children there, as mirrors to reflect the glory of Jesus, as monuments on which will be inscribed his triumphs. This would add to his joy. This would open sources of unutterable pleasure. This would produce exquisite delight. Happy Paul, the day of Christ will be a triumphant day for you! The coming of Jesus will be a glorious event to you!

Reader, what will it be to you? Do you expect the fulfillment of that sweet passage then -- "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear -- then you shall also appear with him in glory!"

My soul, I charge you so to live, so to labor, so to suffer, so to believe, and so to die -- that you may rejoice in the day of Christ. Look forward to it, as to the day of jubilee, the year of release -- and expect grace to be brought unto you at that appearing of Jesus Christ.

We have thus looked at Paul's seven wishes . He had others, no doubt; but these were his principal, his abiding ones. All of Paul's desires are gratified -- but one.

Now he knows Christ, not in part -- but even as also he is known.

He has won Christ, and possesses him as the prize of his high calling. There is no running, wrestling, or striving now. No, no, Christ is his -- in the highest, in the fullest, in the most glorious sense of the term.

He has magnified Christ in his body, both in life and in death; and he now magnifies Christ in glory before thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers!

He is found in Christ. Death found him in Christ, and he said, "I am ready!" The ministering angel found him in Christ and conducted him up to the eternal throne, and there he is in Christ forever!

He is conformed to Christ in holiness, happiness, and glory -- as concerning his soul , and will be in reference to his body "at the resurrection of the just."

He is with Christ.

With Christ, in the presence of his Father.

With Christ, in the mansion prepared for him in his Father's house.

With Christ, and with Christ forever!

But the last wish waits to be realized -- and it will be soon. For "he who shall come , will come -- and will not tarry!" "The Lord my God will come, and all the saints with him!"

The redemption of the body will soon take place -- the redemption of the purchased possession will soon be realized; then . . .

the groans of creation will be silenced,

the prayers of the church will be ended,

the promises that refer to that glorious period will be fulfilled,

and the whole earth will be filled with his glory! Then the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea. All flesh will see the salvation of God. The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together -- for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it!

We must close our remarks. A man's state before God, may be known by the nature and character of the abiding desires of his soul . For if as Solomon said, "As he thinks in his heart -- so is he;" so we may say, "as he desires in his heart -- so is he."

If our desires meet and center in Christ -- we must be true Christians. If to know Christ, to win Christ, to magnify Christ, to be found in Christ, to be conformed to Christ, to be with Christ, and rejoice in the day of Christ's second coming -- are the desires of our souls -- then we are as really Christians as Paul was!

Paul, you see, begins with Christ, goes on with Christ, and ends with Christ. Christ was his Alpha -- and Christ was his Omega. Christ was the circle within which he moved, the center to which he constantly tended.

The grace of Christ converted him,

the preaching of Christ employed him,

the power of Christ sustained him, and

the glory promised by Christ attracted him.

Faith in Christ gave him peace,

love to Christ set him working,
zeal for Christ stimulated him to persevere, and
the hope of glory promised by Christ, prompted him to press forward with incessant ardor.

Is our religion, then, like Paul's? Is Christ . . .

our Alpha and Omega,
our first and last,
our center and circumference,
our all in all?

Would taking away Christ extinguish our light, destroy our life, and pass sentence of death on all our hopes and joys? If so -- then all is well. All is right. As we have, therefore, received Christ Jesus the Lord -- so let us walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Holy Spirit, glorify Jesus in us, by us, and through us, more and more every day!

"For to me, to live is Christ -- and to die is gain!"

Christ is my all, my sure defense,
Nor shall my soul depart from thence:
He is my rock, my refuge too,
In spite of all my foes can do!
Christ is my all, and he will lead
My soul in pastures green to feed;
'Tis he supplies my every want,
And will all needful blessings grant.
Christ is my all -- where should I go?
Without him I can nothing do;
Helpless and weak, a sinner great,
Yet in his righteousness complete!

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