

Transcription of 19ID3213

II Corinthians 5:9-10 "The Greatest Ambition"
April 14, 2018

II Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 9, let's turn there.

Corinth was a place that Paul spent a year and a half planting a church. It was probably one of the most vile cities on the planet; filthy, immoral, it couldn't have been worse. What happened in Corinth stayed there. And yet it is there that God began a wonderful work. The church had lots of problems, and I guess if you read I Corinthians in the city church, the people brought a lot of sin with them and it took a long time to kind of deal with. Five years later Paul in Ephesus got news that this church that he had planted and was doing so well and growing had been infiltrated by false teachers, who had taken the gospel away from the people and began to teach legalism and kind of the cultic ways, and in order to establish themselves they went after Paul. They said the most vile things about him. They tried to undermine his influence and the time that he had spent there, the relationship that he had had with the folks who he'd led to the Lord. And they had begun to turn people's heart away from faith.

Paul freaked out. He loved these people. Wrote them four letters from what we can gather. Two of them we have. This letter that we are studying was written after news came that they were starting to do better, and there were at least some folks in church that started going, we can't follow these false teachers. Let's go back to the grace of God. Paul was encouraged. So he wrote this letter to defend himself, because who he was really and what they thought of him would be what they thought about what he was teaching. And he also wanted to encourage these folks that were walking away from these very authoritative men in the church, that they were doing the right thing in walking in the simplicity that was in Christ.

As he wrote this letter though, it is one of those glimpses in Paul's heart. It's the most personal letter

of all of the ones that you have. Paul really cared for these folks. He was worried about them following after the lies of the enemy. He was praying that they wouldn't depart from the simplicity that was in Jesus. He caused them to suffer a lot. He hurt for them. And this went on for quite some time.

In Chapter 4 Paul talked about why he hadn't lost heart up to now. It wasn't just this church that was causing him to struggle. There's lots of persecution. Paul was under death threats constantly, both from the religious community and from the Romans as well. But he wrote in this chapter why he hadn't lost heart, that he realized that it was God's work and not his, that he was at best a vessel that God could use. He mentioned that he understood that there was an enemy who was working overtime to blind the hearts of people he was trying to share with to the love of God. He knew that God's word and God's power could work it out, and so he said I'm just a clay vessel delivering the news, and I have this awesome treasure in my heart, and I want to share it. He said loudly, the last chapter, man, it's really wearing me out. At least the old man, the flesh, was just getting beat up over all of this stuff, starting to show the tear and the wear of it all. But he said, my inward man, my spirit, is groaning. Every trial has left its mark and I'm closer to the Lord than I have ever been. And besides, I realize that compared to what I'm going to get, what I'm going through is just a light affliction, he said. So he ended the Chapter 4 by saying, I'm just going to keep my eyes on the eternal things. Those are the things that matter, and that's what's going to continue to motivate me.

Well, then in the first eight verses of Chapter 5 last week, Paul went a little step further and he goes, let's face it, if I die, I've got a place to go. I'm going to get a body that's going to be better than this one. It's going to be a permanent home. It's going to bring me to where God had planned to bring me all along. It's going to be a perfect life. So hey, I got nothing to lose.

And so Paul pressed on, which brings us to two verses this morning, and I thought we should just do the two, because it is an important concept as Paul talks about the consequences of knowing all that we just went over. And then he said, it motivates me to live my life a certain way. Well, here's what it says in verse 9.

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to the Lord. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in our body, according to what we've done, either good or bad."

The word "ambition" usually has a negative connotation. One of the greatest Puritan writers, they're not easy to read, because by the time you read a Puritan writer, no matter how well you're doing spiritually, you feel awful. But a fellow named Thomas Brooks wrote this about ambition: He said, "It is a gilded misery, a secret poison, a hidden plague, an engineer of deceit. It is the mother of all hypocrisy, the parent of all envy, the original vice, the blinder of hearts. To win a high seat, they're going to be in an uneasy seat to sit in, and crowns are always stuffed with many thorns." Puritans. Blind ambition is a term that we're comfortable with, we understand. Blind ambition by definition means someone who will compromise their convictions and violate their beliefs and sacrifice their character just to get ahead. Whether that is monetary or power or social status or prominence, a claim, dominance; whatever it might be. The carnage of people that are driven by blind ambition is usually piled up behind them.

The English word "ambition" comes from a Latin word "ambitio," which means to come around. And it was used initially in the Roman times for politicians who would come around to get your vote. They would say whatever you want. They would never visit you again, but they would just come to win your support. It doesn't sound like things have changed that much. It could be argued that the chief sin in the Bible is selfish ambition; or blind ambition. It took Lucifer down. He was in a pretty prominent spot as the worship leader in Heaven. And yet we read in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, that he wanted to be just like God. "I want to sit in the sides of the north." And it caused his downfall, as you know. Adam and Eve were told by the devil, "If you eat of this tree, of the fruit, you will be as smart as God. You'll know even as you're known." And they went, well, we want that, and it took them down. Oswald Sanders, who is a Bible commentator, he writes a lot to pastors, but he wrote in one of his sermons, "Because we as the children of Adam want to be great, God became small. And because we don't want to stoop down, He humbled Himself. And because we want to rule, He came to serve."

The Bible condemns blind ambition. We read in Jeremiah Chapter 45 the Lord saying, "Do you want to seek great things for yourself? Seek them not; because I will bring adversity upon you at every turn." But Paul here speaks about a legitimate ambition that the Bible constantly encourages in, and it is this goal: To live to please God. That you might live to please God.

The word "aim" in Greek comes from two words: The words "phileo," love, and the word "timé," which is the word for honor. Taken together, it defines a true motive. I want to do things in a way that honors the Lord because I love Him. And Paul said, "That ultimately is my goal. I just want to please the Lord." Paul uses that word aim in two other places in the Bible. "My aim is to preach the gospel," he said in Romans Chapter 15. "My aim is to lead a quiet life, where I am not concerned with the busyness of others," he says in the I Corinthian letter. But notice when we read in verse 9, he begins by saying, "My only ambition is to please the Lord." To honor Him. And to be pleasing. The word "pleasing" means to be agreeable to. So Paul under this savage kind of criticism that had haunted him for many months and years, from these false teachers, kept his eyes plainly on the fact that at one day, verse 10, he was going to have to answer for the way that he lived his life. My goal is to please the Lord. That's my ambition, because we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what we've done in our bodies, both good and evil.

For Paul, his highest ambition was driven by his understanding of what one day would take place. His only concern was what God thought of him. Maybe this morning you are easily influenced by what others think. Oh, you know what they're going to say? You know what they did? Or you know what so-and-so thought? And I guess to some extent we certainly want to be open to be corrected and helped along and when there are problems that people can help us to do well, but the bottom line is there's coming a day when you're going to stand before God by yourself. Nobody there to cheer you on, no one there to vouch for you, no one to explain your weird behavior. And Paul looked forward to that day. I can't wait till the day that I'm vindicated. He would write in the I Corinthian letter, "I don't even judge myself, because I know the Lord knows everything and one day He's going to come and reveal the hidden things of men's heart, and then

everybody's going to have their own reward from God." And Paul looked forward to that day. Do you look forward to that day, where your life is going to be laid bare? The ultimate and the most accurate verdict upon your life in ministry and the way you spend your time will be rendered by the Lord, who knows everything about you. He knows your motives; He knows your ways.

Paul when he wrote his last letter to Timothy said, "I've run the race, I've finished. And I'm looking forward to the fact that there's now a crown of righteousness laid up for me, but not just me, for everyone who loves His appearing." Paul looked forward to the interrogation of that day. It was his only goal. It's a singular term. Can you say that of your life this morning? My goal in life is to please the Lord. And if that's so, what do you do in your life that's different from someone that doesn't have that goal? And if it's not so, what do you have to change to make it so?

Paul said here in verse 9, "Whether I am present or absent, that's my goal." Or if you will, whether I live or die. Now, he had just spent the last couple of verses talking about how difficult his life was. Paul was in constant fear -- not fear, but threat of death. It's not exaggerated. This wasn't imagined. This was a real fear. This was an actual experience in his life. Every day he got up, he didn't know if somebody would be lying in wait to take him out, solely for walking with the Lord. And Paul says this: In my pursuit to please the Lord, if that gets me killed, fine. If it doesn't, fine. But whether I live or not, whether I'm absent or I'm present with you, I'm going to please the Lord, no matter what. He would write to the Romans in Chapter 14, "Nobody lives from self, nobody dies from self. If you live, live to the Lord; if you die, die for the Lord. But whether you live or die, do it as unto the Lord." And Paul was all about that. He was convinced of that. He wanted to please God. He wanted to serve the Lord. He had written in verse 6 in this chapter, "If I'm at home in the body, I'm not present with the Lord." In verse 8 he wrote, "If I'm absent from body, I'll be present with the Lord." Now he writes, "However I end up. Doesn't matter to me. That's up to God. But either way, I'm going to present my body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. That's my reasonable service."

Paul's ambitions to please God were not limited by what would happen to him as a result. Or if you want, Paul's goal was not survival. Paul's goal was being well pleasing to God. Wasn't interested in what happened to him as a result, just so that he could come out the other side and stand before God on that day and have his life examined, which is why verse 10 becomes so important to kind of tie along with verse 9, because he realized that one day there would be a severe examination and test of his life at the judgment seat of Christ, where whatever he did in his body while he was alive would be scrutinized by the Lord, of all people.

When Jesus spoke that sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, to the disciples, he started off telling them to be careful that what they did spiritually they would do in such a way that God would be honored, that God would take notice, and that they wouldn't elicit praise from men as a result. He used three examples. He used the example of giving, He used the example of praying, He used the example of fasting, but He said to each one of those, "If you do it to be seen of men, you have your reward. But if you'll do it in secret, then your Father, who sees in secret, He can reward you openly. Do it that way. Be pleasing to the Lord." And that was Paul's interest. I just want to serve God in such a way that He is pleased with my life. The right motivation, even though it can be hidden from others, it can't be hidden from God. And notice in verse 10 these pretty powerful words: "We must all appear." This isn't optional. Yeah, I don't want to come. This is inevitable. This is comprehensive. And each one of us one day are going to stand before God.

When Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 14, he admonished them. He said, "Why do you judge your brother? And why do you show contempt for him? Do you not realize we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ?" In other words, you ought to be more worried about you than about him. This is not a group meeting. This is not some collective judgment. It is personal, it is thorough, it is comprehensive, and you're going to stand before a God who knows all about you; who sees all, who doesn't get anything wrong, who understands it down to the heart. And for Paul, it was such a motivation in his heart that he came away with one ambition: I'm just going to live every day to please the Lord, because I know. I'm going to plan ahead. I'm going to stack the

deck. I'm going to think about this every day. I want to get to the end of every day and go, I pleased the Lord today. I did things His way.

Look, you can fool me. You're in church, so I say, "He must be doing great." I don't really want to know anything else. I'm much more encouraged just to think the best of all of you. But God knows your motives. God certainly knows your intentions. And in that day, it won't matter what I think, it'll matter what He thinks. And Paul was so moved by them that he said here in these two verses, I'm going to please the Lord, even if it kills me. Then I'll still do that. A godly ambition driven by an awareness that he was going to answer for himself in that day.

Now, here's the good news, because that sounds kind of frightening. But the good news is, the judgment seat of Christ is only designed for believers. In fact, even more selective, it is only designed for New Testament saints. You are being judged in a different manner than the Old Testament saints, who will receive their reward at Jesus' second coming under a different criteria, but as the church, those that have been born again of God's Spirit, you will receive this judgment before the Lord at a separate time. David wrote in Psalm 62 that the Lord was coming to render to every man according to his work. Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 16 that the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and He will reward each one according to their works. Paul said to the Ephesians, "Knowing that whatever good you do, you'll receive the same from the Lord, whether you're a slave or whether you're free." This judgment is coming, and it's coming from the Lord for us, but it is a judgment that is only for believers and it will take place, from what we learn from the scriptures, after the rapture of the church in Heaven, but before the return of the Lord to the earth.

Judgment always follows resurrection. Since you as a believer in Christ have been forgiven of your sins, and there is now therefore no condemnation to those that are in Christ, this judgment is all about rewards. It's all about rewards for faithful service. Here's what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "No other foundation can be laid but that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if we build upon that foundation with gold or silver or precious stones, or we build on it with wood or hay or

stubble, each man's work will become clear; that day will declare it, it'll be revealed by fire; the fire will test what sort of work each man's work is. If his work that he builds on it endures, he receives a reward. If his work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, but he'll have to go through the fire." This is a judgment of rewards, where God tests your work.

The word "bema," which is what the word is here, is a word that comes out of the experiences in Rome where the tribunal or the court would sit on a raised platform, and then you would stand in front of the court also on a raised platform to answer to the judge, or to the tribunal. It eventually worked the way into the Greek games and into the Olympic games, and we still use that podium today, the first place, the second place, the third place, to denote your accomplishments, if you will. So from that standpoint, when your life is over and you've run the race, Jesus is coming with His rewards. If you have a chance to ever go to Corinth -- we were there last year with some folks from the church -- the original first century bema seat is still there. It's an interesting thing to think about.

But notice that Paul says in the I Corinthians letter: When you judge to the Lord's judgment there, your life's work is going to be thrown into a fire. The fire of God's wisdom and of His knowledge, you can't fool him. You can't say no, that's not at all what I meant. The Lord goes, that's exactly what you meant. You won't be able to argue. If that work that you did makes it through that stare and that gaze of the Lord, you are going to be rewarded. If not, poof, it'll be gone. It will be a work done with the wrong intent or the wrong motive. You won't be rewarded from it, but you'll still be in Heaven. Now, why is that important? Well, it's important because I want rewards, because one of the things that we read in the scriptures that we get to do as Christians is we get to take the crowns that God gives us and we get to lay them at the feet of Jesus, and admit, hey, Lord, You did this in my life. So you don't want to just throw a little something-something, you want a lot; right? You want a lot.

When John wrote his little epistle towards the back of your Bible, II John, he wrote in verse 8, "Look to yourself, that you don't lose the things that you've worked for, but that you'll be sure to get a full

reward." Jesus said in Revelation Chapter 3, "I'm coming quickly. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one can take your crown from you." It's important that we have a lot to offer. The loss of rewards is not a loss of salvation, but it is a reward from the Lord for doing things in the right manner.

So God's going to test the works of what sort they are, and that's important, because it is so easy to pretend to be sincere. Like I said, you can fool me, you're here, but you can't fool Him. And neither can I.

Your rewards will be proportionate to the proper intents and motives which drove you to begin with. Paul said of his own life, "There's a crown of righteousness laid up for me." The word "appear," by the way, in verse 10 means to make known, or to make visible, or to make clear. Think about this for a minute: You're going to stand before God stripped bare; every facade removed, your true character exposed. Every hypocrisy, every pretense will bear eternal weight. It'll go up in flames. And only what lasts and survives will be compensated, and each one will receive the things that you've done in your body, good or bad. The bad is not sin here, it is just misdirected motive. I said I did it for the Lord, but I really did it for me. Dear God, give me a Porsche so I can take people to church. One at a time, but Lord, I'm willing to do it. You get the idea. And you know that the Lord knows. It's not for His glory. The words I speak, the actions I take, the favors I shake, the smiles I put on my face, the handshakes that I exchange with others, the excuses, they can be a lot of wood and hay and stubble, but the gold and silver and precious stones, they'll remain. So Paul said, look, my aim, my goal is to please the Lord, no matter the cost, because I'm looking forward to the day when I'll be examined by God. And know this: You're going to be that as well.

Now, we don't usually have you flipping around, so let's see if I can get you to do this. Chapter 2 verse 3 of Philippians. So if you go forward; right? You're in Corinthians, then Galatians and Ephesians, Galatians, and then Philippians. Or Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians. Sorry. So just a couple books forward, Chapter 2 of Philippians, verse 3, it says this: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind esteem others better than yourself. Look not just

to your own interests, but also the interests of others. And let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, didn't think it was robbery to be equal with God, but He made Himself of no reputation, He took the form of a bondservant, He came in the likeness of men. And being found in the likeness, appearance of men, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even to death on the cross. Therefore God has given Him and highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in Heaven, in earth, and those under the earth, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." But it starts with the words, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or through conceit."

Like I said, Ezekiel 28 and Philippians 14 tell us that the fall of the devil, whose name used to be Lucifer, was driven by ambition. It ended him in the lowest parts of the pit. I put in my Bible years ago in Isaiah 14, "I am never more like the devil when I pursue things with selfish ambition." And that would be true. You know what selfishness is, don't you? You see it in your children, you see it in others, you see it in your friends. Just hard to see it in your own life. Selfishness is at the core of our sinful nature. It is why Jesus said to the disciples as He taught them to pray, "Pray like this, 'Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.'" Oh, and by the way, provide for me my daily bread. You get put at the end of the line, because we're so willing to put ourselves first.

Selfish ambition demands its way no matter who gets hurt. It's the me philosophy. If your marriage is based on me philosophy, you probably won't make it. If your business is run by me philosophy, you'll have turmoil on your staff. If it's me philosophy that runs the nation, you'll have war. Look at Jesus. He thought about others first. He came to save. He came to please the Father, to do His will, to bless. It's the opposite, polar opposite of selfish ambition.

Whenever we set about to campaign for self-interest, we're going to lose. Now, here's what Paul says: Check out your motives, because everything you do will one day be called into question. It's inevitable. You can start here. Be like Jesus. Don't do anything through selfish

ambition. You know what it is.

The word "conceit" is another word in the Greek for pride. It literally can be, I think, defined as an exaggerated view of yourself. Do you know who I am? Yeah. Do you know who you are? Pride and conceit are those greatest hindrances to being used by the Lord. Do you remember in Acts 3 where Peter and John were ministering and there was a man that was lame from his birth there at the beautiful gate, and the Lord put it upon Peter to pull on him. I don't have any money, but I'll give you what I got. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And this guy stood up. And didn't he just stand; he had to bounce around the temple area. Walking and leaping and praising God, that's the way they described it. I mean, this was a pretty dangerous time for John and for Peter. They could have been tempted to be prideful at this point. They had the people in the palm of their hands. This would have been a perfect time for John to take up an offering, or sell a book, or make himself known, but he resisted that. He looked at the people and he said, "Why are you marveling at this or staring at us, as if somehow by our own capacity we brought this to pass? No, no, no. It was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, of our Fathers, who glorified His Son Jesus, who you delivered up to be killed. He's the one. It is His name and through faith in His name that this man stands before you whole." And they passed the test. They passed along the glory.

We can't take bows for what God has done. That's conceited. I Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 7, "What do you have that you weren't given? And if you were given it, why do you act as if you weren't?" The antithesis of conceit and pride and selfish ambition, according to verse 3, is humility, a lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than ourselves, or, really seeing yourself as you truly are. The word "lowliness of mind" means deep sense of one's value. Humility doesn't mean you deny that God is working in your life, but you certainly deny that it's up to you or that you're the one who should be honored.

F. B. Meyer, who's a good Bible commentator, he once wrote of himself, "I've always believed that God's gifts were stacked on shelves one above another, so that the more that I grew, the easier it would be for me to reach them." He said, "But now that I've been around for a

while, I realize that God placed His gifts one below another, and the more I'll bow down and humble myself, the greater I'll be to the Lord's use."

So Paul, as he writes to these Corinthians, thinks about his life and the way that he's living it and the hardship that he's been facing, and he literally in two verses says, here's how you can prepare to stand before God: Live your life every day with an ambition to make Him happy. To make Him happy. Can you do that? Will you do that? And if you'll do that, then you will find that you'll be looking forward to this day rather than dreading it, because eventually the cover comes off.

So if that is your primary goal, or if that would be, what are you going to have to do to change? What are you going to have to adjust? What are you going to have to correct so that you can, next Sunday, show up at the field at Easter and be able to say to the Lord, I've been pleasing the Lord all week. What do you have to do? It's important. In that day of judgment, you'll be glad that you made the call early on. Amen? So be ready.