

# EXPLAINING THE PRETENSE PREACHERS

ARE THE APOSTLE PAUL'S INSPIRED WORDS IN PHILIPPIANS 1:18 AN ENDORSEMENT FOR ALL FALSE MINISTRIES?

To come to a proper understanding of *Philippians 1:15-19* we must, as always, rightly divide the Word of truth by comparing spiritual things with spiritual. This is fundamental to proper Biblical exegesis. Sadly, many have mistakenly used this passage, and particularly *verse 18*, as a proof-text in chastising those of us who oppose preaching/ministry that is less than Biblical. They insist that we should 'rejoice' as they mindlessly assume the *Apostle Paul* 'rejoiced' over the preaching and message of the 'pretense preachers' of his day. However, before we arrive at this simplistic conclusion we would be wise to consider several points:

1. Regarding counterfeit spirituality, the tenor and tone of the N.T., and the Bible in general, is one of condemnation. False, counterfeit Christianity, its message, and its messengers are to be judged, exposed, and if they refuse to repent, avoided (*Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 3:10-11; 2 John 1:9-10; etc.*). Rarely, if ever, are we instructed to overlook religious error, but in fact, are many times commanded to judge, prove, expose, and if need be, separate from all error (*John 10:12-13; 2 Cor. 11:13; Philip. 3:2; Jude 1:3; 1 John 4:1*). Moreover, this was the consistent example of the Apostle Paul as revealed throughout the N.T. (*Acts 20:29-31; 2 Cor. 11:13; Gal. 1:7, 2:4; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 1:4-7, 4:1-3, 6:3; 2 Tim. 3:5, 4:3, etc.*). Not only this, but the Apostle often exposed men by name (*1 Tim. 1:20, 2 Tim. 4:10, 2:17-18; etc.*). He even withstood the Apostle Peter publicly for error because as Paul explained, 'he was to be blamed' (*Gal. 2:11*). Of course, we are speaking of heresy (*alterations of gospel truth that could eternally effect souls, for example, Catholicism, as it is a different gospel*) and not mere theological differences over non-essentials. Considering these facts, it is difficult to believe the Apostle Paul was taking a passive stance toward these hypocritical teachers. Do we suppose that if he had spoken directly to these 'pretense preachers' he would have offered them encouragement by exclaiming, 'I rejoice in your preaching'? Or course not. We thus conclude that the Holy Ghost would never ask us to 'rejoice' over a flawed gospel. This is confirmed by none other than the Apostle Paul as he was inspired to declare that charity, or love...

*1 Corinthians 13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth...*

Hence, although *Philippians 1:18* teaches us that the *Apostle Paul* actually *rejoiced*, it is doubtful, if not impossible, that he rejoiced over the messenger, message, or method of the named *pretense preachers* as this would be unloving.

*Galatians 1:8-10* But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

2. It is fruitless to discuss the merits of '*false teaching/preaching of Christ*' and God's use of it without first making a distinction between God's use of an ordained and sanctified vessel/method as opposed to His providential or Sovereign use of something other to accomplish His purposes in individual lives, families, nations, etc. The Bible clearly teaches that God's Church, the Body of Christ, is His chosen vessel who He has given the distinct purpose of manifesting Christ (*Mk. 16:15; 1 Tim. 3:15*). Likewise, the '*preaching of the gospel*' (*remember, preaching is narrowly defined by Biblical precept and example*) is His ordained means and method for this purpose (*Titus 1:3*). God never steps outside of this order, meaning, he will not ordain, bless, or anoint another pattern. However, we certainly believe that God, in His Sovereignty, can use many, if not all things, to accomplish His perfect will in human affairs without divinely ordaining, blessing, or otherwise endorsing such things. For example, the Bible declares that the '*way of a transgressor is hard*'. The sinful life is often difficult and sin brings many a man into a terrible and desperate state. Such was the case with many of us as the wages of sin humbled us and brought us to a place of desperation. Without this, many of us would never have looked outside of ourselves for answers. Nevertheless, it could not be said that God ordains or blesses the use of '*sin*' to humble sinners. Likewise, we obviously concede the possibility of some tender-hearted sinner, perhaps desperate in spirit, hearing some wayward street preacher and being compelled to investigate the Bible for deeper truth. But this does not mean we should encourage sinners to submit to the mixture of such ministries. It certainly doesn't mean we should promote and cultivate an interest in compromise. But yes, we could rejoice in the case of someone, somewhere, perhaps being provoked to seek the full-gospel, yet, this is no more an endorsement of such ministries than it is for sin. Likewise, I believe the Apostle Paul was not rejoicing over the messengers or message of the '*pretense preachers*' but over the fact that some were

apparently compelled to investigate Jesus Christ *in spite of*, not *because of* the '*pretense preachers*' and their defiled message.

3. Are we to assume, as apparently so many do, that *rejoice* means to participate, promote, and endorse? Even if we conclude that the Apostle Paul did literally rejoice because of the ministry of the pretense preachers (*as we have established that it is doubtful that he did*), surely he would not have wholeheartedly endorsed their message, encouraged sinners to hear their preaching, and God forbid, instructed other Philippian Christians to submit to their teaching. However, this is precisely what many in the visible church are doing today regarding the myriad of false and apostate ministries today. Few are warning of the errors and instructing Christians to avoid such men (*Eph. 5:11*). It's important for us to note that though the Apostle certainly rejoices in *Philippians 1*, his very words also expose the *pretense preachers* for what they are, namely, insincere hypocrites.

4. The false application of this Scripture passage as a defense of marginally false ministries, if applied consistently, forces us to accept several flawed and unscriptural positions. For example, according to this application, obeying *Philippians 1:14-18* means we must '*rejoice*', or refrain from criticism, and perhaps participate, and promote in other grossly unscriptural teaching. If it's unscriptural to judge, expose, and attack such ministries how can we judge, expose, and attack anything? For example: using this faulty interpretation/application we must also refrain from exposing the Charismatic errors of such ministries as *TBN*, the *Word of Faith* movement, *Benny Hinn*, etc. Following this same flawed premise, if we must '*rejoice*' over Kenneth Copeland and his filthy and perverted presentation of the '*Gospel*', we must also *rejoice* over Romanism and all her abominations and crimes against God. Why, according to this reasoning, the Reformers should have *rejoiced with* rather than protested against Catholicism. If we reason thusly, whatever preaching uses the name of *Jesus Christ*, is off limits. We should simply '*be happy*' and leave such men, no matter what they preach, alone. This is not only unscriptural, but illogical as well. Furthermore, those who are applying these verses in this manner will forever force themselves into a position of hypocrisy should they dare challenge anything deemed '*Christian*' in this hour. This leads me to my final point...

5. Those who use these verses in this application are admonishing men like me to '*rejoice*' while they themselves violate their own foolish counsel by refusing to rejoice in what they deem '*pretense preaching*', namely, our warning and preaching against false ministries, which they apparently disapprove of. If indeed we are wrong, or our motive is impure, they should still *rejoice* and be consistent with their own rhetoric.

What of our position? We believe that we are ‘*contending for the faith once delivered to the saints*’. Are we judgmental? Yes. Are we intolerant? Absolutely (*intolerant of anything/everything outside of Christ and His Word*). Are we critical? Of course, we are (*consumed, not possessed, with a critical Spirit, His name is the Holy Ghost*). Are we open-minded? Never (*we are given over to a narrow mind*). Yet, for all our perceived faults, we are nevertheless, consistent. Blessed consistency, a mark of those that walk in the light. On the other hand, those who hold to this faulty view of Philp 1:18, are anything but consistent. ‘*How?*’ you ask. Allow me to continue. As we judge, prove, and expose they wax defensive as they confidently turn to their new found text...

“*The spiritual thing to do would be REJOICE*”, they piously instruct.

According to this faulty interpretation of Philippians 1:18, we are very much like the ‘*pretense preachers*’ of Paul’s day. Apparently, we are misguided, preaching, unbeknownst to us, out of an impure motive. We are, according to those who hold to this view of *Philippians 1:18*, unnecessarily stirring up strife and creating trouble. Like the ‘*pretense preachers*’ of Philippians, such men have no choice but to believe we preach Christ out of ‘*envy, strife, and contention*’. Of course, remember, we still preach Christ—that *Jesus* was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died at Calvary to redeem mankind, and rose from the dead. Surely, our gospel is at least as accurate as the popular but false ministries of today, true? Now, this being so, why don’t those who want to impose *Philippians 1:18* on us obey their own counsel? Why don’t they submit to their own sermon?

–B.W.