

(People God Uses) 03 Beware of Ambition

by Chuck Smith

The sermon warns against the dangers of ambition and emphasizes the necessity of humility and surrender to God for effective ministry.

Duration: 41:11

Scripture: Acts 3:12, Galatians 6:7

Topics: "People God Uses"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of being hindered in worship by people standing in front of him during a church service. He emphasizes the importance of not seeking attention or glory for oneself, but rather directing it towards the Lord. The speaker then references the story of Peter and John healing a lame man in the name of Jesus Christ. The crowd mistakenly attributes the miracle to Peter and John's holiness, prompting Peter to remind them of the greatness of God and discourage worship of human beings. The sermon concludes with a challenge to recognize the greatness of God and not be amazed by His miraculous works.

Transcript

All right, let's turn now in our Bibles to Acts chapter 3, and we want to begin tonight at verse 12. We've been looking at the characteristics of the men that God used to accomplish his eternal purposes here on earth. We found that they were men of prayer, and that they were men of faith.

And now we come to a vital and extremely important characteristic. As we get to verse 12, we discover that they are men who have come to the cross in their own lives. They've reckoned the old nature to be dead, crucified with Christ, and they are not thus looking for glory for themselves.

Peter and John were going into the temple at the hour of prayer. The lame man sought alms from them. Peter said, look at us.

He turned, expecting to receive something. Peter said, silver and gold have I none, but what I have I'll give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Rise to your feet and walk.

And Peter, lifting the man to his feet, immediately the man received strength. He began to walk and leap and praise God. Went into the temple with Peter and John, walking, leaping, praising God.

And all of the people gathered together on Solomon's porch, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw them, he answered the people, ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why do you look so earnestly on us as though by our own power or holiness we have made this man to walk? Peter, recognizing that the people are about to worship him, look upon him as though he was something special, immediately seeks to turn them away from himself to the worship of God. Many people cannot distinguish between God and the instrument that God uses to accomplish his purposes.

Because I can see the individual and I can't see God, I am often prone to exalt the individual that God used, rather than exalting God who used that individual. And this is just the way people are. You can't stop people from being this way.

But you can, as Peter, be careful not to try to stand on that pedestal that they're trying to put you on. You can be careful to turn the people away from you and turn them unto the Lord and let them get focused upon the Lord who was using you. I think that one of the greatest dangers in the ministry is when God truly begins to use you in a supernatural, marvelous way.

Because the people then want to exalt the instrument, and that's not good. The crowd began to look at Peter and John as it was the result of their great holiness, or that they had some kind of special powers that they were able to make this lame man to walk. And they were ready to worship them for the miracle that was done for the lame man.

If you want to be used of God and continue to be used by God, you've got to come to the death to the self-life. It's a very easy trap to fall into, that is to take the credit and the glory for what God has done. When people begin to elevate you, look up to you, and begin to revere you, it is so easy to then begin to accept the praise, accept the adulation, and our old flesh loves that.

Our old nature wants to be worshipped. It wants to be admired. We want people to look up to us, and in fact, we want people to think that we are very holy, and we are very righteous, and we are very spiritual.

And so often, we then put on spiritual airs. We begin to have certain affectations that appear to be extremely spiritual. You can even develop a spiritual voice.

Oh brother, God bless you, you know. And you can begin to hold your hands in a very spiritual posture, and close your eyes, and you know, and you can give off the affectations of being a deeply spiritual person. But what that does is draw attention to you, not to the Lord.

I was in a church recently, as they were having the worship service. They were singing choruses, some new ones that I didn't know, and so I had to read the screen to worship with the words. They had some beautiful choruses.

But as they were singing, some unthoughtful person and persons started standing up in front of me, hands raised, swinging back and forth, and they were very effectively stopping me from worship, because I couldn't see the words anymore. And I thought, would you please sit down? If you want to stand and wave, then sit in the back row where nobody notices you. Why is it they always want to sit down front? And so it draws attention to the individual.

Now you might be completely sincere, and you might feel that you can worship better standing with your hands raised and swinging back and forth. Fine, if that's so, then go outside, where you're not bothering anybody. Or at least sit in the back row, where you're not drawing attention to yourself.

But you see, it is so subtle and so easy to do things that draw attention to ourselves, and to give off the aura of being spiritual, or more spiritual than the rest. As God begins to use you, and people begin to look to you, because God has been using you as an instrument, Satan often offers a subtle suggestion that it's all right to let them really admire you, because when they really gain confidence in you, then you can turn them to Jesus. Look out for that one.

Many have fallen into that trap. People that begin to take the glory to themselves soon become unusable by God. One of the main prayers that I have for myself, and I ask people to pray for me, is that God will keep me usable.

I stand in amazement at what God has done, and what God is doing. I marvel, and I am so grateful for what God has done. But I realize that it is God who has done it.

And I realize that if I begin to take credit or glory for it, God can set me aside in a hurry. And so my prayer is, God, keep me usable. Keep me in that place where you can continue to do through my life, Lord, what you desire to do.

Keep me from ever trying to touch the glory, or take credit for what you have done. Paul the Apostle was concerned about this very thing. Writing to the Corinthians, he spoke about how he beat himself to keep his body under, lest having preached to others, he would be set aside, he would be put on the shelf.

He realized that that's a prevalent danger, if you don't keep the body under. And that's not an easy thing, to keep the body under, to keep the spirit uppermost. Because the body wants to rule over your life, even as the spirit desires to rule over your life.

And you will be ruled by one or the other. You'll be governed by your flesh, or you'll be governed by your spirit. And unfortunately, sometimes we are governed by the spirit, we yield to the spirit, and then unfortunately, sometimes we yield to the flesh, and we respond and react after the flesh.

And so there is this battle for supremacy. What is going to rule over you, whether you'll be ruled by the spirit, or you'll be ruled by the flesh? We are told if we sow to the flesh, then of the flesh we're going to reap. If we sow to the spirit, then of the spirit we will reap.

And it is a mistake to think that you can sow to the flesh and then reap of the spirit. It's important, if I am to be used by God in a powerful way, that I have no personal ambitions for greatness, no ambitions to be famous, no ambitions to be known, no ambitions to see my name in print. As Paul said, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ.

As the hymn that was taken from that verse of Paul, forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God. All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood. When Paul was in Lystra, he faced the greatest peril of his ministry.

Not when they stoned him, thought he was dead, and drug him out of the city. That wasn't the greatest peril. The greatest peril was when they thought he was a god, Mercury, and the priest of Jupiter was dragging an ox down the street to sacrifice it to him, for the people said the gods have come down.

That was the greatest peril in the ministry of Paul. When the people were ready to exalt him as a god. The danger of receiving, accepting that kind of praise and adulation.

The self-life desires worship. This is what caused Satan to fall. He wanted to be worshipped.

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will be like the Most High. The flesh life manifests itself quite early, and as long as we are living in this body of flesh, we're going to be having problems with the old nature and the flesh life.

In fact, the flesh life is so universally manifested that we just call it natural. Well, God doesn't want you to live a natural life, he wants you to live a supernatural life. But you cannot live a supernatural life without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Very early in life, a child begins to manifest the desire for worship, the desire for praise and adulation. As your child is standing on the wall saying, watch daddy, watch. And you look at him as he leaps from the wall and you pray that he doesn't break a bone.

But he wants you to say, ooh, big boy, wow. And they're wanting the praise, it's just natural. That's just a part of human nature.

That is the old nature. Just like the little girl who dresses up in those dress up clothes and comes out and she's wanting you to say, ooh, a princess, you're gorgeous. I mean, that's just natural.

We just, that's just our nature. We want people to admire us, to praise us. It's just a demonstration as the truth of Paul's statement to the church in Ephesus when he said, we were all by nature, the children of wrath, even as others.

So I have a real problem when I become born again, when my spirit comes alive, because now my spirit wants to rule. And my flesh is fighting against my spirit because my flesh doesn't want the spirit to rule. It's been on the throne for a long time and it is reluctant to cede the throne to the spirit.

And if it has to cede the throne, it's going to counterattack and try to get back on the throne again. And so as long as we live in these bodies of flesh, we're going to be subject to the choices constantly of yielding to the spirit or yielding to the flesh. And that is why Paul tells us that we, and all of creation together, groan and travail until now, as we are waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God to wit the redemption of our bodies.

Our bodies are not redeemed. Your soul is redeemed, but a redeemed soul in a corrupt body is a bad combination. But that's the way it is.

My spirit is redeemed. My soul is redeemed. And in my heart, I long after God.

In my heart, I want to serve God, but my flesh is fighting against that. Now, if I want God to really use me, I've got to come to the cross. I've got to reckon that old flesh life to be dead, crucified with Christ.

In a few chapters, we'll see how severely God dealt with this problem in the early church. People who were desiring glory, people who were desiring the oohs and the ahs of the rest of the congregation, and God dealt with it in a very severe manner. As Ananias and Sapphira sought to put on an act for the people, pretending to give more than what they were giving, pretending to give all when they were holding back.

It wasn't wrong that they held back, but the fact that they were acting and declaring that they were giving everything when they were holding back. But why would you do that except that you want people to praise and to say, oh, did you hear what they did? Isn't that marvelous? Isn't that wonderful? And that desire for

the adulation and praise cost them their lives. We look in the Old Testament and we see there in Leviticus where when the tabernacle was complete and they were ready now to inaugurate the worship of God in the tabernacle, they had killed the animals for the burnt offering sacrifice.

They were getting ready to offer the animals on the altar, consecration to God, complete consecration. When suddenly God kindled the fire, spontaneous combustion, fire leaped from the altar, and the people seeing this manifestation of God's power began to shout and praise the Lord. And Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, grabbed their little golden censers.

They put fire in it and poured incense on it and went running in because the people were all excited. And now they are going to show that, you know, that they have a part of this whole thing. They are priests.

They are to offer the incense. And fire came from the altar and consumed the two of them. God would not have any flesh to glory in his sight or have them take away the glory that was being given to God because of God's miraculous work among the people.

God had to dwindle Gideon's army down to just 300 to give them the victory over the Midianites because God said, there are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves over me, saying, my own hand hath saved me. God had to bring the odds down until they were absolutely ludicrous because God knew that if he gave the victory to the 32,000, they would be boasting of their prowess and their toughness and so forth. And so God brought it down to where it was absolutely ridiculous, 300 going out against over 135,000.

But by giving the victory to the 300, there is no way that they could boast but could only glorify God who delivered the enemy into their hands. When we talk about the old man, the old nature, what do we mean? We're talking about the natural man as you were born of the flesh. Jesus said, that which is born of the flesh is flesh.

So you're talking about the unregenerate man or the man who has not been born of the spirit, born again. From the moment that you were born, you began to let the desires of your flesh known. And if you were not catered to, then you let everyone within your ears reach know of your displeasure.

And it's fortunate that you weren't stronger at that point, or you would have torn the crib to pieces. That same trait remains in a person until they are born again. Now with some people, it does become a little more refined.

But with others, they haven't really advanced much from the crib. They're noisy, they're demanding, and they've got to have their way or they're going to tear things apart. The old nature is the nature that is constantly insisting that things go my way or I'm not going to cooperate.

It's manifested in the child who says, if I can't be the cops, then I'm going to go home and I'm not going to play with you anymore. I want my way. I want you to yield to my desires.

It is sort of like Johnny's mother as she's watching the whole regiment of Marines marching by in the parade. And she said, look at that. The whole regiment is out of step, but my Johnny, it's putting my opinion above everyone else's.

Everyone else is wrong. I'm right. It's talking about my rights.

Well, I have a right to be upset. I have a right to be angry. They offended me.

You see, we usually don't put the emphasis where it belongs, but that's what it really is all about. It's the I, it's the me, the I life, the me first life. It's putting my needs above the needs of others.

And if you don't like it, that's tough. You know, it's that kind of an attitude. Frank Sinatra surely expressed it in the song, I did it my way.

And that's what so many people are today. I'm going to do it my way. Now, it's interesting that God has only one remedy for your flesh life, and it is not reformation.

God knows that your flesh is so rotten, he doesn't even try to reform it. This is the problem, of course, with our man developed programs that are dreamed up by sociologists as they try to reform our society. My mother's cousin used to be the head over the state of California, juvenile, oh, whatever they called it, they used to call them reform schools.

And the program that they had in reforming juveniles, he was the head over all of the reformatories in the state of California. He finally quit heartbroken, discouraged, depressed, because he saw the inability of reforming these kids. He saw that the whole program was a failure.

God's remedy is not reformation. He's not going to try to reform your old flesh. God's remedy is to kill it, not to reform it.

Paul said, for if you live after the flesh, you will die. But if you through the spirit do put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. So to live after the flesh is death.

But if by the spirit you will put the flesh to death, then you'll have real life. Writing to the Colossians, he said, mortifier, put to death, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, talking about your body, the parts of your body, fornication, uncleanness, that is sexual impurities, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, which is idolatry. And so God tells us to reckon the old man to be dead, crucified with Christ.

And we are told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof. Don't make any room for it. Don't say, well, that's just my Irish temperament or that, you know, I have a Latin temperament or what, you know, make no excuses, no provision for the flesh.

That's the old flesh. You're not an Irishman and you shouldn't trace your ancestry back to the Irish or any other. You're a new person in Christ and you trace now your ancestry back to Jesus and the old things are passed away.

The characteristics, the natural testament, the natural temperaments and so forth have no place in the Christian's life. For I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. Walking in the spirit, someone called this last week and wanted to know what does it mean to walk in the spirit? Well, it means to walk in love because love is the fruit of the spirit.

It's to walk in love as it is defined in 1 Corinthians 13. To walk in the spirit means that I suffer long. I put up with a lot of things and I am kind.

It means that I'm not envious. It means that I don't vaunt myself. It means that I'm not puffed up.

It means that I do not behave myself in an unbecoming manner. It means that I do not seek my own way or will. It means that I do not get provoked.

It means I do not harbor evil thoughts. It means that I do not rejoice in iniquity. It does mean that I rejoice in the truth and that I bear all things and I believe all things and I hope for the best and I endure all things.

Now, when I can live up to those things, walking after the spirit, I'm not looking for glory for myself anymore. I realize how rotten my flesh is and I desire not to give place to my flesh knowing how rotten and evil it is. And so, I am now in the place where God can begin to use me because I'm not seeking the glory or the honor or the fame, only seeking to bring glory unto Jesus Christ.

And so, as the people gathered because of the miracle, seeing this lame man who they knew he had been there for years, he had never been able to walk. It was a thing that he had had from birth. And now seeing him walking and leaping and seeing him as he was hugging Peter and John, they immediately related the fact that he's walking to somehow Peter and John are responsible.

And so, they began to look steadfastly at them. They began to worship them, looking with adoration and worship. And Peter said, wait a minute, wait a minute.

Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? That's a good question. How big is your God? You are the men of Israel. Your God is the one that created the universe.

Why should you marvel because a man is walking? Don't you know how big your God is? Good question. Why marvel ye at this? But then the second question, why do you look upon us as though it was because of our power or our holiness that this man is able to walk? And notice how immediately he turns them away from their worship of him to God and to the worship of God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his son, Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go.

So, he points them away from himself and he points them to Jesus Christ. And as long as you will be doing that, God can continue to do through you what he desires and longs to do. But the moment you begin to take the glory or the praise that the people are wanting to heap upon you and you begin to accept it for yourself, then before long you're going to be sitting on the shelf wondering what happened to you, why God isn't using you any longer.

The person that God uses is a person who has come to the cross in his own life, has reckoned the old nature, the old life to be dead. Now, the word reckon is a word of faith. If it were dead, I wouldn't have to reckon it to be dead.

But it's something that I have to reckon. I have to say that is a part of the old life. I'm not going to be subject to that.

I'm not going to live under the tyranny of my flesh any longer. I recognize that as a part of the flesh life. That was put to death on the cross.

I'm crucified with Christ and that is not going to rule over me any longer. And you've got to take that stand. And whenever the flesh life manifests itself, you've got to take that stand.

That's a part of the old nature. That's a part of the old life. I'm not going to be ruled by that.

I'm going to be ruled by the spirit of God. And it's a fresh commitment of yourself to be ruled by God's spirit. And in that position, God can use you and continue to use you.

Father, we do desire that our lives count for eternal things. We desire, Lord, that you would use us in the accomplishing of your eternal purposes. And Lord, whatever might stand in the way, we ask, Lord, that you would reveal it to us and that you would help us, Lord, to deal with it, to be freed from it in order, Lord, that we might bring praise and glory and honor unto you.

And so, Lord, we just come tonight asking for the help of your Holy Spirit as we seek to reckon the old nature to be dead, not to be governed and ruled by it any longer, that we might manifest the characteristics of Jesus Christ, that his love might be manifested through us, the nature of Christ within us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to minister to you. It may be that there's an area of that old nature that has sort of kept you under, brought you into defeat. And tonight you'd like to have God's victory and the help of God in really being freed from the power of the flesh.

It is a tremendous power. You can't free yourself. It isn't reformation.

It's transformation. And that can only happen through the Spirit. They're down here in the front to pray for you tonight, that you might experience God's power in your life, setting you free.

It may be that you're desiring to be used of God. You want the power and the anointing of the Spirit on your life. They're here to pray for you.

There'll be no afterglow tonight in the fellowship hall, but right here in the front, these men are here to pray for you this evening. So we encourage you to come forward, you that desire to receive prayer. May the Lord be with you.

May the Lord watch over and keep you. And may, by the grace of God, we keep the body under, not let it rule, not let it reign, but will be ruled by the Spirit of God, that we might live and serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Rule over my soul, rule over my soul, sweet Spirit, rule over my soul.

My rest is complete as I sit at your feet, sweet Spirit, rule over my soul. Amen.

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