

# **PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT**

## **Part I: Aiming For A Mature, Discerning Love**

**(Philippians 1:1-11)**

### **I. Introduction**

- A. The Philippian believers lived in a city marked by a history of selfish competitiveness. When the long discord between Rome's aristocracy and the poor over the unequal distribution of wealth erupted in civil war between Caesar Augustus and Brutus, some of the soldiers under victorious Augustus had seen their lands seized in the war by Brutus, so Augustus tried to compensate them by relocating them to Philippi and declaring the city a Roman colony, giving its citizens rights equal to that of Rome's citizens, Zon. Pic. Ency. Bib., v. Four, p. 760.
- B. Such a compensation likely seemed inadequate for many of the soldiers, leading to enhanced selfishness in the city's culture, so the Philippian believers inherited an attitude of selfish ambition and strife, cf. Philippians 4:2.
- C. To begin to get his readers to exchange such deep-seated selfish ambition with godly achievement, Paul wrote of the need to aim for a mature, discerning love for others in Philippians 1:1-11, providing instruction for us:

### **II. Aiming For A Mature, Discerning Love, Philippians 1:1-11.**

- A. In the introduction of the epistle, Paul clearly sought to show respect and love for his Philippian readers, what would inhibit the arousal of any feelings of selfish ambition and strife in them, Philippians 1:1-8:
  1. In giving his introductory remarks, Paul mentioned himself and Timothy as mere slaves of Christ Jesus and referred to his Philippian readers as honorable saints, being careful to refer to its elders and deacons who were officials in respect for their positions of leadership in the church, Philippians 1:1.
  2. Paul gave his customary greeting of grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, for one must respond to God's grace before he can enjoy His peace, Phil. 1:2; Bib. Know. Com., N. T., p. 649.
  3. Continuing to avoid arousing a spirit of competitiveness and selfish ambition in his readers, Paul added that he always thanked God in his remembrance of them, requesting with joy their continued fellowship of financial support of him from the beginning when they had first trusted Christ, Philippians 1:3-5,7.
  4. Paul expressed confidence that God Who had begun His work in his readers would perform it until Christ's return, which work was evidenced by their long, faithful financial support of him, Philippians 1:6.
  5. The apostle added that he had a great affection in the Lord for his Philippian readers, Philippians 1:8.
- B. Paul then carefully shifted from his expressions of thanksgiving for his readers to mention his intercession for them that they might attain a mature, discerning love in their relationships, Philippians 1:9-11:
  1. The apostle testified that he prayed for his Philippian readers that they might abound more and more in their love, what would counter the selfish ambition and its resulting strife that marked their culture, v. 9a.
  2. However, **true** abounding love would be marked by two special qualities (as follows), Philippians 1:9b:
    - a. Paul prayed that their growing love would be marked by "advanced, perfect knowledge" (*epignosei*), an understanding of general principles, J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, 1974, p. 86.
    - b. He also prayed that this growing love in terms of its advanced, perfect knowledge of general principles might become applied in practical living, the Greek terms being *pase aisthesei*, "all perception," Ibid.
  3. The **result** of this kind of mature, discerning love as applied to life would be twofold, Philippians 1:10-11:
    - a. First, such a mature, discerning love would equip his readers to discern or approve of what was spiritually best or excellent in thought and action in relating to others, Philippians 1:10a NIV, ESV.
    - b. Second, with such a discernment of what was best or spiritually excellent, Paul's Philippian readers would function in ways in their relationships that would lead them to be pure and blameless at the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10b), for they would then be filled with the fruit of righteousness in their words and actions through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God, Philippians 1:11.

***Lesson:*** *To BEGIN to get his readers to replace a tendency for selfish ambition that was deeply engrained in them by their city's history and resulting culture, Paul introduced his epistle with words that avoided inflaming selfish ambition and strife and added that he prayed that his readers might aim for a mature, discerning love that would equip them to discern and approve of what was truly excellent before the Lord that they might adjust in their words and actions in their relationships to produce spiritually productive works to be rewarded at the coming of the Lord.*

***Application:*** *If we struggle with temptations to be selfishly ambitious, may we realize that we have an imperfect love that needs to mature, and aim by God's grace for a mature, discerning love for others that adjusts our thoughts and deeds to produce truly righteous works that will receive God's approval at the Lord's return.*