

From the Nugget series # 52 by Elder Ralph Harris

"I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:23-24).

The two conflicting yearnings expressed here by the apostle Paul are both high and noble, and they are both characteristic of the true servants of God. Only those who love God and His people and who live "in hope of eternal life" know anything about the "strait" to which the apostle here refers. The wicked never experience Paul's *strait*. They neither experience his desire to be with Christ, nor his longing to be of service to the saints. They miss his conflicts, but they also miss his comforts.

Christ was the center of Paul's life (See Philippians 1:21). To him, Christ was synonymous with life and with real living. In his mind and heart there was no life apart from Christ, and thus it is with all true Christians. There is no joy greater than *serving* Christ Jesus, and no happier prospect than being *with* Him. "*To live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" Happy is the man, or woman, who has this view of living and dying. Satan has no darts in his arsenal that can penetrate this blessed shield of faith.

Paul's *strait* lay in the fact that there was at one and the same time a strong desire within him to leave this old sinful world behind him and to be through with trouble and sorrow, and also an unselfish longing to remain among his beloved brethren in Christ "*for their furtherance and joy of faith*" (verse 25). The great passion of his soul while he remained on earth was to strive for the benefit and up building of the saints and no man ever went about that labor of love with any greater fervor, faith and dedication than did he. He "*labored more abundantly than they all*" (I Cor. 15:10).

How fearfully does the life of Paul shame those slothful servants who love their leisure and who find greater delight in material pursuits than they do in serving the Lord and His people! ---Elder Ralph Harris 3/12/2002

(Note) There is a part of me that wants to go on and be with the Lord, but as I have said from the pulpit a few times, I carry pills around in my pocket to try to stay alive as long as I can. These are conflicting desires, but they seem to be consistent with Paul's. ---R.E.H.