

# **Ambition**

Is ambition good?

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Ambition is especially the sin of the great, and the greatest of all wrongs are due to it. Satan transgressed by reason thereof, and his followers still pursue with eagerness the same course, seeking greatness by following the desires of their own hearts.

Yet there is such a thing as laudable ambition, for in three places in the New Testament the Greek word which means "To be ambitious" (though not so translated in any English version known to us, save in the margin of the Revised Version) is used either by way of exhortation or as a pattern. We propose, therefore, to enquire briefly as to the ways in which it is right to be ambitious.

First, in 1Thess 4:11-12, it is written "That ye study (lit., ambitious) to be quiet, and to do your own business [or, mind your own affairs — N.T.], and to work with your hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing [or, of no man — N.T.]."

What a lovely ambition, and, withal, within the reach of the lowest. No need to be kings, or of the great of this world, to follow this injunction; but how it would change the Christian world if Christians would only obey it.

David was sent for while he was keeping his father's sheep in order to be anointed of Samuel. Amos was a herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit, and the Lord took him as he followed the flock, and the Lord said to him, "Go prophesy unto my people Israel." To the shepherds following their flocks by night, the word of the Lord came at the birth of the Saviour.

How beautiful it is to see God's people going on quietly and faithfully in whatsoever estate they may be found. These give no trouble in the Church, they desire no human greatness, they are contented with their lot, they interfere not with others, though ever willing to shew others a kindness, and they are ready to give to him that needs. On the other hand, what appalling trouble has been caused by those, who do not interfere with the affairs of others, and meddle with that with which they have nothing to do. Malice, envy, backbiting, slander, and speaking evil of others behind their backs come in here, and fearful mischief is wrought.

"These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Prov 6:16-19.)

He, who is ambitious on the line enjoined by the Apostle in writing to the Thessalonian converts, will be kept from these seven sins hateful to the Lord. Alas! for lack of following this injunction, how many (yea, even religious leaders of reputation) have fallen into these great snares, and it has to be said, "How are the mighty fallen!" O God, give to all Thy children this beautiful ambition, which characterizes the weak only!

Secondly, in 2Cor 5:9-10, it is written, "Wherefore we labour [lit., are ambitious], that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted\* of Him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he

hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

{\*Accepted should be more literally translated, well pleasing to (R.V.), or agreeable to (N.T.).}

This is what Paul and his companions did. And it is written that all of us may have the same blessed ambition, for we all must be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ.

What can be more important, what more worthy of every redeemed soul, than to walk ever in view of the judgment-seat of Christ with a passionate desire to be well pleasing or agreeable to Him? He is our supreme Lord. All rights were His because He is the Creator; but by redemption He has set us free that we may belong to Him by the strongest of all ties. We are infinitely loved, and we have been blood-bought that He might acquire special rights over us in order to bless us beyond measure.

Woe betide the soul, who lets any man, or set of men, interfere between the Lord and his conscience; and double woe will be to him, who seeks to come between the Lord and any other soul. The Lord will make short work of such.

It is of course true that we have to be subject to human authority — to kings and rulers, to parents, masters, spiritual guides, elders, and to the Church (see Mt 18:17, etc.), but never to the superseding of the Lord's authority. Whatever men may say, and however specious their arguments, if they ask us to do what is not agreeable to the Lord (as far as we can tell, for we are poor things), then we have only to reply, “We ought to obey God rather than men,” and accept the consequences.

In Roman Catholicism the priest comes between the Lord and the believer; but, alas, the principle of Rome extends far beyond Roman Catholicism. Excommunication and boycott and fear are brought to bear in Christian England to force men to stifle their consciences, and to submit to men rather than obey the Lord, and not fear the consequences of so doing.

Beloved fellow Christians, let it be our passion to be agreeable to Him, no matter what it entails. Cannot the Lord comfort even here on earth? Is there not a hundred-fold for him, who suffers loss for Christ, even in this present time? Is it not worth everything for Christ to come in to that soul and sup with Him, and for that soul to sup also with Himself?

It is well to say to the Lord, even with tears, “Lord, I am such a poor thing, let me not be deceived, let me not miss the road, let me hear Thy voice, let me understand and know Thy will. Make me willing to suffer anything rather than turn aside from Thee, Lord.” But it is not well, because we are such poor things, to follow any man, or set of men, however great, wise or clever they may be, saying, “What else can we do?” No; let us in the sense of our utter weakness and insufficiency launch out freely, trusting in the all-sufficiency of Christ, and refusing man and all his pretension, if we cannot say the Lord hath so commanded.

We shall soon be before the judgment-seat of Christ. What shall we care for men's censure then? Therefore let us go on now trusting in the Lord, letting everything else go to the winds, that we may be agreeable to Him. O God, make this to be our ambition!

The third occasion of the use of the word is in Rom 15:20-21 “So have I strived [been ambitious] to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation: but as it is written, To whom He was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.”

This ambition is mentioned as personal to Paul, and in the full sense in which it applied to him it cannot apply to many of us, but as all Scripture applies to us all, and nothing is told us by way of gratifying curiosity, therefore there must be a sense in which we profit by these verses.

Even at the present time there are many places where the gospel has not penetrated. True, there has been a wonderful opening of the world to the gospel of late, and there are not now many countries where the gospel has not entered at all. Still there are vast tracts in many countries where none have ever heard of Christ. We may say we are not called to engage in such pioneer work. Well, so be it; but you can bear up with all your sympathy, your prayers, and with your carnal things those whom God has called to these arduous labours. In how many cases has new ground been opened up by many, who have given up their lives to the cause, e.g. in the case of the Congo-Balolo Mission.

Many, who are not generally called martyrs because disease cut them off rather than the sword, are none the less martyrs, and have literally laid down their lives to open one place or another to the gospel of Christ. Dr. David Livingstone was truly one of these, also the Hon. Keith Falconer, and many others. Probably we know some who are attempting such arduous work, and facing the inevitable dangers. If not, we can easily discover such. What are we doing to help them?

We can thus have a little share in this beautiful ambition. May God incline our hearts thereto.

Although the above work is very difficult, and beyond most of us, save by way of fellowship with others, there is a minor sense in which we may have a tiny share in the same ambition. Not many can go to strange countries, but at our doors, and even in Christian England, are many souls as dark and as ignorant of the gospel as the heathen, among the educated and the rich as well as among the poor. Now if you go to some of these, who sit in darkness, and who have never been spoken to personally about their soul in any wise, you will be doing in your very tiny measure what the Apostle did in his mighty measure. God, moreover, is the God of measure, and looks on us according to what we have, and not according to what we have not. May we be faithful in little, and God will bless that little and give us more. Let us not get the sentence pronounced on us which was pronounced on the servant, who hid his one talent in the napkin.

While, therefore, we must earnestly seek to be ambitious on the first two lines spoken of here, let us not neglect the last. God grant in that day we may give an account with joy and not with grief.

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