

**04/19/26 Living to Please God
2 Corinthians 5:9-10**

Welcome...

This morning as we continue our study of the book of 2 Corinthians, we come to a passage that not only defined the life of the apostle Paul but is meant to define the life of every believer in Jesus Christ.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 5:9–10...

The word ambition can feel uncomfortable. In our world, ambition is celebrated: Climb higher. Achieve more. Be successful and make a name for yourself. But the Bible gives us a very different perspective.

Ambition is not the problem. Misplaced ambition is the problem.

When ambition becomes about self—our glory, our success, our recognition—Scripture calls it what it is: idolatry.

When I was in fourth grade, I started a band called The Greasy Grits.

We didn't play instruments we played a soundtrack and performed. We didn't sing, we lip-synced. We greased our hair, acted like rock stars, and somehow, we were asked to perform for the whole school.

So naturally, after that success we started another band that we called The Frosted Freaks. This time we covered ourselves in powdered sugar. We only had one performance and it did not go so good... because apparently powdered-sugar-covered fourth graders look less like rock stars and more like terminally ill children or—even worse—we looked like zombies.

That was ambition. But it was shallow. Temporary. Completely self-focused. And honestly—that's a picture of life without Christ.

In our passage today, Paul shows us something radically different: A rescued and redeemed ambition. Not living for self...but living to please God.

This brings us to the main point of our passage. 2 Corinthians 5:9–10 reveals three compelling motivations for living to please Christ so that we would pursue faithfulness with eternal joy.

**Our Ambition is to Please God in verse 9
Our Lives Will Be Evaluated by Christ in verse 10a.
Our Works Will Be Recognized by Christ in verse 10b.**

My prayer is that you know Christ and will have as your chief ambition to living a live that is pleasing to God and brings glory to His name.

I. Our Ambition is to Please God

Verse 9 says: “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.”

That word “therefore” connects back to everything Paul just said in verses 1–8:

In verse 1 he says we have a future, eternal dwelling from God.

In verses 2-4 we groan now, longing for what is to come.

In verse 5 God has prepared us for eternity and given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

In verse 7 we walk by faith, not by sight.

Verse 8 tells us to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.

So, the word “Therefore” in verse 9 means in light of these realities in verses 1-8. Because your future is secure and guaranteed in Christ, this is how you should now live: make it your present ambition to please God.

Paul is not trying to earn God’s approval. He already has it. This is not: Live like this so God will accept you. Rather it is: Live to please the One who already has forgiven you, redeemed you, and adopted you as His own child.

We are not working for acceptance. We are living from acceptance.

Think of a child with a loving father. He doesn’t obey the father to become a son. He obeys because he is a son—and he wants to please his father.

So, what does it mean to please God? Let’s consider what other Bible passages say:

Earlier Pastor Steve read Colossians 1:9-12,” For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.”

Four things, given in participles, result from such a God-pleasing life: “bearing fruit” and “increasing or growing” (Col. 1:10), “being strengthened with all power” (v. 11), and “joyously giving thanks to the Father” (v. 12).

The first two are related: bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God. As you abide in Christ and grow in your relationship with God you will also come to a deeper “knowledge” of God.

Hebrews 13:16 tells us a life shaped by obedience is pleasing to the Lord.

Also, our sacrificial giving for ministry is pleasing to God as Paul describes it in Philippians 4:18 as “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”

Pleasing God is not to be confused with pleasing people. • Galatians 1:10 says, “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 2:4 says, “...we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.”

Pleasing God flows from faith in Christ, is expressed through obedience, frees us from the fear of man.

Children are pleasing to the Lord when they honor and obey their parents. Colossians 3:20 says Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. I hope you will register for our May 29-30 Parenting Conference. Children are such a gift from God and they are dependent upon parents and grandparents to love them, encourage them, teach them, correct them and model a life that pleases God to them. So parents and grandparents, please register for the upcoming Parenting Conference entitled Gospel Powered Parenting.

How else do we please God? We are pleasing to the Lord when we do not participate in but even expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness. Ephesians 5:8-11 says, for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light

- 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),
- 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.
- 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.

We are pleasing to the Lord when we preach His message, which to the world is foolish.

1 Corinthians 1:21 says, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

Pleasing God is not peripheral—it is the central ambition of the Christian life.

Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

Romans 8:8 says, “those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” If you are apart from Christ, you are not born again, the Holy Spirit is not in you, you are still in the flesh and cannot please God. Romans 8:8 says you are unable (without power) to please God.

Which means: Before we can live a life pleasing to God, we must first be made right with God through Jesus Christ. Your greatest need is not improvement—but transformation through repentance and faith, turning from sin and turning to the Savior.

In My Daily Bible reading this week, one of the passages was Luke 13:23-24, And someone said to Jesus, “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?” And He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

Coming to saving faith is not simply adding Jesus to your life – it is renouncing your self-sufficiency and your self-righteousness and surrendering all to know the Savior and to follow Him.

When you come to saving faith in Jesus, and you are made alive spiritually by the Holy Spirit, you will for the first time be able to please God. And at the same time you still have the propensity to still sin and go your own way. That tension will continue as long as you are in this world.

When counseling I will draw on a white board in my office a fork in the road a big Y, with two choices that we face repeatedly every day: Will I please self or will I please God?

Only two choices on the shelf: pleasing God or pleasing self.

In Luke 6:43-45 Jesus said, “For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

So I draw a horizontal line and below that line is the inner man, it is what the Bible calls the heart, your heart drives every decision you make. Above that line, I draw a vertical line that become a Y – every day in our lives

we come to a fork in the road with each decision and each action. Will I please God or will I please self? Who is ruling my heart? What is my ambition? To please God or to please self?

Hebrews 11:24-25 says, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.”

Moses chose to please God and chose the more difficult, the narrow road. When we choose to please self, we are usually choosing the path of least resistance. We are making the decision that feels easier. But with making the choices that are easier, life only gets harder. Many of you know what I am talking about.

As Galatians 6:7-9 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”

The problem is that even as believers we can grow weary and we go the easy route; we choose to please self instead of pleasing God. Proverbs 13:15 warns, the way of the unfaithful is hard and leads to ruin.

But as believers we have a helper, the Holy Spirit, who will lead us in the way we should go. As Galatians 5:16 says “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

If we choose to live by the Spirit, we choose to depend on God’s Word to be a light to our path, to go the narrow way, to live by faith and not by feelings, we choose to please God instead of self then in time life generally gets easier.

And what I mean by that is not that all trials and troubles disappear, but by obeying God’s Word and living to please the Lord there is a root and fruit connection. We are rooted in Christ and the fruit of abiding in Him and living empowered by the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Paul’s controlling ambition is not comfort, success, or approval—but pleasing God. He says this ambition applies whether at alive here on planet earth or present with the Lord in heaven. The Christian life is not passive—it is intentional and directional.

So let me ask you:
What is your ambition?
What is driving your life?
Whose approval are you really living for?
Who are you pleasing?

Because every day, you are choosing to please God or to please self. Only two choices on the shelf: pleasing God or pleasing self.

And why does this matter so much? Because this life is not the end of the story.

II. Our Lives Will Be Evaluated by Christ

Verse 10 says: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”

Why make it your ambition to please Christ? Because one day you will stand before Christ.

Notice the certainty of this event:

“We must” — unavoidable

“All” — every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ

“Appear” — the Greek words means to be laid open

No one is overlooked. No life is ignored.

This concept of the judgment of the Christian troubles some people. You ask, “Aren’t we saved by faith?” Yes, we are.

The judgment seat of Christ is different from the Great White Throne Judgment. That will be the final judgment of the wicked prior to them being cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 20:11-15. Appearing before the great white throne will be unbelievers. But our text today tells us born again believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

“Judgment seat” is translated from *bēma*, which, in its simplest definition, describes a place reached by steps, or a platform. In Greek culture the *bēma* seat referred to the elevated platform on which victorious athletes received their crowns, much like the medal stand in the modern Olympic games.

The bema was never a place to reprimand the athletes or to punish them in any way. It was a place of testing and reward. In the same way, the bema of Christ will not be a place of condemnation or censure.

The judgment seat of Christ does not determine our salvation; that matter was settled by Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf and our faith in Him. All our sins are forgiven, and Romans 8:1 says there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Jesus said in John 5:24, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” Romans 8:31 says, “Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

Every sin of every believer was judged at the Cross, when God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Though salvation is not by works, good works are the inevitable result of true salvation. So, 2 Corinthians 5:10 is not about whether you are saved—but how you lived as one who is saved.

What did we do with the resources God gave us? How faithful were we? Were we yielded to the Spirit, seeking to honor Christ and further His work in the world? Did we take opportunities to share Christ with others?

It is living today in light of that day when we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

And if we remember who we are and whose we are, and if we remember that day then it will mean that this day there will be no drifting, coasting, or settling. Instead it means living with purpose and urgency. I loved our recent Men’s Breakfast that had the theme of urgency to share Christ with others. And yesterday’s Women’s Luncheon that had the theme of Gather and Go. Let’s gather to be edified and encourage one another, and let’s go make Christ known to our neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and relatives.

This means you should be living not just for this day, but for that day when you will appear before the judgment seat of Christ,

So, ask yourself: Am I living with that day in view? And what will happen on that day?

III. Our Works Will be Recognized by Christ

Verse 10 continues "...so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Notice how personal this will be: "Each one..." It will be your life, your choices, your actions, your faithfulness.

"Recompensed" means: to receive back what is due.

Believers will be recompensed for the things they have done in their earthly lives (while in the body). Their good deeds will evoke one response (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 6:8) and the bad (*phaulon*, "worthless") will evoke another (1 Cor. 3:15; Col. 3:25).

That word "bad" is unfortunately misleading. The Greek word literally means worthless and is not the Greek word for moral evil or the Greek word of iniquity.

So, as we seek to live to please God, how do we distinguish between what is good and what is worthless?

The best answer to that is back 1 Corinthians chapter 3:6-15...Let's read it together.

Imagine building your life like a house. But your house is tested by a fire. Some materials last. Some don't.

And one day, it will be tested. What remains... reveals what truly mattered.

Some works are like: Gold, silver, precious stones → they have eternal value, they last
Others: Wood, hay, straw → they disappear when the fire comes.

Not because they were sinful... But because they had no eternal weight.

This does not mean that things that do not have eternal value are somehow sinful: working, skiing, playing golf, going for walks and hikes. But not everything is of eternal value.

In preparation for the judgment seat of Christ, what are you choosing to "build" with? Gold, silver, and precious stones—things that will last? Or wood, hay, and straw—things that will not stand the day of testing?

The question is: Are you living only for what is temporary... or for what is eternal?

When it comes to rewards, the Bible speaks of believers being awarded heavenly crowns for different things. The Greek word translated "crown" and means "a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally." Used during the ancient Greek games, it referred to a wreath or garland of leaves placed on a victor's head as a reward for winning an athletic contest.

As such, this word is used figuratively in the New Testament of the rewards of heaven God promises those who are faithful. I believe the judgment seat of Christ which will follow the Rapture of the church is when the crowns will be awarded. There are five heavenly crowns mentioned in the New Testament.

1. The Crown of Life for Enduring Persecution

James 1:12 says, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Revelation 2:10 “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” This crown is for all believers, but is especially dear to those who endure sufferings, who bravely confront persecution for Jesus, even to the point of death.

2. The Crown of Righteousness for Loving His Appearing

In 2 Timothy 4:8. “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

3. The Crown of Glory for Faithful Shepherding

1 Peter 5:2–4 says, “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

4. The Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19) - For soul-winning/witnessing.

1 Thessalonians 2:19, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?”

5. The Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:25) - For self-discipline.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27, “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. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [disciplined] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown”

These rewards will not produce envy or regret; rather, they will exist in a context of perfect love and communal joy. The rewards, these crowns, are not about fame, platform or visible success.

They are about: faithfulness, endurance, love for Christ, service to others and eternal priorities.

And what do we do with those crowns?

Revelation 4:10 says we lay them at the feet of Christ. Because in the end: The reward is not the crown—the reward is Christ.

Paul is saying in our text today in 2 Corinthians: “I want to live now in such a way that I can serve and glorify Christ to the fullest capacity forever. In other words, I will have the same ambition here as I will there.”

If you are a Christian, one day you will stand before Christ. Not as your Judge for sin—that was settled at the cross. But as your Lord. And in that moment, everything will become clear. What mattered... What lasted... What was worth it...

This week Paula and I went to our dentist's office for a cleaning and checkup. I first met Dr Rex Baumgartner 30 years ago when he came to my men's Bible study. From that moment Rex became our dentist and a good friend. On Wednesday when we stepped into the dentist office, the receptionist stood up and walked over to us and said, "I am sorry to inform you that Dr Baumgartner died of a massive heart attack."

Wow, we did not expect that. Rex had always said that when his time came to graduate to heaven, he hoped it would happen quickly. And it did.

Imagine that was you and suddenly... you are standing before Christ. No distractions. No comparisons. No hiding.

Just you... and Jesus. And in that moment—you're not thinking about:

How much money you made.
How successful you looked.
How many people admired you.

You're thinking about one thing:

Did my life please the Lord?
Did I trust Him?
Did I obey Him?
Did I speak of Him?
Did I live for Him?

If that moment were today... Would you be ready?

Only two choices on the shelf: Pleasing God or pleasing self.

Brothers and sisters, let's not waste our lives. Let's make it our ambition to please God knowing that our lives will be evaluated by Christ, and our works will be recognized by Christ.

Let's live to please God now...so that on that day we hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Let's pray...

Benediction: Hebrews 13:20-21: Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.