

PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT

Part III: Paul's Great Depth Of Selflessness In His Ambition For Christ

(Philippians 1:21-30)

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 saw 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 his great depth of selflessness in his ambition for Christ in Philippians 1:21-30, an example for us:

II. Paul's Great Depth Of Selflessness In His Ambition For Christ, Philippians 1:21-30.

- A. Having stated to his Philippian readers that he aimed for Christ to be magnified in his body, whether it be by life or by death (Philippians 1:20b), Paul explained that for him to live was Christ, and to die was gain, v. 21.
- B. The apostle then explained this statement in Philippians 1:22-24 (as follows):
 1. He knew that living in this current life in his current earthly body meant only more spiritually fruitful labor for the Lord (Philippians 1:22a) because it would edify believers like Paul's readers (Philippians 1:24).
 2. However, to depart in death by being executed by the Roman authorities was far better for Paul, what he preferred, for departing through death immediately brought him into the presence of Christ free of all the suffering, limitations and persecution of his earthly life, Philippians 1:23b. [Note: Paul did not anticipate entering a time of suffering in purgatory, but through death to be immediately put into Christ's presence, for absence from the body meant to be in the "far better" presence of the Lord in heaven, cf. 2 Cor. 5:8.]
 3. Paul was torn as to which destiny he would have (Phil. 1:23a), for dying and going to be with the Lord was "far better" for him (Phil. 1:23b), and could help spread the Gospel by the testimony of his martyrdom, but to stay alive and minister to other believers was more beneficial for them, Philippians 1:24.
- C. The apostle concluded that since he was still needed on earth to serve the spiritual needs of God's people, he would be acquitted and released to continue his ministry to them, Philippians 1:25-26. Paul's depth of selflessness was so great, he had committed himself to function beyond concern for the longevity of his earthly life with its sufferings and limitations and solely for the cause of Christ, be it by life or by death!
- D. In the conviction that God still wanted him alive to minister to fellow believers, Paul directed his attention to the discipling needs of His readers, directing them to godly living in Philippians 1:27-30 (as follows):
 1. In writing about their "conversation" (Phil. 1:27a KJV), Paul used the verb *politouomai*, "a political word which would mean much to the Philippian believers. Literally it means 'live as citizens.' Because Philippi was a Roman colony, the Christian inhabitants of the city would appreciate Paul's use of that verb," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 652; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 693.
 2. Paul admonished his readers to "live as citizens" of heaven in functioning worthy of the Gospel with an excellent personal testimony, that whether he was released so as to be reunited with them or whether he was only to hear of them while remaining imprisoned convicted to be executed, he might know they had stood unitedly for the faith of the Gospel, contending for its truth, Philippians 1:27b.
 3. He also urged them not to be frightened by their foes, a boldness that would be a testimony to them of the eventual destruction of the foes but conversely of the believers' deliverance by the Lord, Philippians 1:28.
 4. Paul explained that his believing readers had been granted the opportunity not only to trust in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake similar to the suffering Paul himself experienced for the Lord, Phil. 1:29-30.

Lesson: *Paul's ambition to magnify Jesus Christ was so great, it surpassed concern for his own earthly life and earthly ease, that Christ might be exalted in his body, be it by life or by death. Since he realized God still needed him on the earth for other believers, which state was actually less desirable for Paul as heaven was far better due to his current sufferings, he anticipated being released from prison to help his readers, so he admonished them to heed his example of unitedly standing for the truth of the Gospel regardless of the persecution they faced.*

Application: *May we heed Paul's example to invest our entire earthly life for God's glory whatever that entails.*