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Paul's Critics
1: 15-20

Paul's critics DIG: Who were Paul's critics? From verses 15-16 what possible motives might they have for preaching? What did Paul think about them? Was he jealous? What did he conclude? What was Paul's ultimate goal for his ministry?

REFLECT: How do you tell the difference between true and false preachers or teachers? Do you care if someone is communicating the true Gospel out of selfish ambition rather than pure motives? What is the ultimate goal in your life?

It is the Gospel that saves, not the preacher.

One of the critical themes of this letter is humility. This theme reaches a zenith in **Chapter 2** where **Paul** gives us the example of **Yeshua** and the humility that led **Him** to **death** on a Roman cross. In **verses 15** and **16**, **the apostle** contrasts those who share **the Good News** of **Messiah** out of selfish-ambition and for their own fame with those who share **the Gospel** humbly. He is not criticizing their message like **he** did **the Judaizers** (see **Galatians, to see link click Aj – No Other Gospel**); but rather, their spirit of self-ambition. **Paul** even commends **the word** of **Yeshua** that was being delivered, even if done by unworthy messengers **(1:18a)**.[41]

It is true that some preach Messiah out of envy and strife, but others out of good will (1:15 NIV). Like **the Lord** during **His** earthly ministry, **Paul** had more than **his** share of **critics**, most of them from the Jewish and pagan religious establishments. The Church soon came to have **critics** within its own ranks who maligned their leaders, more often than not those who were the most godly and effective. **The apostle's critics** in **Philippi** were not heretics like the Judaizers, but were biblically on solid ground. **They** preached and taught the true **Gospel** of **Yeshua Messiah**. Nor were **they false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Messiah (Second Corinthians 11:13)**, or part of

those who demanded Gentile circumcision for salvation mentioned later in the present letter **(3:2).**

As John MacArthur relates in his commentary on *Philippians*, **envy** (Greek: *phthonos*) is the desire to deprive others of what is rightfully theirs. It was **because of envy** that the Jewish multitude **(Matthew 27:18)** and **the Sadducees handed Yeshua over** to Pilate for crucifixion. **Envy**, wishing others did not have what they have, is closely related to **jealousy**, which is wishing to have what someone else possesses. From the context, it seems likely that **the apostle's critics** were both **envious** and **jealous** of **the apostle**. They envied **Paul's** giftedness, **his** blessings, **his** intellect, **his** effectiveness in ministry, and, perhaps especially, **his** being highly respected and beloved by **the Philippians**. As a result, like all those motivated by **envy** and **jealousy**, **they** considered **the apostle** to be a threat to **their** own influence in the church.

Strife (Greek: *eris*) refers to *contention*, especially with a spirit of hostility. As it is used here, it is frequently associated with envy and jealousy, as well as with other sinful passions, such as greed and malice. **Envy** leads to competition, hostility, and conflict. **Paul's** purpose in confronting this issue was not to gain sympathy for **himself**, much less to retaliate against **his critics**. **He** was rather pointing out that faithfulness in ministry includes right motives as well as right doctrine. There have always been those whose service in the Church is to a large degree motivated by a desire to make a name for themselves. That makes them resentful of those who are respected and whose ministries are fruitful. They inevitably breed **envy** and **strife** and therefore do great harm to the congregations of **God**. Exactly what was being said about **the apostles** to hurt **him** and destroy **his** reputation is not revealed. But because the charges were false, the details are not important.[42]

Unlike **Paul's critics**, **the latter** (those of **good will**) preached **Messiah out of love.** In context, those believers motivated by **good will** doubtless **loved the Lord** and each other but the emphasis here is on **their love** for **the apostle**. **They** cared deeply for **him** and were concerned for **his** personal welfare as well as for the impact of **his** ministry. From **their** perspective, **the Gospel** itself was on trial.[43] Only a few years earlier, in **his** first letter to the bickering and divisive church in **Corinth**, **he** wrote: **If I speak with the tongues of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be**

burned, but do not have love, it prophets me nothing . . . Now faith, hope, love, live by these three, but the greatest of these is love (First Corinthians 13:1-3 and **13).**

Those **believers knew** that **Paul** was divinely **appointed for the defense of the Gospel (1:16 NKJV)**, and were grateful for **his** faithful obedience to that call – an obedience that had brought **them** such rich spiritual blessings. **Yeshua** had declared to **the apostle** on the road to Damascus that **he** was to **carry [His] name before Gentile nations and kings and the sons of Isra'el (Acts 9:15; cf. Galatians 1:15-16; Ephesians 3:6-7). His** imprisonment in Rome was neither an accident of fate nor primarily the decision of men, not even of **Paul's** decision to **appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11)**. Above all else, it was an integral part of **his** divine mission to defend **the Gospel**. And in this case, **he** was destined to do so in Rome.

The former (**Paul's critics**) **proclaim Messiah out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives (1:17a Greek). Selfish ambition** did not originally have a bad connotation, but simply referred to working for hire. Eventually, however, it acquired the meaning of looking out solely for one's own interests, regardless of the consequences to others. It was used by career professionals who ruthlessly tried to claw their way to the top of their fields anyway they could, and by politicians who sought office at any expense. Not only did **the apostles' critics** not preach from **pure motives**, even worse, **they thought that they could stir up trouble for him while he was in chains (1:17b Greek). They** exhibited incredible cruelty born of jealousy, using **the apostle's** imprisonment to discredit **him** and to promote **themselves**.[44]



But, in the final analysis, **Paul** concluded **that it didn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message of Messiah is being preached either way. And because of this I rejoice (1:18 Greek). Paul** here doesn't excuse **those** who share **the Good News** for impure motives but focuses on the sharing of **the Good News**. Where there is a false presentation of **the Gospel**, **he** would speak out forcefully, as **he** did with **the Judaizers**. But here, **the message** is right, even though **the messenger** has the wrong motives. Nevertheless, **Paul** rejoiced that **the Word of God** was being preached. It is **the Gospel** that saves, not **the preacher**. The insincere **evangelist** is storing up for **himself** judgment, but those who have come to **Yeshua Messiah** because of **his** words have entered eternal life (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**).[45]

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that this will work out for my deliverance (Greek: *soteria*, which is commonly rendered *salvation*) **(1:19a Greek). The apostle** quotes directly from the Septuagint (The Greek translation of the TaNaKh), citing **Job's** reply to Zophar: **Indeed, this might work out for my deliverance (13:16a).** Some therefore believe **Paul** was referring to **his deliverance** from sin and **death** through faith in **Yeshua Messiah**. The idea then would be that **he** was confident in **his** eternal security. Others take this

deliverance to refer to **his** vindication before **Caesar** and **his** consequent release from prison and **deliverance** from execution. The primary **deliverance** of which **he** was speaking could not have been from execution, however, because in **verse 20 he** qualifies **his** expectation by saying: **whether by life or death.** In any case, **Paul** knew that **his** present circumstances were temporary. One way or another, **by life or death**, **he** would be delivered from them. However, **verses 21-25** indicate **his** confident anticipation that **he** would live. **His salvation** would be perfected when **he** was ushered into **his Lord's** presence **(1:23)**. Again, like **Job**, **he** could declare: **As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God (Job 19:25-26).**

Through your prayers (1:19b Greek). Paul believed in the limitless sovereignty of **ADONAI** and had perfect confidence that **God's Word** would be fulfilled and **His** purpose carried out. **He** also knew that **God's** sovereign plan includes the **prayers** of **His people**. **He** especially appreciated **the prayers** of the beloved congregation at **Philippi** and **he** expressed to them **his** deepest convictions and personal longings. Before **Paul** visited the church at Rome, **he** had appealed to those believers: **Now I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Yeshua Messiah and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me (Romans 15:30).** Nothing is more encouraging to those in ministry than to know that fellow believers are holding them up before **the Lord** in **prayer**.

And the help I get from the Spirit of Yeshua Messiah (1:19c Greek). The Word of God, the prayers of believers, and the power of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** always work together for the benefit of the servants of **God**. **Yeshua** promised: **I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He lives with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17; cf. 15:26; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12; Romans 8:9). The Spirit** helps believers to **pray**. When we are weak and **do not know how to pray as we should . . . the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26). The Spirit** is the source of our power: **You will receive power when the Ruach Ha'Kodesh has come upon you (Acts 1:8).** And **the Spirit** produces in the believer's life an abundant harvest of spiritual fruit: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).**

For I fully expect and hope that I will never be put to shame (1:20a NIV). Paul was certain that, in the eyes of **ADONAI**, **he** would never truly be **put to shame**, whether before Caesar, the world, or the Church. Ultimately, **he** would be vindicated. **The apostle** expressed **his** supreme **joy** when **he** wrote that, **with all boldness, now, as always, Messiah will be exalted in my body.** Knowing that the believer's **body** is **the temple of the Ruach Ha'Kodesh (First Corinthians 6:19), he** had presented **his body** as **a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which [was his] spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1). Whether by life or by death (1:20b Greek). Paul** was not certain what **the Lord's** plan was for **him**, whether **he** would continue to serve **Him** through **his life** and ministry or through the final praise of **death**. To **the elders** from **Ephesus**, who met **him** near **Miletus**, **Paul** declared: **I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Yeshua, to testify solemnly of the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).** Either way **he** would be victorious and **Messiah** would be **glorified**.[46]

What is your ultimate goal in life, your **eager expectation and hope**? **Paul** expressed **his** supreme goal – to promote **the glory** of **Yeshua**, whatever the cost or benefit to **himself** – in order to wet **the Philippians** and our appetites for the same heart-satisfying aim. **He** was not setting **himself** apart from the rest of us as some ascetic monk, to be admired from a distance by people whose devotion didn't match **his**. Rather, **he** wanted to make us all feel **his** thrill at the privilege of glorifying **Messiah**. This privilege, and nothing less, is what you and I were made for. **Asaf**, the author of **Psalm 73** once **envied** those who enjoyed attractive, but fleeting rewards. But when **ADONAI** brought **him** to **his** senses, **he** realized that nothing could compare to the priceless treasure **he** already possessed: **Whom have I in heaven but You? On earth there is none I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (73:25-26).**

Just as **the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1)** and **the trees clap their hands** and **sing for joy before ADONAI** at **His** coming **(Isaiah 55:12** and **Psalm 96:12-13)**, so we, who bear the very image of **the Creator**, are designed to be **the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1: 12** and **14).** So a question begs for an answer: What passion fills your thoughts in your waking hours and sleepless night? Are you pursuing academic achievement, career success, health and fitness, a fulfilling marriage, respectful and accomplished children, financial stability,

popularity, or community recognition? These are all good goals, but none is big enough to be your ultimate goal, the goal for which your **Creator** designed you. Now, they might be consistent with **His** sovereign design for you, but if your sights are set no higher than these earthbound accomplishments, sooner or later your hopes will be dashed.

Or, to use **Paul's** other way of speaking, from what evil, above all, do you need salvation? Do you long to escape poverty, illness, abuse, injustice, violence, loneliness, failure, obscurity, or shame? Any sane person would want to escape such miseries. Yet no sane person would expect a life free of pain and adversity in this world. **Yeshua Himself** said: **In this world you will have trouble (John 16:33b). ADONAI** has not promised complete deliverance from the world's woes short of **Messiah's** return at the end of history. On that great day, when **the Savior** for whom we wait appears from heaven, not only will **He** transform our lowly body to be like **His glorious** body **(3:20-21)**, but **He** will also create **a new heaven and a new earth**, from which every form of evil and misery will be defeated **(Revelation 21:1-4)**. In the meanwhile, the salvation that **YHVH** gives *now* is the deliverance from **selfish ambition**. And **God's** grace will free you, too, enabling you to embrace the ultimate goal that was **Paul's eager expectation and hope**, and that gave **him** confident **joy** in the face of an uncertain future: seeing **Messiah glorified** through you, whether through **life or death**, plenty or want, health or disease, admiration or rejection. Don't settle for less than the best![47]

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for making an eternal home in heaven for me where I will live with **You** forever! **Critics** may complain, but I can be full of joy and feel secure when my hope is in **You**. **Critics** may complain, but the inheritance of the promised **Ruach Ha'Kodesh** as a seal of ownership is so great that it silences their weak voices. What a joy and a comfort it is, to know that what **the critics** say does not matter. What **You** say matters for all eternity! **You** have promised to prepare a wonderful eternal home for those who love **You**. Thank **You** for the strength of **Your** steadfast love that satisfies and is greater than the voice of any critic. **Since Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live. In Your name I lift up my hands. My soul is satisfied with fat and oil, so my mouth praises You with joyful lips (Psalm 63:3-5).** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*