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NORTHWEST THEOLOGICAL
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His story is...

Our Story

To Die Is Gain?

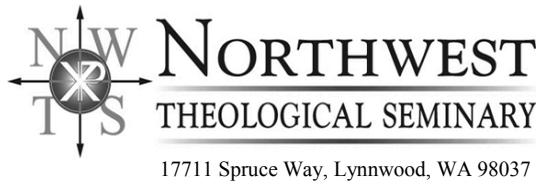
For some, Paul's words in Philippians 1:21 are among the most comforting and beautiful he ever penned. For others, they are the most insensitive, rude, and even bizarre. How in the world could anyone honestly read these words to someone on their deathbed and expect them to take them seriously? After all, does not Paul himself personify death as the great *enemy* to be swallowed up in victory at the end (1 Cor. 15:54-57)? Does he not tell us plainly that death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23)? How can the moment of death—the fruit and wages of sin—in *any sense* be a moment of true *gain*?

One thing is clear. The gain contemplated by Paul has nothing to do with the process of death *in itself*. Death is the consequence of sin. Its presence in mankind is not simply “a natural part of life.” Man was created to live, not die. To look forward to death for its own sake is not only a misunderstanding of Paul's word, but an implicit rejection of the order of God's creation. It is even a denial of the Author of life himself.

But neither is Paul looking forward to death *merely* as a means or pathway by which we become free from our sin and misery. It certainly is such a pathway—one for which we can be thankful and grateful. How often do we comfort those whose loved ones are dying in terrible physical agony: “Soon his pain will be over!”

The gain Paul contemplates is something infinitely greater than merely freedom from sin and misery. After all, that is not really a *gain* at all, but a welcome *loss* of something we desperately want to rid ourselves. Rather, the gain Paul has in view consists in the marvelous addition of something so grand that when it is compared to the seemingly mammoth trial of death, it makes it look like a tiny drop in the ocean. The gain is not just somewhat better, but something “better *by far*” (Phil. 1:23).

What then is the gain that Paul sees through death? It is the same gain he sees in life: Christ himself! “To die is gain” because through it one “departs to *be with Christ*” (Phil. 1:21, 23). As long as the believer is at “home in the body”, he is “absent from the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6). Surely



Christ is/only spirit who does not possess a body. He is professed to be seated with believers, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20) but he "is living body, and he is given. And Christ is in our body can only be in one place at one time. The only way for us to be with him *in his body* before the final resurrection is to be "absent from the body" so that we might "be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

That is the deepest yearning of the heart of every true believer: to be near to the person of Jesus Christ. The believer will scratch, claw, and fight his way through anything—even death itself—if only he "gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil. 3:8-9). All of God's redemptive work, from election to resurrection, is aiming towards this one goal of eternal union and communion with God and Christ. In death, our souls attain that final state. In resurrection, our bodies will share in that consummation.

To those who share Paul's longing to be with Christ, the moment of death can therefore be nothing else than gain. For them any message preached in any pulpit that does not regularly draw them to and encourage them in that central hope is nothing but "rubbish" (Phil. 3:8). It ought not to be tolerated or excused, but thrown in the garbage heap where it belongs. Churches need to demand that their ministers serve them the manna of heaven, and not the rubbish of the earth.



We need your prayers The Lord has sustained us throughout the years in a marvelous way. We thank you for praying. Among the prayers we would ask you to send up to our heavenly Father are the following:

1. The giving of our donors in December was the best we have ever had for that month. How grateful we are to the Lord. It has enabled us to pay all our bills through March without going into our reserves. However, we need monthly contributions to be able to keep doing this. Needless to say, any contribution in any amount will be helpful. Please pray that the Lord will continue to sustain us as he has in the past.
2. Also, we need students. We have three now that will be returning next year. However, we would like more. We have had a number of inquiries for next year, but to date we have not had any applications submitted. Please pray about this too.
3. Give thanks that our professors have remained in good health being sustained by our Heavenly Father. We give thanks too for the excellent students we have. They study diligently and are sincerely committed to Jesus Christ. Please thank the Lord for his grace and goodness to us.

Faculty Activities

Professor Dennison teaches a Bible Study series on Jeremiah for the community on Thursday evenings. See nwts.edu for the audio presentations which include: an overview of the prophet's life; remarks on commentaries on the book of Jeremiah; internal history of Jeremiah's era (626-586 B.C.); narrative structure; God's call of the prophet (1:4-19); the apostasy of the nation (2:1-3:5). Also, his third volume of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* has been completed and sent to the publisher.

Professor Sanborn has been teaching the adult Sunday School class through the fall and the spring at Lynnwood OPC. The church has been greatly encouraged as Mr. Sanborn has shown them how our eternal, heavenly hope is the basis of our life in our earthly pilgrimage.

Professor Peter Vosteen exchanged positions with Pastor Benji Swinburnson in September. He is now the associate pastor, while Benji is the senior pastor at Lynnwood OPC. This has enabled Pete to fill the pulpits of neighboring Reformed Churches. Also, he has taken on the duties of the chaplain at the Everett Gospel Mission's men's shelter on a volunteer basis.

We want to introduce you to three ladies who work behind the scenes. Without them the seminary would not be able to function. We give thanks to God for these faithful sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. Although done behind the scenes, their work is crucial to the continued well-being of the seminary. Thank you so much for your labor in the Lord!

First, there is Anita Hoogerhyde. She is married to Garry Hoogerhyde, has four grown children, and is a member of Lynnwood OPC. Anita holds down all the tasks of the office including doing the secretarial work and the bookkeeping.



Second, there is Lynn Rorberg. She is married to Paul Rorberg and has four children. Lynn is a member of the Trinity OPC where Marc Renkema, our adjunct professor, is the pastor. She assists with preparing the financial statements and the tax reports.



Third, there is Mary Vosteen. She is married to Pastor Peter Vosteen and has six grown boys. Mary does the recordings of the lectures that are put on the website.

