

Gospel Ambition
What Makes Ambition Healthy
Philippians 3:1-21
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Many come to New York because they are ambitious, drawn by the Kander/Ebb lyric, “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere.” Is ambition always bad? If not, what makes it unhealthy and what makes it healthy? What sort of ambition do we find in Philippians 3 and how does it relate to the other ambitions we have?

I) Questions about ambition are legitimate for the Christian

A) A question about ambition arising from raising children

Is it unspiritual or sub-spiritual to be ambitious about helping a child to master things, to help him make his mark on life? Is all this effort and achievement to be treated as “nothing, refuse, loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ?” (Phil 3)

B) The answer: No

Phil 3 cannot simply cancel out Genesis 1:28: *...subdue the earth*
What is new (or renewed) are our motives and goals

II) Healthy ambition

A) It involves striving

3.12-13: ...Not that I have already obtained...One thing I do...straining forward...I press on toward

Strange kind of striving: Holding tightly to what one already has and cannot lose
v. 12: Christ has made me his own...

B) Two areas of strife

1) *To be found in Christ not having a righteousness of my own (v. 9)*

Christ our home

Striving to stay at home

2) *...that I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings (v. 10)*

Doing versus knowing

What does it mean to know Christ?

- Knowing about.....talking to
- Participation in...
 - His resurrection
 - His suffering

C) The goal of healthy ambition

The good of my neighbor

Conclusion: no substitute for spending time with God and his Messiah

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) John Kander and Fred Ebbs wrote this famous lyric: “Start spreading the news/ I’m leaving today/ I want to be part of it/ New York, New York...If I can make it there/ I’ll make it anywhere/ It’s up to you/ New York, New York.” Did you come to New York to ‘make it’? If so, in what? Have you succeeded? Have you failed? How are you coping with success/failure?
- 2) Is it wrong for the Christian to encourage his child to master things? If not, why not? Answer in the light of Paul’s statement in Phil 3:4-8.
- 3) Two people who are equally successful on the outside can be very different on the inside—one of them content and joyful, the other afraid, lonely, envious, and bitter. How do you explain the difference? Consider in your answer the difference that different motives and goals make. (Motives can be self justification or thankful trust in the Creator/Redeemer. Goals can be self advancement and neighbor advancement).
- 4) Paul uses language of striving in Phil 2:12-13. What is odd about Paul’s striving (consider Phil 1:21 and 3:12B)? Relate Paul’s striving to the notion that Christians live in the “already but not yet”. What is “already” true for us? What is “not yet” true for us?
- 5) What does Paul strive for, according to vv. 9-11? To be “in Christ” is like being at home with him in his house—a house where we are justified freely by faith. How and why do we struggle to be “at home” in this way?
- 6) Paul strives to “know Christ”. What sense does this make? Does he not already know Christ? What does it mean to “know the power of his resurrection?” What does it mean to “share his sufferings”? How do these experiences help us know him better? Are we supposed to look for suffering? How do we answer a friend who says: “God promised to give me peace when I put my trust in Jesus; but I am having a terrible time of it”?
- 7) Reflect on the following: “Being ‘found in Christ not having a righteousness of my own’ is not an invitation to stop doing the right thing. It is an invitation to stop doing the right thing for the wrong reason. But doing the right thing for the right reason is still on the table—and that may cost you something.”
- 8) Our ambitions are so easily warped by both self-justification and self-centered aims that nothing less than habitual sitting at the Father’s table, remembering the Son’s goodness and suffering for us, can bring us back to the right place. Such resting is, ironically, the heart of how we ‘strive’. Make a plan to sit at the Father’s table for at least ten minutes every day this week.