

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“Don’t Let THEM (Rivals/Enemies) Change You”

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 1:15-18; 1:1-14; 2:3-8; 4:22; Gal. 1:6-7; 5:18-23; Luke 6:27-28

Most of us know what it is like to deal with someone whose attitude toward us is wrong. Maybe they have spoken against us, misunderstood us, competed with us, questioned our motives, or even deliberately tried to make things more difficult. And when someone comes at us in the flesh, there is something very natural in us that wants to respond in the same way. If they attack me, I defend myself. If they speak against me, I speak against them. If they treat me like an enemy, I begin treating them like an enemy. But there is a danger in that: **if I fight the flesh with the flesh, then I become someone who is operating in the flesh.** Their behavior begins changing mine.

Paul is writing Phil. 1 from prison, and he has already explained that what happened to him has *actually* resulted in the advancement of the Good News. His imprisonment has opened doors into the Praetorian Guard and even into Caesar’s household, and other believers have become more courageous in proclaiming the message. But not everything happening among those believers is good. Some are proclaiming Messiah with pure motives, while others are doing it out of envy, strife, and selfish ambition. Paul cannot control their motives, but he can determine what happens in his own heart. That becomes the challenge of this passage: **Don’t let what is happening in them change what the Holy Spirit is producing in you.**

1. WATCH WHAT IS MOTIVATING YOU

Paul writes, *“Some are proclaiming the Messiah out of envy and strife, but others out of good will. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the Good News”* (Phil. 1:15-16). What is striking is that Paul considers these people *adelphoi*—brothers and sisters in the Lord. The issue is not necessarily their message. They are proclaiming Messiah. Unlike other places where Paul confronts false teaching, here he does not say they are preaching another gospel. Their methods are not really the concern either. The difference is found in their **motives**. Some proclaim Messiah from goodwill and love; others from jealousy and strife.

Motives reveal what is driving us. Paul identifies love as the motivation of those walking rightly. Love is the fruit of the Spirit. But strife, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissension, and factions belong to the works of the flesh. (Gal. 5:19-23). It is possible to be doing something that looks right while being driven by something wrong. So before we become consumed with examining everyone else’s motives, the better question is, **“Lord, what is motivating me?”**

2. DON'T FIGHT THE FLESH WITH THE FLESH

Paul then turns to the other group: *"The former proclaim Messiah not sincerely but out of selfishness—expecting to stir up trouble for me in my imprisonment"* (Phil. 1:17). The word translated "selfishness" carries the idea of selfish ambition, faction, partisanship, or serving one's own party. These people are preaching Messiah, but something beneath the surface is wrong. Their concern has shifted from the Kingdom of God to their own kingdom, their group, their position, or their advancement. They are apparently using Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to advance themselves and, somehow, to make his situation even more difficult.

It would have been very easy for Paul to make this personal. He could have thought, "They are attacking my reputation. They are trying to cause trouble for me. I need to defend myself. I need to straighten this out." But if Paul responds to their flesh with his own flesh, then they have succeeded in changing him. This is why he will later tell the Philippians, *"Do nothing out of selfishness or conceit, but with humility consider others as more important than yourselves"* (Phil. 2:3). Paul is not merely giving them a principle; he is living it. When someone else walks in selfish ambition, we do not have to join them there. When someone makes us their rival, we do not have to make them ours. **We don't fight fire with fire. We don't fight flesh with flesh.**

3. CHOOSE WHAT YOU WILL REJOICE IN

Paul's response is remarkable: *"But what does it matter? Only that in every way, whether in dishonesty or in truth, Messiah is being proclaimed—and in this I rejoice! Yes, and I will keep rejoicing"* (Phil. 1:18). Paul is not saying that motives do not matter. If they did not matter, he would never have mentioned their envy, strife, or selfish ambition. He is not excusing their behavior. Instead, Paul recognizes something freeing: **I cannot control what I cannot control.** He cannot change their hearts, determine their motives, or make them behave differently. But he knows the Lord is still in control, and he can choose where **he** places **his** attention.

It is as though Paul is looking at the work of a Master Artist. From our perspective, we might say, "Lord, why are You using that brush? It is flawed. Why are You using that piece of chalk? It is broken. Why would You put that color into the picture?" But Paul knows the Artist. He trusts Him enough to believe that even when he does not understand the tools being used, the Master Artist is still creating something beautiful. Paul therefore finds something in which he can rejoice: **Messiah is being proclaimed.** His joy is not rooted in other people treating him correctly. His joy is rooted in the Lord. He can say, "This is not about my reputation, my kingdom, or my name. This is about Messiah Yeshua. And If His Kingdom is advancing, then I will rejoice."

CONCLUSION

There will always be things we cannot control. We cannot control what someone says about us, what motivates them, how they interpret our actions, whether they compete with us, or whether they decide to treat us as a rival. But we can choose whether their

we respond to them in the flesh. Yeshua says, *“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for the ones who mistreat you”* (Luke 6:27–28). That is freedom. If I can love my enemies, then my enemies cannot control my heart. If I can pray for those who mistreat me, then their behavior cannot determine who I become. **I do not have to become like the people who oppose me. I am called to continue becoming like Yeshua.**

So perhaps the prayer today is simply a place of surrendering the people we cannot control and allowing the Spirit to search what is happening within us. “Lord, why am I so offended? Why am I so consumed by what they said? Why am I fighting so hard for my reputation? Is this about Your Kingdom, or has it become about mine?” Bring the rival, the critic, the difficult person, even the one who has treated you like an enemy, before the Lord. Release your need to control the situation, or to defend yourself at every turn. Ask Him instead, **“Give me the mind of Messiah. Help me see this through Your eyes. Keep their flesh from awakening mine. Keep their motives from changing mine.”** I cannot control what I cannot control. I will not lose my love. I will not surrender my joy. I will trust the Master Artist—and I will keep rejoicing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Phil. 1:15–16, what was the primary difference between the two groups who were proclaiming Messiah?
2. Why does it matter that Paul identifies envy, strife, and selfish ambition even though Messiah was still being proclaimed?
3. Think about a person who has frustrated, criticized, competed with, or mistreated you. **Has their behavior begun to change the way you think, speak, or respond?**
4. When you feel the need to defend yourself or your reputation, **how can you discern whether you are being led by the Ruach or reacting from the flesh?**
5. What is one thing you can choose to rejoice in right now, even in a situation involving circumstances or people you cannot control?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, search my heart and show me what is motivating me. I do not want to respond to the flesh with the flesh. When others operate from envy, selfish ambition, strife, or wrong motives, keep those things from taking root in me. Fill me instead with the fruit of Your Ruach—with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Lord, teach me to see through Your eyes. Help me trust You with the people I cannot control and the situations I cannot change. Keep me from fighting for my own kingdom, my own reputation, or my own agenda. Give me the mind of Messiah Yeshua. Let my life be about Your Kingdom and Your glory, and wherever I can see You working, teach me to rejoice and to keep rejoicing. Make me more like Yeshua today.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.