

LIFE'S SUPREME AMBITION

"Wherefore also we are ambitious, that whether being at home or being from home, to be well-pleasing to Him." II Corinthians 5:9.

There is a well-known saying that if you give a dog a bad name it sticks to it. There are individuals who unfortunately get a bad name, and it is very difficult for them to throw it off. It is just the same with words. Some words get an unfortunate definition, and it is not easy to cast off their sinister association. "Ambition" is a word of this sort. It is often set forth in literature in a bad sense.

Frequently Paul laid hold of that which was questionable, baptized it with a new spirit, gave it a new meaning, and charged it with a new idea. When General Booth of the Salvation Army heard a rollicking tune which was wedded to questionable words he would say, Let us take that tune from the Devil's service and use it in the Lord's service. He would have new words written to which the tune could be sung. What had been a tap-room song would become a revival hymn. In the same way Paul took hold of this word, and he said: "Let us be ambitious for the right thing." There is then a true, a worthy, a commendable ambition, an ambition which is holy, just as there is an ambition which is ignoble. It all depends upon the things for which you are ambitious and the means you adopt in order to attain your ambition. David had a great ambition when he wanted to build a temple for the worship of God. Although he was not allowed to do it he was commended because he had the desire in his soul and because he made preparation for that desire to be realized. John Milton had a worthy ambition when he said it was his desire "to write something which aftertimes would not willingly let die." He had an ambition to put on record great ideas which the world would cherish and which has immortalized his name. David Livingstone had a worthy ambition when, after he had traversed Central Africa, he said, "I am determined to go on and to do all I can for the poor degraded people of the North." He saw with his own eyes the tragedy of the slave traffic and he determined he would not rest until, God helping him, that traffic was destroyed.

I am sure that none of us are satisfied with our lives. We may have reached heights of spiritual attainment, but unscaled heights are still above those. No matter how deep our spiritual experiences have been, unfathomable depths are still beneath us. We are not living as well as we can live and ought to live. Each of us should desire above all else to please our Saviour and Lord. The highest possible ideal for human life is to strive to do those things that please Him.

In the text Paul expresses an ambition which I wish everyone possessed because it is the kind of ambition that is highly praiseworthy and brings great happiness. He says, "Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him." This ought to be the ambition of every believer. Bengel calls it the sole legitimate ambition. It was enunciated by a man whose brain was as big as his heart. His head was as full of light as his heart was full of devout heat. Paul was the living proof that there need be no conflict between a luminous mind and a devotional spirit. He was a man with a transforming religious experience; an experience which completely shattered all his original plans and turned his manifold, masterly activities into new and nobler channels. His chief desire was to please Christ. Whether here in the body or at home yonder in the Father's house, he could conceive of no motive so lofty. He was ambitious to please Christ perfectly.

I. Why Was Paul Ambitious To Please God?

1. Because he had come to know Christ as his Saviour.

He was willing to do whatever Christ wanted him to, and to believe what He wanted him to believe, because his Lord had taken away his blindness and had enabled him to behold greater glories than he had ever beheld.

2. Because he was assured of victory over death.

He says: "Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." II Corinthians 4:14. What a glorious thing it is to be assured of victory over death through Jesus Christ! The more assured of triumph over death a believer becomes, the more the desire to please God wells up within him.

3. Because he knew that he had to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

He says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad." The believer in Christ will never come into any kind of a penal judgment that will endanger his salvation. God's Word says very emphatically, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." But the believer in Christ will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to have his works judged with a view to rewards. In that day all our motives will be made known, all our faithful service in the name of Christ be rewarded, all our sacrifice repaid, all of our honors determined.

4. Because the love of Christ constrained him.

Christ's love for Paul impelled or urged him on. Christ's love for us, which He demonstrated on the cross, urges all true believers to endeavor to please Him in all things.

II. What Are The Characteristics Of The Ambition To Please God?

1. It is intelligent.

It is based on a right estimate of values. Paul's discriminating faculty was so illuminated and sensitized that he could recognize the true, the beautiful, and the good. Through the eyes of such clarified intelligence he saw that for the priceless privilege of knowing Christ and pleasing Him, he could afford to suffer the loss of everything.

2. It is adequate.

It is based on knowledge -- a knowledge which includes the whole sweep of life; not one period alone or even one world, but all time and both worlds. Those who are ambitious to please Christ have a religion of assurance. It was this assurance that led Robert J. Burdette to say at nightfall: "My work is about done, I think. The best of it I have done poorly. Any of it I might have done better. But it is done. And in a fairer world with finer material and a better working light, I shall do better work."

3. It is supreme.

It towers above all other ambitions -- social position, literary fame, political preferment, amassed fortune, as Jesus rises immeasurably above all the brightest and best of the sons of the morning. It is the ambition which in its spirit, aim, and duration, is the same as that which He cherished. He, who is the perfect pattern, said, "I do always those things that please the Father."

Whatever our gift may be, whether testimony or song or teaching or finance or visitation, we may please Christ by ministering to others even as He pleased the Father by thus ministering. We can hang pictures of cheer and hope in the silent gallery of at least one sunless life. We can be a music-maker in the weary path of at least one songless toiler. We can bind up at least one broken heart. We can pour the oil of comfort into at least one bruised spirit. We can throw a burst of sunshine into at least one darkened mind. We can extend a helping hand to at least one unfortunate brother. We can speak the message of salvation to at least one perishing soul. From practical tests this supreme ambition lifts us to spiritual tasks. The man with a hoe only is a drudge. The man with a hope only is a dreamer. But the man whose hoe and hope are joined is the passion of eternity.

4. It is continuous.

Whether present or absent, at home or in exile, in the church militant or in the church triumphant, it continues. This ambition links us with the spiritual and the permanent. It mobilizes the forces of the soul and heartens us to endure. It keeps us faithful to daily duty. It helps us to eliminate inferior values. It holds us true to the highest ideals.

5. It is prospectant.

This ambition looks forward to the judgment-seat of Christ. Each of us must give account of himself. None will be overlooked in the crowd. There will be no loophole of escape for any of us. We should desire to be able to give a good report and not be ashamed when we shall appear before Him.

III. How Can We Please God?

1. We must believe what God says.

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him." The faith here referred to is the very definite belief that God has revealed Himself to us in the Bible, and has also in that Book made clear what duties he requires of us. It is vain to talk of being well-pleasing to anyone if you do not believe what he says. Paul is a splendid example of the kind of faith that is well-pleasing to God.

2. We must do what God says.

To "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" is to live in such a way as to please the Lord. We walk thus only when we live in accordance with His Word, trusting in Him for strength to do that which His Word commands. A believer who does not walk in accordance with God's Word dishonors Him, but one who does walk in accordance with God's Word glorifies Him.

3. We must give to His work.

Paul spoke of the gifts which the Philippian believers had sent to him to enable him to carry on his work of preaching as "a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." Hebrews 13:16 says, "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased."

IV. What Are The Results Of Pleasing God?

1. Enemies are compelled to be at peace with us.

"When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Proverbs 16:7. No matter how much our enemies may hate us they can do us no injury so long as we are doing what is well-pleasing to God. If the believer will please God, no one will harm him.

2. Prayers are answered.

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight." If we do what pleases Him, God will be glad to give us what pleases us. It works the same with earthly parents. A child who seeks to please you gets from you pretty much what he desires, so long as those things are calculated to do him no injury. But one who does displeasing things does not get what he desires. The Psalmist said: "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me."

3. We shall receive glorious rewards.

Some professed Christians claim they are not interested in rewards. They say that the joy and gratitude for salvation by grace will be sufficient compensation for them. But the Lord must have known that many of His children would be actuated by anticipation of a heavenly recognition for victorious service or else He would not have had so much to say about rewards in His inspired Book. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to

the saints, and do minister." Hebrews 6:10. It certainly pays to please God. The most worth-while ambition that anyone can cherish is to please Him, and in order to please Him we must believe Him, be devoted to Him, do what He says, praise Him, and give to His work. Is it any wonder that Paul said: "Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home, or absent, to be well pleasing unto him?"