

PERSONAL MOTIVES – A MATTER OF THE HEART

The Book of Philippians #12

Webster's Dictionary defines a motive as "an inner urge that prompts a person to action with a sense of purpose." It is the driving factor in each of our lives. What are the motivating factors in your life? What motivates you? What drives your engine? What gets you up in the morning and keeps you going throughout the day? We're going to look at the personal motives of some with whom Paul dealt while in prison and writing to the church in Philippi.

Paul has been instructing the Philippians on how they should conduct themselves in the midst of persecution. He started by bringing to light the motives of those who were proclaiming the gospel of Christ while he being persecuted and imprisoned. He then moved on to address the issue of the motives of the Philippians themselves as they were struggling through their own persecution.

Paul began by about asking about their encouragement, consolation, fellowship, affection and compassion for one another in the midst of this persecution. He then asked them to make his joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, and intent on one purpose.

We have already spoken of these things over the past several weeks so today we will look at what Paul has to say about selfishness, conceit, humility and personal interests as he gets to the heart of what motivates personal conduct. And to make sure we stay in context let's look at the first two verses of Philippians chapter two.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

"Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintain the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

As he continues Paul gives some specific direction which aims at the heart of his request. The unity, love, and purpose Paul asked of them in verse two will not be possible without addressing what personally motives each one of them.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

"Do nothing from selfishness (selfish ambition NIV) or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look after your own personal interests but also for the interests of others."

Paul lists some "Dos" and "Don'ts" here. Let's address the Don'ts" first since Paul starts with those.

Paul says we are to do nothing from selfishness or, as the NIV says, from "selfish ambition". Paul also says we are not to do anything from empty conceit. Let's define each of these so we can get a better handle on what Paul is trying to address, starting with the first one.

"Selfishness" (or "selfish ambition") is being concerned with our own interest only, placing our own will and desires above all others. It is revealed in how we manipulate people and circumstances in order to get what we want.

My 2 year-old grand daughter is at the age where she frequently demonstrates his kind of behavior. Her “modus operandi for “I want what I want when I want it” is to cry or get mad when she doesn’t get it. Her world revolves around what she wants when she wants it and the adults had better toe the line or they will hear about it from her. She will try and manipulate them into paying attention to her by her voice or her actions. One way or another someone WILL pay attention to her and she WILL get what she wants.

This is especially true when the adults are talking and she is no longer the center of attention. Though she has learned to say “excuse me” when she wants our attention she does not want to wait to get it. So if we do not immediately stop what we are doing and start paying attention to her then in her mind something must be done. Continuing to speak while increasing the volume and getting closer are her usual tactics. When that fails a little whining and a few tears are thrown in.

Fortunately for her she has experienced parents and grandparents who are not intimidated by a little two-year-olds rising voice and agitated actions. Instead she gets a firm lesson on how to behave properly. Like Paul, we are trying to teach her to do nothing from selfishness but rather to consider others before herself. But we also pay attention and attend to her needs so eventually she will come to realize that she is important to us, just not more important than others. And if she wants to continue to be important then she needs to start treating others as important as well.

Like this two-year-old we all at times do things from selfish motives. Though all of us strive to be perfect because that is what the Father requires of us, we are not perfect yet. And selfishness does creep in from time to time in our relationships.

But Paul is talking about something more than what we might call “normal” selfishness. Let’s look back a few verses to see how Paul used these same words about others.

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-17

“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.”

The Greek word translated here as “selfish ambition” is the same Greek word that is translated as “selfishness” in verse 3 of chapter 2. It means “provocation, contention, or strife”. It is also translated as a “dispute” in 2 Corinthians 12:20. It is a self-seeking pursuit of something using unfair means to attain it. So it means more than what we might define as selfishness. It certainly contains the elements of seeking after one’s own interests above that of others, of being self-centered. But selfishness can be self-contained. Selfish ambition could never be self-contained because it goes beyond the realm of self and reaches into the world of others and the desire to harm them in order to get what we desire.

In Paul’s case, even though the proclamation of the gospel was a good thing, the motive of some who did so while Paul was in prison was to get Paul in more trouble than he was already in. If they could keep Paul locked up so he could no longer proclaim the gospel himself, then when they proclaimed it they would be elevated as Paul was in the eyes of those who believed.

They had no real concern for Paul or for the new believers, only for the prestige and adoration that might come from being the ones who proclaimed it. They were hoping to provoke the authorities into causing

Paul increased anguish, persecution, tribulation, and trouble while in prison, all so they could attain some gain from it. They were, in essence, jockeying for Paul's position. Never mind that Paul was uniquely chosen of God for this task. They felt that it was theirs for the taking.

This concept of personal gain or selfish ambition was actually an integral part of Roman culture. The zeal required to attain public status and to promote one's own honor was regarded as exemplary behavior by the Romans. According to *The Roman World of Dio Crysostom*. "Cities in the empire were always struggling to be the first in their province, and individuals struggled to be the 'first men' of their city to wear the gold crown and purple robe of office." So Paul knew this was an integral part of the roman culture and those coming out of it would need to be redirected in their pursuit of honor and status.

But this was not unique to Rome. It was also part of the Jewish religious culture and Jesus addressed it when he said to his disciples,

MARK 12:38-40

"Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."

Scribes loved the benefits of being in a position of religious authority, even though their actions did not always align with their appearance. But Jesus knew their hearts and said they were "whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones" who "outwardly appear righteous to men, but (were) inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:27-28). And when Jesus spoke with authority it frightened them because their authority was being questioned and criticized. So they set out to destroy Him (Mark 11:18).

Elevating one's self at the expense of others was not limited to Roman culture. Nor is it limited to the past. In our own culture we have people chasing after power at the expense of others. Catch phrases that make good sound-bites are used to make people appear stupid, ignorant, uninformed and unenlightened in order to hold on to power. Words like "far-right", "racist", "religious kooks", "homophobic", "war on women", and "pro-choice" are all meant to alienate anyone who has a different point of view than those who are trying to hold onto power. Character assignation was not limited to Biblical times. It is still thriving today.

To some who seek after power it matters not that truth is spoken. It only matters if what is said is believed. It is more important to achieve their goals than it is to be transparent. Lies repeated enough times appear as truth to the uninformed. And when the truth is revealed it is excused as unimportant, irrelevant, or necessary in order to ensure they retain their positions of power and influence. Selfish ambition is very prevalent in America today and can be observed almost daily.

Unfortunately many in the media are willing to be used by these powerful people because they are of the same mind and have the same goals. So we do not always hear of the magnitude of the problem until it is too late. And when we do it is rarely widely reported.

But what is the point of selfish ambition? Why practice it at all? The point of selfish ambition is to create anguish, persecution, tribulation, and trouble for another party in order to elevate one's self into a position of power, authority or respect. And once power is attained it is also used to maintain it. It is the

age-old philosophy that says, “I will use whatever means necessary to achieve my goal no matter whom or what gets in my way.”

And how does Scripture view those who are selfishly ambitious? Let’s take a look.

ROMANS 2:5-8

“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.”

Those who are selfishly ambitious are those who do not obey the truth. They obey unrighteousness. And the wrath and indignation of God are what await those who practice selfish ambition. Selfishness is not an attribute of the believing Christian and should not be manifested among us. Yet it does occasionally rear its ugly head. So where does it come from?

Galatians defines those who are selfishly ambitious as working from the flesh and not the Spirit. Here, as in 2 Corinthians the word translated as selfish ambition is translated as “disputes”. The Greek word translated as “strife” is closely related to the word dispute and selfishness and is also mentioned as coming from the flesh.

GALATIANS 5:19-26

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

The warning here which all should heed is that those who practice selfish ambition, which is truly at the heart of all dispute and strife, will not inherit the kingdom of God. If we find ourselves involved in these types of things we should take heed of this warning. We are working out of the desires of our flesh and not out of leading of the Spirit. Scripture tells us we are to crucify the desires of the flesh with its passions and desires. We are not to be crucified by them.

At the end of this passage Paul says we should not challenge one another. This use of the word challenge here means “to provoke, to irritate, to engage another in a combat or a contest to determine the winner”. We are not to be these types of people. We are to be self-controlled, patient people, bearing with one another in love, humble and content in Christ, with a heart full of compassion and forgiveness. If there is to be any challenge among us it is the challenge to individually maintain the purity of obedience and to corporately maintain the purity of doctrine so that all remain grounded and established in the truth.

In Colossians Paul tells us how to avoid acting like those who have selfish ambition; How to be content so that we do not feel the need to provoke or irritate others into a combative or challenging situation.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

“As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

A heart in which the peace of Christ dwells is not a heart from which selfish ambition and empty conceit arise. What rules our heart will rule our actions. If peace is on the throne then peace will rule and peaceful actions will be manifested. If contention is on the throne then contentiousness will rule and envy, strive and conceit will be the result.

But notice the expression “put on a heart of”. Paul is saying that compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing, forgiveness and love all must come from the heart, and that we must “put it on”, the analogy being to “wear it like a garment”. This expression to “put on” something is found elsewhere in Scripture. It can also be paired with laying something aside. For instance in Ephesians we read:

EPHESIANS 4:22, 24

“In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit...and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

So we are to put aside something in order to put something else on. We must lay aside the old self in order to put on the new self. Sort of like taking off our pajamas and robe in order to put on street clothes, or taking off our fancy clothes so that we can go outside and work in the garden or in the shop. We take off one thing in order not to ruin the other. In the case of the old and new self a better analogy could not be made. The old self can corrupt the new. It must be taken off before the new is put on.

But sometimes we just put something on over what we already have. For instance, when we cook we put on aprons. When we work on cars we put on coveralls to protect us from the oil and other fluids. Going to war we put armor over or under our normal military fatigues. We need the extra protection that armor brings to us as we enter into battle conditions. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians:

EPHESIANS 6:11

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”

We need something extra when we are doing battle with the devil. Our usual attire will not do. That protection is the full armor that God supplies to all believers. This is what will allow us to stand firm and win the battle for our minds and souls.

We also need wisdom to win the battle and understand the enemy. James tells us what to look for, what we can expect to encounter if we do not follow these instructions, and what will happen if we fail to put on the armor, put off the old self and put on the new.

JAMES 3:13 - 4:6, 11-12

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy but who are you who judge your neighbor?”

This passage reveals the true source and fruit of all selfishness. Its source is earthly and demonic in origin. And its fruit is disorder and every evil thing. It's no wonder Paul instructs us to put off the old nature and put on the new. They are mutually exclusive. They cannot exist together because each has the power to overrule the other. We must choose carefully what we wear because what we choose to put on will determine either victory or defeat.

This determination is made through the will of choice. We can choose victory by putting on the new self or we can choose defeat by refusing to put aside the old. For each of us the choice given to God's people millennium ago through Joshua still resounds today: “Choose this day whom you will serve.” Whom we serve - which self we choose to put on or take off - will set the course of our tongue and our actions for the day. Either selfishness or kindness will come out of that choice. But it is determined by an act of the will.

These verses also tell us what we can expect if we do not follow Paul's advice to the Philippians - when selfishness, greed, quarrels, wrong motives, pride and judgment are allowed to occur among us.

We become arrogant and lie against the truth. There is disorder and every evil thing. The things we desire (our pleasures) wage war in our members. We lust and do not have so we commit murder to get it. We are envious and cannot attain what we want so we fight and quarrel. We don't have what we want because we don't ask for it; and when we do ask we don't receive it because we ask with wrong motives so that we can spend our wants on our own pleasures. We become proud and God ends up opposing us. We speak against our brother and judge him thereby judging the Law itself. We then become subject to judgment from the Righteous Judge Himself. All of these are the result of selfish ambition.

But Paul speaks not only of selfish ambition but also of empty conceit. What is “empty_conceit”?

Conceit is having an exaggerated estimate of one’s own ability or importance. Empty, of course would be to have no substance, or to have nothing to back up the conceit. We strive for recognition because we believe we deserve it. Then when we do not get it we do things to others in order to inflate our own importance and achieve our goal. But whatever we achieve through the means of selfish ambition will be empty because it was gained at the expense of another. God does not reward selfish ambition. He resists it because it comes from a heart full of pride. The favor and grace of God is only granted to those whose actions stem from a heart steeped in humility.

Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”. He also said that what proceeds from the heart is what defiles us.

LUKE 6:4-5

“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

The outward sign of selfish ambition and empty conceit is driven by the inward condition of the heart. The heart contains the fuel which empowers movement. What direction the movement takes is determined by the type of fuel the heart contains. If the heart contains evil it will speak and move in the direction of evil. If the heart contains good it will speak and move in the direction of good. This is why selfish ambition cannot come forth from a heart filled with God’s Spirit and His word. It only springs forth from a heart full of flesh.

Yet what fills the heart is determined by the mind. What we allow to enter our mind we also allow to fill our hearts. Dwelling on the deeds of the flesh will fill the heart with sinful desires and out of this abundance will come sinful actions. Dwelling on God and His word will fill our hearts with goodness. Out of the abundance of goodness will come righteous deeds. That is why Paul addresses the mind as well as the heart.

Paul has said that our actions must not be driven by selfish ambition or empty conceit. He then provides the solution or the antidote to this type of thinking, He says our actions must be driven by humility of mind.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

“Do nothing from selfishness ambition (selfishness NAS) or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”

And what is “humility of mind”? It is having a humble opinion of one’s self; a deep sense of one’s moral littleness. A person with a mind full of humility understands that they have no moral ground upon which to stand except that which God has supplied. They understand that they are not better nor less than any other of God’s human creation. A person with a humble mind is not puffed up with self-importance or self-comparison with others.

Jesus addressed this when he told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

LUKE 18:9-14

And (Jesus) also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Who went home justified in the eyes of God? Not the one filled with self-importance but rather the one whose mind was full of humility. Though both were sinners only one acknowledged it before God - the one who had a deep sense of his moral littleness, of his inability to measure up to God's standard. James (4:6) tells us that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. So if we do not want to be resisted by God then we should take stock of the state of our mind to ensure that it compares itself to the standard of righteousness that God has set and not the standard of righteousness that men have set for themselves.

Unlike this Pharisee, Paul says that we should regard one another as more important than ourselves. This is the exact opposite of selfish ambition and empty conceit. This attitude does not seek to grab what others have and do so by whatever means necessary. It is not jealous of another, does not brag, is not arrogant, and does not act unbecomingly (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). And it does not seek after its own because it places its own interests on an equal plain with the interests of others.

When Paul says we should look out for the interest of others he does not say that we should neglect our own personal interests for the interests of others but that we should pay as much attention to the needs of others as we do to our own. We cannot neglect our own personal interests because we have obligations which require our attention. And so do others. But we cannot be so preoccupied with our own interests that we pay no attention to the interests of others.

I had a hard time defining the word "interest". Other than a reference to money, I could not find a definition of this word in the Greek and the commentaries I searched did not define it. So I was left with the dictionary which defines an interest as "one's feelings of concern or curiosity; something which draws one's attention towards it".

But this does not help me much because I don't think I should expect you to be interested in Barbra Streisand music or science-fiction movies about time travel. Nor should you expect me to be interested in everything that interests you. I might find it interesting to discover that you are interested in football and race cars but that does not mean that I should make sure I look after those interests as well. I don't need to add them to my list of interests in order to be concerned for you.

Perhaps the reason I could not find the word defined even in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of Greek words is because the actual intent is better stated as follows: *Don't just look out for yourself but look out for others as well.* In other words, don't be so preoccupied with what concerns you that you fail to see the concerns of others. Don't place a higher priority on yourself than you do on others.

The point Paul is making is that we are one body and as one body each part has its function. Do not disregard another part of the body because you cannot see it as having the same function as you yourself have in the body. And do not elevate your position in the body above that of another member. Do not be like the Pharisee but rather be like the tax collector. In humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourself, not merely looking out for your own interests but also for the interests of others. This does not come from a place of selfish ambition and empty conceit. This comes from a mind filled with humility.

As I close, and to demonstrate my point, let me use the same analogy that Paul uses - that of marriage being like Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32). In Philippians Paul has been addressing the church and its behavior in the midst of persecution. Now image this same scenario occurring in a marriage.

Imagine living with someone who sought after their own needs without any regard to the other. Imagine verbally tearing one another down in order to build yourself up. Imagine one spouse spending large chunks of money for something which only they would enjoy. Imagine one undermining the other when it comes to child rearing, allowing the child to express some behaviors which the other has been trying to quell. Imagine finding bill collectors at your door because the money earned was spent on something other than rent and utilities. Imagine one seeking comfort in the arms of another because they arms of the one they are married to are being withheld due to spite. Imagine the arguments when one spouse feels they deserve to be treated better than they are and the verbal bantering that would occur to try and reestablish dominance. Imagine trying to hold a marriage together when one or both are acting out of selfish ambition and empty conceit instead of humility of mind.

Putting the needs of one over the other comes at a cost in a marriage and it comes at a cost in the church. It has been said that marriage is a 50-50 proposition. But that more accurately describes a divorce and the subsequent division of property. Marriage is not 50-50 it is 100-100. Each giving all they have to the other. The church is one with Christ. It is married to Him. He gave His all for us. We are His bride and one day He will take us home to be with Him. He asks no less from us than what He Himself willingly gave up for us.

It truly is a matter of the heart. When we fight and struggle with fellow believers, seeking after our own interests at the expense of others, we are striving against Christ. And the evil which fills our heart spills out for all to see. What Paul is asking us to do is to align our motives and our actions with the One we serve so that only good fruit will emerge. By doing so we will not only make Paul's joy complete but the joy of our Savior as well.