

Opening Words:

Don't try to build your reputation and have others consider how awesome you are. It is the Father in heaven we want people to connect with – not ourselves.

### 13 Phil – Different Preachers, Same Gospel

<sup>12</sup> And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.<sup>13</sup> For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

<sup>15</sup> It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. <sup>16</sup> They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. <sup>17</sup> Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. <sup>18</sup> But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

There is something strange-sounding in that passage. Did you notice it? Perhaps, something out of place? Yes, in verse 15 Paul talked about some who were preaching Christ from jealousy and rivalry. Paul is certain about it. He didn't say, "I'm concerned that some might be preaching with bad motives." No, he said, "those others do not have pure motives." How sad! The New International Version translates it, "it is true" and the New King James Version says "some indeed" preach Christ from envy and strife.

It's tragic, but it is true that sometimes, some preachers don't have the best intentions or motives. In verse 17 Paul says they do not have *pure* motives. They were men with selfish ambition. They thought preaching the gospel was a way for some kind of career advancement or a way for some to gain a following to stroke their ego.

We see this in the New Testament in various places. The little book of 3 John tells us about a man named Diotrephes. Listen to what John says about him:

<sup>9</sup>I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. <sup>10</sup>When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the traveling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.

Did you catch that? He loves to be the leader and does not accept apostolic authority. That sounds familiar.

One day Jesus asked the disciples a question about what they were discussing as they traveled. They kept silent and wouldn't answer him. Do you remember why? It was because they were having a discussion about which of the 12 was the greatest and they were ashamed of their conversation. Jesus gathered them together and said, "Listen, the greatest is the one who is the servant of all." Jesus then took a child, set the child before them and said, "whoever receives a child like this in my name receives me."

In other words, "Don't try to build your reputation and have others consider how awesome you are. It's enough to be considered a child as long as they receive you because when they receive you they are really receiving me and when then receive me they are receiving the Father in heaven." In other words, it is the Father in heaven we want people to connect with – not ourselves.

Oh how contagious pride is! It is like a deadly bacteria residing in all of us waiting for the right moment to multiply and spread its sickness. This deadly infection found its way to Rome where some were preaching out of jealousy and rivalry.

What spiritual ugliness, and it shows up in other ways. Listen to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. <sup>11</sup>For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup>Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."

Division in the church which comes from pride and from a party spirit and from thinking you are superior to others when Christ has commanded us to be servants of one another. This is preaching from strife. This is preaching to build a following for us. This is preaching to point people to us.

I once shared a 5-part teaching series called the Humble Prophet which looks at John the Baptist and how some of his followers were jealous for him. The crowds were following Jesus and not John and they told this to their master. Do you remember John's godly and humble response? He said, "I can't do anything unless God gives it to me. Jesus is the

Messiah, not me. Jesus is the bridegroom and I am just the attendant at the wedding. He must increase and I must decrease.” It’s about Jesus – not me.

Evidently, some people missed that message. You know what – I think what I just said isn’t quite right. I think, for the most part, people hear the message of humility but they are still captured by romantic notions of glory in following Christ. They want to be the awesome prophet. They want the roar of the crowd and the adulation of the audience and so they cause strife in order to get people to notice and follow them.

This ugly reality made its way into the church in Rome, and there was something else going on. There were agitators in the house churches who were still not quite comfortable with Paul’s message of grace to the Gentiles that allowed them to have equal footing with the Jews. Some may have even opposed his message and when Paul comes to Rome, not as the conquering apostle but as the chained prisoner of Christ they saw it as an opportunity to advance their viewpoint in the theological dispute and tried to cause Paul distress in his imprisonment. How distressing! How thoughtless! How selfish! How ungodly!

What did Paul do with all this? Are you ready for the shocking answer? He rejoiced. Paul rejoiced. Look with me at 1:18

It doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

Wow! What a man of humility and faith! Paul was a man of humility. This passage reminds us that Paul was doing what he was doing for the glory of Christ and to advance the cause of Christ in the world.

When he wrote to the Corinthians church about their factions he asked, “Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” Later he said,

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. <sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. <sup>7</sup> So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

And later still he would say that the goal of everything in life is working toward the great moment when God will be all in all.

How foolish, how vain, how petty, how small it was for these people to think this way, and Paul would not have that attitude.

This also shows him to be a man of faith for rather than wringing his hands and thinking, "Oh no, what's going to happen to my ministry now?" he said, "I'm going to rejoice. Do they have bad motives? God can deal with them, and even with their bad motives he can use them to preach the gospel and people will get saved. They think they are doing it to cause me distress. I refuse to be distressed about it. I choose to rejoice."

I bet Paul prayed for them. I bet he prayed for their ministries. I bet he prayed for the ones who were coming to Christ through their ministries.

What a lesson for us who are in leadership positions in local churches or in ministries such as Word of God, Speak. Temptations will present themselves to become proud and to make the ministry about us. But it isn't about me – Jonathan Williams or any other man except for the Man from Heaven, Jesus Christ. And if any of you think it is about any one man, then you have missed the mark, and you know what? We are going to rejoice and spread the good news about Christ and we will bless all other efforts to do the same.

We are going to strive for love and unity in the body of Christ and we will honor and bless the ministries of others as long as they are teaching God's word and preaching his gospel.

One day someone asked John Wesley if he expected to see George Whitefield in heaven. They asked that question because early in their ministries there had been a falling out between the two great preachers over the viewpoints of Calvinism and Arminianism. And so they asked, "Mr. Wesley, do you expect that you will see Whitefield in heaven?" And Wesley replied, "No, I do not."

They quickly asked, "Then you do not believe Whitefield is a converted man?"

Wesley replied, "Of course he is a converted man. But I do not expect to see him in heaven – because he will be so close to the throne of God and I so far away that I will not be able to see him!"

Oh that we would have that kind of humble spirit with those with whom we do not agree. What could happen if we would lay aside our differences which are mostly petty differences and which are mostly minor issues and would unite under the banner of the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

What would happen if we would humble ourselves before one another, consider others as more important, and wash one another's feet – maybe literally. How pleased our Father in heaven would be, and I believe there would be a great outpouring of the Spirit of God and the gospel would advance even further as we unite to spread the good news about Jesus.

This is our heart at Word of God, Speak. Join us with humility and faith as we spread His name with others around the world.