**The Sin of Selfish Ambition**

**Introduction**

1. While pride and selfishness have always been a problem, such has been elevated by the present culture and values.
2. Humility is no longer a virtue that is encouraged by the majority. Many fail to even understand what humility looks like.
3. We’ve heard phrases that show this self-centeredness:
   1. “It’s okay to be selfish sometimes.”
   2. “You’ve thought of others all your life. Now its time to be a little selfish.”
   3. Michael Jordan once said, “To be successful you have to be selfish, or else you never achieve. And once you get to your highest level, then you have to be unselfish.”
4. This permissive attitude toward selfishness is not acceptable to Christ.
5. The idea that, in order to be successful in life, you have to be selfish is wrong.
6. The Holy Spirit identifies “selfish ambition” as one of the works of the flesh – **Galatians 5:20** (The Christian should avoid this character flaw, for those who possess it will not get to heaven – **v. 21**)
7. Selfish Ambition – eritheia
8. Defined
   1. Translated “self-seeking” (x3), and “selfish ambition(s)” (x4). (NKJV)
   2. “properly, intrigue, i.e. (by implication) faction” “electioneering or intriguing for office; apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts” (STRONG)
   3. “denotes "ambition, self-seeking, rivalry," self-will being an underlying idea in the word; hence it denotes "party-making." It is derived, not from *eris*, "strife," but from *erithos*, "a hireling;" hence the meaning of "seeking to win followers," "factions,"” (VINE)
      1. Hireling – **cf. John. 10:11-13** – seeking his own. Only worried about getting his pay.
   4. “found before NT times only in Aristotle…where it denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. Its meaning in our literature is a matter of conjecture. A derivation from *eris* is not regarded with favor by recent NT linguistic scholarship; it is also unlikely for the sources from which Paul possibly derived the lists of vices in 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20, since *eris* and *eritheia* are both found in these lists. Nevertheless, this is not absolutely valid for Paul and his followers, so that for them the meaning strife, contentiousness cannot be excluded. But selfishness, selfish ambition in all cases gives a sense that is just as good, and perhaps better.” (BDAG; 309)
   5. ﻿“The word originally was applied to an ordinary laborer, one hired to perform a task. It then came to mean working solely for pay. In this way it came to represent self-seeking and selfish ambition (cf. 2:21 which shows that some worked from selfish motives). Ultimately even this word may come to take on the meaning of contention or partisanship, because the person who lives only for himself is not only selfish, but as a result of his selfishness he becomes factious and partisan. But we should remember that Paul does distinguish *eris* from *eritheia* when he places them both in the same list in 2 Corinthians 12:20 and Galatians 5:20. For this reason it is best in this verse to give to *eritheia* only the meaning of selfishness, and not what might result from selfishness, i.e., contention, the meaning of *eris*.” (Walton Weaver, Edited by Mike Willis. Truth Commentary - Philippians and Colossians (Kindle Locations 1120-1128))
   6. ﻿“Moulton and Milligan conclude, “The meaning of ‘selfish’ rather than ‘factious’ ambition perhaps suits best all the NT occurrences of *eritheia* ” (254).” (Clinton D. Hamilton, Edited by Mike Willis. Truth Commentaries - The Book of  Romans (Kindle Locations 4459-4460))
   7. Essentially, *eritheia* is selfish pursuit. It is seeking what is best for self, with a disregard for any other. IT IS ONLY CARING WHAT IS BEST FOR ME, MYSELF, AND I.
9. Examples
   1. Ahab and Jezebel – **1 Kings 21:1-16** – A dark display of self-seeking.
      1. Ahab requests Naboth’s vineyard, but Naboth refuses because it’s his inheritance.
      2. Ahab sulks, and his wife, Jezebel, conspires to kill Naboth so her husband can have his vineyard.
      3. **1 Kings 21:15-16** – Naboth was stoned, and Ahab took his vineyard.
   2. Contrast – Abram to Lot – **Genesis 13:7-9** – A wonderful display of selflessness and yielding.
10. The Effects of Selfish Ambition
11. Division
    1. Selfish ambition produces the opposite of unity.
    2. Jesus desired, and commands unity among His disciples – **John 17:20-23** – just as the Godhead is one, believers are to be one in Christ.
       1. Same desire, will, character, thoughts, etc.
       2. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are incapable of selfishness because they are united in eternity.
       3. We are called to imitate them. (**cf. Ephesians 4:1-3**)
    3. The Corinthians struggled with selfish ambition which caused division:
       1. **2 Corinthians 12:20** – selfish ambition is really the seat of all these sins.
          1. *Eritheia* – “apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts” (STRONG)
          2. These are on the opposite side of unity.
       2. **1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 3:1-4; 4:6-8** – The party spirit was great in Corinth.
          1. They made different groups following different preachers **(1:11-13).**
          2. In doing so they showed their carnality **(3:1-4).**
          3. The result of these divisions was an over estimation of self against others **(4:6-8).**
       3. **1 Corinthians 6:7-8** – they were going to law against each other to “get their own.”
       4. **1 Corinthians 8:9-13** – they were too worried about enjoying their liberties to care for their brethren.
       5. **1 Corinthians 12:20-26** – they were puffed up regarding the differing spiritual gifts, and there was schism in the body.
    4. Selfish ambition leads to division:
       1. When an elder seeks his own agenda instead of the will of Christ, and the spiritual well-being of a congregation, division will result.
       2. When a preacher decides a following of men is more important than preaching Christ to glorify God, division will result.
       3. When any member considers the church as an entity to serve them, instead of themselves as a servant to the body of Christ, division will result. (I want to get my way, and I will lobby to ensure the result.)
12. Confusion and Every Evil Thing
    1. Translated “Self-seeking” – **James 3:14-16** – a contrast of wisdom.
       1. Wisdom that is earthly, sensual, demonic.
       2. This idea that being selfish at times is virtuous or even necessary does not come from God.
       3. ***“in your hearts” (v. 14)*** – **cf. Proverbs 24:3** – the products of a heart with “bitter envy and self-seeking:”
          1. Boasting against truth – “to exult against (i.e. over)” (STRONG) – **James 4:16** – arrogant boasting. (Same as “triumphs” – **James 2:13)**
             1. Such selfishness elevates the teacher of James 3 above the truth.
             2. A TEACHER WITH SELFISH MOTIVES NEVER HIDES BEHIND THE TRUTH, BUT HIDES THE TRUTH BEHIND HIM. (He is wise, not the wisdom described from above.)
          2. Lying against truth – such a claim of wisdom with such selfishness is a boldfaced lie. The truth shows such is not wisdom.
          3. Confusion – with self-seeking there is no solidarity of will. God’s will brings order, but man’s will/selfish desires bring confusion.
          4. Every evil thing – general – from this confusion comes all kinds of sin.
    2. Following the context of teachers:
       1. **1 Timothy 1:3-7** – fable telling/idle talk instead of truth for the edification of the hearers toward love.
       2. **Titus 1:10-11** – idle talk, false doctrine, for sake of dishonest gain.
       3. **2 Peter 3:3** – exploitation of hearers with deceptive words.
       4. **2 Timothy 4:3-4** – those teachers heaped up are ones with selfish ambition.
          1. Anytime truth is substituted for something else for the sake of relieving itching ears, that teacher has selfish ambition.
          2. SUCH A REQUEST COMES FROM SELF-SEEKING AS WELL.
          3. **Cf. Galatians 1:10** – Teachers must have the mind of Paul.
       5. Result of such teaching from selfish ambition?
          1. Ignorance (willful) (confusion) – **Isaiah 30:8-11 (cf. Hosea 4:6)**
          2. Apostasy – **Hebrews 2:1-4**
13. A Disregard for God’s Law
    1. One with selfish ambition (“self-seeking”) is going to be incapable of submitting to the Father’s will.
    2. **Romans 2:6-9** – Of those who will be judged by God unworthy of eternal life.
       1. THEY CANNOT OBEY THE TRUTH BECAUSE THEY ARE SELF-SEEKING.
       2. **Cf. Galatians 5:16-17** – that you may not do what you wish – at the heart of all sin is pride and selfishness.
       3. **Cf. Romans 8:6-8** – it CANNOT be subject to the law of God because it is seeking fleshly gratification INSTEAD OF APPROVAL FROM GOD.
    3. Jesus said, “Not My will, but Your will.” – **Matthew 26:39** – one who is Self-seeking does not care for God’s will.
    4. God calls sinners to HUMILITY – **James 4:6-10** – humble yourselves, and turn to God!
    5. The Christian does not have the mindset of “WHAT CAN I DO TO FOR ME,” but “WHAT CAN I DO FOR GOD.” – **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** – live for Jesus.
    6. THE NOTION THAT IT IS OKAY TO BE SELFISH, I.E. ONLY THINK ABOUT YOURSELF, WHETHER ALL THE TIME, OR SOMETIMES IS HUMANISTIC IN NATURE. THE INEVITABLE RESULT IS THAT GOD IS LEFT OUT OF THE PICTURE.
14. The Cure for Selfish Ambition
15. Having the Mind of Christ
    1. **Philippians 2:1-8** – the brethren in Philippi were called to step outside of themselves to look at the needs of their brethren, being give Christ as the ultimate example.
       1. **(vv. 1-2)** – An appeal for unity based upon their experiences in Christ. Have you been encouraged in Christ? Have you received comfort from love, both given and received? Is there a sharing with the brethren in the HS? Have you experienced affection and mercy from brethren? Then be united together in Christ!
       2. **(vv. 3-4)** – Do not be selfish or conceited, but esteem the needs of the brethren greater than your own.
       3. **(vv. 5-8)** – This is what Christ did for us.
          1. It was not in His best interest to leave heaven.
          2. It was in our best interest.
          3. NOTE – “made Himself of no reputation” – HE WAS NOT FILLED WITH SELFISH AMBITION. HE WASN’T WORRIED ABOUT HIMSELF, BUT US, AND GOD’S WILL.
16. Seek Glory from God, not Self or Man
    1. **Romans 2:6-8** – those who receive eternal life seek glory, but it is the glory to be found with the Father – eternal glory. Those who are “self-seeking” seek glory on this side of eternity from themselves and others.
    2. We should not live to be pleasing to men – **Galatians 6:12-15** – Paul sought glory from the Lord, and in His cause, not from men.
    3. **Colossians 3:1-4** – God has promised us glory.
    4. Jesus did not seek glory from men, but humbled Himself to be exalted by God – **Philippians 2:9-11** – given the name above all names.
    5. **“HUMBLE YOURSELVES IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP” (James 4:10).**

Conclusion

1. Christians need to beware of the sin of selfish ambition. It is extremely destructive.
2. God has called the Christian to His service, and that includes the serving of others, not self.
3. God requires humility in seeking His will, not our own.