

Spiritual Ambition

by John Bramhall

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual ambition, defined as the development of seven elements of Christian character, and encourages believers to be diligent in their spiritual testimony.

Scripture: Galatians 6:10, 2 Peter 1:1-2, 2 Peter 1:5, 2 Peter 1:16, 2 Peter 1:19, 2 Peter 3:5, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "End Times"

Description

John Bramhall preaches on the condition of professing Christendom and the unbelieving world at the end of the age, highlighting the presence of false teachers spreading unsound doctrine and the increase of scoffing infidels as signs of the last days. He emphasizes the need for diligence among believers to combat spiritual inertia and the danger of following damnable heresies. Bramhall encourages believers by presenting the glory of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ as an incentive for spiritual ambition, drawing from personal experiences and the Word of God.

Transcript

In his second epistle, Peter describes the condition of professing Christendom and the unbelieving world as existing at the end of the age. Two particular forms of evil are recorded: first, in chapter 2, the presence of false teachers propagating unsound doctrine, accompanied by wicked deeds, prominently characterizes the last days of Christendom; second, in chapter 3, the increase of scoffing infidels signifies another proof of the last days. With arrogant unbelief, the promise of Christ's coming is openly denied by men, supposedly on the basis that the present creation has an eternal stability. Peter reminds such that a universal catastrophe once destroyed the earth and foretells another disaster of divine intervention that will not only destroy the present earth, but the heavens also (2 Peter 3:5-10). The peril of the last days is indicated by the apostle in a twofold way: first, "many shall follow" the dissolute ways of the false teachers bringing in "damnable heresies," (2 Peter 2:1-3), and secondly, the danger of spiritual inertia exists among the saints of God in these same days, causing the apostle to frequently emphasize the need of diligence (2 Peter 1:5, 10, 12, 15; 3:14).

In his first epistle, chapter 5, Peter describes the adversary as "a roaring lion," against whom the saints are to exercise vigilance. In the second letter, the character of Satan is the cunning and subtle serpent, a snake in the grass, manifesting himself as an "angel of light" through the false teachers. This manner of deceit is more dangerous than the roaring lion, demanding greater diligence than ever.

THE INCENTIVE FOR SPIRITUAL AMBITION

To encourage the believers in such conditions, the apostle presents the glory of the coming kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as an incentive to stir their hearts. Peter possessed a twofold source of assurance concerning this.

He had personally seen the glory of the kingdom: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Together with James and John, Peter had been fully initiated into the mysteries of kingdom glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

More conclusive than his personal testimony, was the Word of God. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19-21). The ministry of Old Testament prophets abounds with descriptive glories of the coming kingdom of our Lord, this being a major doctrine that occupies a greater part of God's Word than any other.

Though Christendom is apostate and the world ridicules the promise of His coming, yet a glorious incentive remains for the believer -- the soon appearing King and the glory of His kingdom!

THE FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUAL AMBITION

Let us clearly understand that Peter is writing to those who have the true foundation of spiritual ambition: "to them that have received like precious faith with us through [the] righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1 N.T.). To these, all divine provision for spiritual growth is definitely promised (2 Peter 1:2-4). Thus everyone who has placed his faith in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ has the foundation for spiritual energy.

THE MARKS OF SPIRITUAL AMBITION

Seven elements of Christian character are to be developed in the believer's life, which upon appearance are distinguishing marks of spiritual energy in evidence. They are (1) "virtue" or courage; (2) "knowledge"; (3) "temperance" or self control; (4) "patience" or endurance; (5) "godliness"; (6) "brotherly kindness"; and (7) "love." These are the productiveness of faith, as J. N. Darby's translation helpfully renders the passage, "In your faith have also virtue, etc." Let us prayerfully meditate upon them in their separate graces and, while doing so, ask our hearts if these marks of spiritual ambition are present in our personal testimony.

1. "Virtue," or courage, is spiritual ambition in action, regardless of the difficulties involved. With courage, the privileges of assembly life and spiritual responsibilities must be entered into. Worship, prayer, ministry of the Word, witnessing, and every phase of Christian responsibility demand courage. Difficulties must never be allowed to prevent this mark of spiritual ambition from being shown.

2. "Knowledge," which implies spiritual wisdom and intelligence, must be acquired in an experimental manner. This cannot be ours without fellowship with God daily, through the study of His Word, communion with Him in prayer, and the practical obedience of our lives to His revealed will. Are we growing into this knowledge day by day?

3. "Temperance," or self-control, is the Christian grace which manifests continence in the believer's life. Paul wrote concerning this great need to govern his body, saying, "I buffet my body, and lead it captive, lest [after] having preached to others I should be myself rejected" (1 Corinthians 9:27 N.T.). Is my body led "captive" or am I in captivity to my body with its natural desires?

4. "Patience," or endurance, meaning in the Greek text, "cheerful or hopeful endurance," is the next grace. It possibly is one thing to endure but another thing to endure "cheerfully" the testings and trials of life's circumstances.

5. "Godliness," in accordance with God's scheme, that we should be holy in life. Practical holiness is the result of the previous graces being manifested, for they enable us to be "partakers of His holiness." What a glorious crown of Christian character is godliness! Is it yours?

6. "Brotherly affection" is a true Philadelphian character! "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1). Affection for the Lord's beloved people shines out as a blessed mark of spirituality, but how this is greatly lacking today! "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another," said the Lord to His own.

7. "Love," the flow of divine grace toward the whole world, showing the constraining love of Christ to every man, is a crowning proof of spirituality! "Let us do good unto all men" is the Spirit's injunction in Galatians 6:10. These are the marks of spiritual ambition we should diligently seek to develop in our Christian character, even in the midst of apostate conditions and worldly skepticism! Do they shine out in our character and conduct?

Does it compensate to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18)? Let us hear Peter's admonition, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, use diligence to make your calling and election sure, for doing these things ye will never fall; for thus shall the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be richly furnished unto you" (2 Peter 1:10-11 N.T.).

Two facts denote the blessed reward for all who will obey the stirring injunction of the apostle to be diligent:

1. A present steadfastness in spiritual testimony will appear: "ye will never fall."

2. A future glory and honor will also be a God-given reward! God will spare no expense as to our entrance into the everlasting kingdom, for it will be "richly furnished unto you."

The blessedness of the Father's house above will be known by all of His children. Yet, when the glory of His majesty and the power of His kingdom shall be made known, our position of honor in that scene of glory will completely depend upon our Christian character and the spiritual testimony we have been for Him here on earth. May God the Holy Spirit stir His beloved people today, causing them to rise from spiritual inertia into paths of spiritual ambition, for His Name's sake!

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