

016: Otherworldly Ambitions

(based on Ch. 15 from *The End of the Pilgrimage*)

What are your ambitions in life?

- are they worldly? or OTHERworldly?
- in this study we are going to learn from the ambitions of the apostle Paul – and his ambitions were OTHERworldly
- In the book of Philippians – one of Paul’s prison epistles, written from Rome near the end of his life –
- we find the heart cry of Paul with respect to rewards.
- He beautifully expresses his desire to know Christ intimately and to please Him.
- The essence of the passage is Paul’s longing to hear the words, “Well done,” at the Judgment Seat and to be worthy of ruling with Christ in His kingdom.
- Is that YOUR longing as well?
- The apostle expresses his heart with the saints at Philippi, with the intent that they would have the same burning desire.
- As we read from Philippians ch. 3, may we all yearn for our Lord’s approval.
- May we have the attitude, “Lord, do this work in me too!
- I want to go all the way with you in discipleship!”
- Philippians 3:7-14

Phil. 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

- **Phil. 3:8** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ
- **Phil. 3:9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is*

through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

- **Phil. 3:10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
- **Phil. 3:11** if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- **Phil. 3:12** Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.
- **Phil. 3:13** Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,
- **Phil. 3:14** I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In order to rightly understand this passage, we must consider the context.

- Paul is writing to believers.
- How do we know that? He starts chapter three with the words, “Finally, my brethren.”
- Children of God refer to their spiritual siblings as “brethren.”
- These are saved people – in this case, predominantly Gentiles.
- I am not going to take the time to exposit the entire chapter, so let me get to the heart of the matter.
- It is as if Paul opens his heart and mind and gives us a glimpse into his eternal perspective.
- Every time I read this passage, I am personally convicted.
- We find here Paul’s three primary life objectives; his goals, if you will.
- What does he want to accomplish the rest of his life?

Objective #1: That I may gain Christ and be found in Him

- we find the word GAIN in v. 8, and it is a verb
- Paul uses the *noun* form of the same Greek word in v. 7.
- what things were GAIN to me ...
- What does it mean to gain Christ?
- Vine says it is “So practically appropriating Christ to oneself that He becomes the dominating power in and over one’s whole being and circumstances.”
- This is obviously not a salvation statement; it is a sanctification statement.
- At what point does a believer GAIN Christ?
- At what point is a believer FOUND in Him (as we read in v. 9)?
- the answer is: At the Judgment Seat, if you indeed appropriate Him consistently in this life here and now, so that He becomes your all-in-all, then you will GAIN Him and be found in Him.

What is the prerequisite to reaching this goal?

- The answer is found in v. 7 — by counting all else as loss.
- that is, by considering your personal goals and ambitions and pursuits and accomplishments as rubbish – to use Paul’s word –
- which means that you count those things as nothing of importance
- this is a spirit that forsakes the mundane so that Christ can be GAINED.
- It is a back seat for our plans and desires, so that the far-surpassing greater benefit of knowing Christ can be in the forefront.
- It is being willing to suffer the loss of all things so that we might GAIN Christ.

- That is not the way most Christians live in the twenty-first century!

Paul wanted to be FOUND in Him.

- He is not referring to the initial aspect of salvation, or regeneration, which places believers in Christ.
- He is speaking in a practical sanctification sense.
- We must learn to live every day of our lives with Christ in the forefront, realizing that can never happen by any supposed inherent righteousness on our part, but through the righteous One who lives within us.
- Jesus is our provision.
- Think of Gal. 2:20.
- **Gal. 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

I think Paul’s first objective is much like what Jesus said on one occasion in the Gospels (John 12:24-25)

- **John 12:24** Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.
- **John 12:25** He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
- This is Paul’s first goal, stated in a little different way, and it results in gaining Christ and being found in Him.
- It’s not a positional standing as in Him.
- It’s a practical, experiential being found in Him.
- It is the idea of abiding in the vine, as described in Jn. 15.
- that brings us to Paul’s second objective:

Objective #2: That I may attain to the resurrection

- This cannot be referring merely to the rapture.

- The rapture is guaranteed for all saints (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
- This resurrection is something that Paul hoped to attain.
- The word means to reach or arrive at by striving.
- It is conditional, not unconditional like the rapture.
- What could this mean?
- An important clue is found in the Greek word behind the English word “resurrection.”
- It is a compound Greek word, not meaning merely resurrection (Greek, anastasis), but out-resurrection (Greek, exanastasis).
- It is used only here in the New Testament.
- It is the idea of rising up from among the resurrected — a resurrection out from amongst those who have been resurrected.

I believe what Paul is longing for is the privilege of being one of those Christ chooses to rule and reign with Him.

- For many are called, but few are chosen (that is, chosen to rule, chosen to be given the status of firstborn sons — Matt. 22:14).
- Those who are deemed firstborn at the Judgment Seat will apparently be taken out from amongst all the raptured saints to go up to the heavenly New Jerusalem, the city of reward, where they will rule with Christ in His kingdom.
- Instead of being merely earthly subjects in the kingdom, as will be the case with those saints who are wicked and slothful servants ...
- these faithful ones will be caught up into the heavenly Jerusalem and given wonderful privileges, the greatest of which is the presence of Christ.

Sadly, widespread within Christianity is the belief that ALL saints will have these privileges by default, because, they say, all saints have the positional righteousness in Christ.

- But that is incorrect, as we have emphasized repeatedly throughout our studies.
- Only those who choose to LIVE righteously, by appropriating the provision of Christ, will be rewarded in that way.
- Paul’s longing desire is to qualify for this status in the heavenlies.
- In v. 12 he avoids presumption by saying, “I have not obtained it yet.
- I am not perfect; that is, I have not reached the final goal of sanctification.”
- So he keeps following Jesus so that he might apprehend, that is, lay hold of complete sanctification.
- Paul wants to take possession (i.e., obtain an inheritance) in the city of reward.
- Like Abraham, Paul is looking for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

What is the prerequisite to reaching this goal and obtaining this privilege?

- being granted an inheritance in the city of reward is by way of suffering.
- in v. 10 Paul cries out, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,”
- this means enduring your trials with the same spirit that Christ endured His.
- As we noted in an earlier study, Rom. 8:17 says we become joint-heirs with Christ if we suffer with Him.
- Only then will we be glorified together with Him.

- 2 Tim. 2:12 says, If we endure, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.
- The word ENDURE in the Timothy passage is the idea of bearing up under pressure, continuing faithful in your walk with Jesus, come what may.
- Does that describe you?
- that brings us to Paul’s third objective for living

Objective #3: That I might be granted the prize of the upward call

- Again, this high calling is not merely referring to the rapture, nor is it eternity in Heaven.
- This is a conditional reward for those who are deemed worthy of it.
- We know that’s the case because Paul describes his need to press toward the goal in order to receive this prize.
- To press is the idea of pursuing.
- Christians don’t need to pursue the rapture.
- But we must pursue the prize of the upward call.
- It is not given to everyone, only to those who are called up to it.
- Again we think of the out-resurrection mentioned earlier.

But I think there is something more here.

- Paul refers to it as the prize of the up-calling of God in Christ Jesus.
- It seems Paul is longing to be in a special place of close fellowship that is granted only to those who qualify — in the very presence of Christ Himself.
- I believe that is what Jesus is referring to in John 14:1-6:
- **John 14:1** “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

- **John 14:2** In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
- **John 14:3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.
- **John 14:4** And where I go you know, and the way you know.”
- **John 14:5** Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”
- **John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

The tendency is to interpret these verses as referring to initial salvation of the spirit (or regeneration) and the benefit of eternity in Heaven for all believers.

- However, that doesn’t seem to fit the context.
- Jesus is speaking to His disciples in the upper room on the eve of His arrest and trial, just before His crucifixion
- Over the course of several chapters (John 13-17), He has an endearing time of discipleship training with these men.
- He is reminding them of the special place of fellowship with Christ in the heavenly New Jerusalem to which they can aspire — inclusion in the city of reward.
- Jesus is the ultimate prize to be won, so to speak.
- We long to be in His presence, but not all saints will be in His immediate presence in the kingdom.

What is the prerequisite to fulfilling this objective?

- It is twofold.
- First, forgetting those things which are behind (v. 13).
- Things like past personal accomplishments.

- Things like past failures and sins that have been confessed and forsaken.
- The second prerequisite is reaching forward (the word literally means “stretching”) to those things which are ahead, still future.
- Pressing toward the mark.
- This involves a deliberate choice to lay everything else aside in order to accomplish the greater goal — the prize of intimacy with Christ, being in His presence in the coming kingdom.
- Paul said it another way in 1 Cor. 9:24-27:
- **1Cor. 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*.
- **1Cor. 9:25** And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*.
- **1Cor. 9:26** Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.
- **1Cor. 9:27** But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Notice the intensity of the passage, all the action verbs.

- What is required for winning the race?
- Running, competing, living a self-controlled life, disciplining the body, keeping it in subjection.
- For what purpose? So that we can receive the prize and not become disqualified
- What a tragedy to be disinherited at the Judgment Seat, found unfit for rule.
- If Paul was concerned about the possibility of becoming disqualified, how much more should we?

- At the end of his passionate outcry about qualifying for rewards, Paul adds an admonition.
- **Phil. 3:15** Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

The word mature is the idea of going all the way to the end goal of sanctification with Christ.

- It is similar to the word Jesus used on the cross, when He cried, It is finished!
- The will of the Father had been accomplished.
- The goal had been reached.
- Maturity is not sinlessness.
- No Christian will ever become sinless in this life.
- Maturity is the ultimate goal of sanctification, going all the way in discipleship.
- Paul is challenging us, “If you want to become mature in your sanctification so that you are rewarded at the Judgment Seat, you should have these three objectives also!”

Objective #1: That I may gain Christ and be found in Him

- **Objective #2: That I may attain to the out-resurrection**
- **Objective #3: That I might be granted the prize of the upward call**
- If you don’t care about these things, then Paul says, “God can reveal that to you.”
- Are your objectives for life in line with Phil. 3?
- Do you have otherworldly ambitions?
- Or are yours merely worldly?
- There is much at stake.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS