

PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT

Part II: Paul's Example Of A Mature, Selfless Ambition

(Philippians 1:12-20)

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 encourage his readers to exchange such deep-seated selfish ambition with selfless, godly ambition, Paul exemplified a mature, selfless ambition in ministry in Philippians 1:12-20, an edifying example for us:

II. Paul's Example Of A Mature, Selfless Ambition, Philippians 1:12-20.

- A. Though Paul was in prison at Rome facing a trial that could lead to his death (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1682, "Introduction to the Letter of Paul to the Philippians: Place of Writing"), he wrote not out of fear for his life, but positively that the circumstances of his imprisonment had merely furthered the gospel, Phil. 1:12.
- B. He explained these circumstances in Philippians 1:13-17 as follows:
 - 1. The imperial Roman soldiers of the praetorium guard (KJV "palace" translates the Greek term *praetorio*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 650) had served guard duty with Paul where prisoner was typically chained to the guard, making for a captive audience for Paul to witness of the gospel of Christ (Ibid.). Consequently, Paul had witnessed to a number of such guards so that news of the Gospel had spread throughout the praetorium and from there to everywhere else that Paul was in chains for the Gospel, Philippians 1:13.
 - 2. This news had led many believers in Rome to be encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly, leading to even more outreach in Rome for Christ, Philippians 1:14 NIV.
 - 3. Further, some believers out of envy and strife against Paul had reacted to news of his imprisonment by preaching where he could not due to his confinement, hoping to afflict him mentally out of a competitive spirit, but others preached in support of Paul, knowing he was set for the Gospel's defense, Phil. 1:15-17.
- C. Nevertheless, Paul did not react to those believers who tried to irritate him by competing against him in their ministries of the Gospel: rather, he asked the question, "What then?" (NASB, ESV) that the NIV renders, "But what does it matter?" to introduce his reaction to such competitive believers, and he answered very non-competitively and graciously that in every way, whether with carnal motives or in truth, Christ was being proclaimed, Philippians 1:18a. For Paul, even if people were preaching Christ with false motives to irritate him in competing against him, he selflessly rejoiced since Christ's Gospel was spreading, Philippians 1:18b.
- D. Paul added that he would continue to rejoice (Phil. 1:18c), for he knew that through the prayers of his readers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that these events would turn out for his vindication in his court trial, Philippians 1:19; Ibid., p. 651. Paul was only concerned that his testimony be upheld.
- E. The apostle expectantly hoped that he would not be ashamed, but that with full courage as always Christ would be honored in his body whether it be by being released or by being condemned to die, Phil. 1:20.

Lesson: *Though imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial that could end in his execution for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, Paul wrote not out of fear nor out of a competitive spirit with carnal believers set on adding to his affliction in prison, but out of joy that the Gospel was being furthered by his imprisonment, and hoping that whether by life or by death, Christ would be honored in his conduct and testimony. Such an example of esteeming the cause of Christ above even his own earthly life powerfully countered the tendency in his Philippian readers to express selfish competitiveness.*

Application: *(1) In light of Paul's example of putting Christ's glory above his personal pride and even his earthly life, may we set aside all carnal selfish competitiveness and personal ambition to focus on seeing Jesus Christ magnified in our lives and ministries, whether the means of this magnification of the Lord involves our improved welfare or even our great loss. (2) If other believers try to compete against us out of selfish ambition or if we face threats to our lives for our faith, may we not respond out of selfish ambition, but focus on fulfilling God's assignments for us, whether it involve our advancement or our loss in terms of what this world values.*