



## Our Motives in Ministry

Piggybacking his statement about being courageous to preach the gospel in the face of persecution (v [12-14](#)), the Apostle Paul continued to provide further reassurance for believers to stay strong and keep focused on the goal of advancing the gospel for Christ.

***Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. [Phil 1:15-18](#)***

A transient read of this passage brings several questions to mind. Who are these people that are preaching Christ from envy and strife? Who are those that are doing it from love? And can the true gospel really be preached from a selfish heart?

Tackling the first question, when we take a look at the Greek words used here, what is translated as “**selfish ambition**” is [eritheia](#), and this is specifically meant to describe one who seeks political gain by unfair means. It is a self-seeking, partisan, fractious frame of mind which stands in stark contrast to the attitude of a healthy convert. They may not be false teachers per se, as we read about in [2 Corinthians 11:13-14](#) (and other places), but instead are teaching or serving with completely defective motives. Typically, the root of this type of attitude stems from the desire to be wealthy and powerful (see [Matt 6:24](#), [Matt 23](#), [Gal 6:3](#), etc).

By comparison we answer the second question: those who preach Christ **out of love** are not self-seeking and instead have **pure motives**, which is the advancement of the gospel to the lost and the teaching of sound doctrine to believers. They serve the church and Christ without anticipating or seeking the potential benefits to themselves, either in power, prestige, or wealth.

I believe from the greater context of this passage that Paul is reassuring the believers in Philippi that they had the right motives. There is no indication that the local church as a whole was tainted with false or selfish teachers, but instead he appears to be comforting them with the fact that, though he was being afflicted even more in his persecution by some in the church at large, there was no need to worry because, in the end, the gospel was being preached. He proclaimed, “**and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice,**”. Once again Paul’s pastoral and servant heart shines through as he encouraged readers to see the good in his suffering, just as he did.



This brings us to our final question: can the true gospel really be preached from those with selfish desires? Surprisingly, the answer seems to be yes, however that person would lose their spiritual reward for doing so (cf: [Matt 6:1-2](#)). What comes to mind as I consider this is the story of Balak and Balaam, found in [Numbers 23](#). Balak was the king of Moab and he offered to pay Balaam, a corrupt, selfish prophet, to curse Israel. But through God's divine intervention Balaam ended up blessing Israel four separate times. Balaam did not set out to provide these blessings, but he could not resist in proclaiming the truth, and in doing so he lost many earthly riches and blessings that King Balak had promised to give him.

God sovereignly advances His word regardless of mans' intention (cf: [Isaiah 55:11](#)). If preached in truth, the gospel will go forward, even if the heart of the preacher is not right. Nevertheless, each of us should carefully consider our heart and motives in ministry work. Are we in ministry to be in the spotlight, gain notoriety, or even become wealthy? Or is our attitude one of a true servant of Christ and His gospel, which is humble, giving, and unpretentious? Let us strive to be of the mind that Paul urges later in this letter: ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** ([Phil 2:3-4](#))

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece