



## **Learning to Lead – Part 5**

### **Policing Your Motives**

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I suppose in this series that we've been studying Acts Chapter 20 that I hope to kind of stir your desire to say that you'd like to hear at the end of your life, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And that's going to really be contingent on you living for eternity, really storing up for yourselves treasure in heaven, looking beyond just the simple temporal things of this life and saying, I want to live for something that lasts. And that's been our goal. And as we reached near the end of it, this is the second to the last sermon in this series, I just really need that to be like the predicate for this message, because it just is the assumed understanding that you as a Christian, you want to please the Lord with your life.

And if that's the case, what's interesting about these three verses as we get to Acts 20:33, 34 and 35, is that Paul injects something right here at the end of his farewell address to these leaders of the church in Ephesus. And that's what's happening. This is the end of his address to these men. The next section that we'll cover next week, Lord willing, is where Luke makes a commentary on the whole thing and we'll examine that next week. But here is the end of his message. And if you just would open your Bibles and look at this you'll recognize that he's telling them something that almost seems like an afterthought, which of course, it's not. God is clearly having this all recorded for the benefit of not just that generation but every generation of Christians to learn from.

And it's not an afterthought, but homiletically if I were the homiletics professor I would say, you know, this is what we call in homiletics a "touch and go conclusion." It's like you're coming in for a landing in verse 32, this is a great way to end it, "I commend you to God and the word of his grace." It's just kind of rolling off the tongue and it's great. And then it's like it should be done, say amen and finish the service. And he seems to take off here in verse 33 to go into another topic.

The reason I think it's helpful for us just to note that is it's almost like everything I've said here so far to you people about trying to be useful to the Lord and particularly in serving and helping people follow Christ, whatever your capacity might be, you can't do it with this. If you have this going on in your life it's going to impede, it's going to thwart, it's going to mess up whatever it is you might desire and aspire to be in your life before God. Like I'd like to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Well, it isn't going to happen if this is a part of your life. This is like the one foil and there are many of them. But this particular one in the address to people who want to see their lives as leading other people in the right direction, having an influential effect. As I often said throughout this series of standing at your funeral and having people say, that guy, that gal made a difference in my life as it relates to eternal things, important things. I mean, they affected my life and changed my life in a biblically positive, spiritually enhancing way.

That's what we want to have our lives amount to and we will glorify God in doing that. And if this particular problem that he says, "I didn't have this problem among you," if it's a problem

among us, if in our hearts we have this problem, we don't understand it, we don't identify it and we don't counteract it, you're going to find that the Christian life that you hoped for is not going to be realized. So we have to deal with this. This is an issue that cannot be left not on the table. And so he brings it on. Seems like an epilog, but he brings it on here at the end. Let's look at the last three verses of his address. Acts Chapter 20. Paul is saying goodbye to the leaders of the church of Ephesus. He's in a town called Miletus, he's about to get on a ship. He's about to sail down the Aegean and through the Mediterranean back to Jerusalem.

But here are the last words of his address starting in verse 33 and it's an autobiographical statement about what he hasn't done. And one thing I need to make sure that we don't do, because it is a huge mess as we see throughout the rest of Scripture. It's couched in old-style language so follow it here. Verse 33, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." Coveted. There's that old-style word. "You yourselves know that these hands," and you can see him lifting up his hands, "ministered to my necessities," whatever I needed. I had this job making tents with Priscilla and Aquila and I met my needs by working hard. "And to those who were with me." I provided not only for myself but for my missionary gang. We were careful to make sure that we paid our bills because I worked hard.

Verse 35, "In all these things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said." Whoa, if you've got a red letter Bible this is in red, is it not? "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And if you look for the cross-reference here and you look for where this is in the gospels, you'll say, oh, this isn't in the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John didn't even record this statement. And as John said at the end of his gospel, there are a lot of things Jesus did and said that aren't recorded in the book of John or in Matthew, Mark or Luke that Jesus said, and here's one that God wanted to make sure was recorded in his word for all generations that the Apostle Paul was privy to, and adds it here as a great summary of what was true about Jesus as he served other people and it must be true about you if you're going to serve other people. This has to be a part of your life. And what can't be a part of your life is that old-style word there found in verse 33.

Let's look at verse 33 again. Let's start. "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." Covet. We need to figure out what that means then we can look at the object: silver, gold or apparel. What's interesting is it's clothing. But let's look at the word covet. Let's understand it. And the end goal, let me just say it upfront. You can write it down, number one on your outlines, what we'd like to do is to "Prayerfully Identify Covetousness." That's an old-style word but write it down. And I want us to become familiar with it and re-inject this into our vocabulary knowing what it means because we need to make sure that we can find it if it exists in our hearts and we are bent toward this, we have proclivities to be covetous, so we want to make sure that we can identify it and see it.

Do you have covetousness in your life? Well, that's a mouthful. What does it mean? It seems so old and I'm about to say another word from where it comes. It's the word Latin. It comes from Latin. I think this is just a dusty old language. Right? Latin. And the Latin root you are familiar with. It may sound farfetched and unfamiliar, but it is familiar to you as walking



through the supermarket in the first couple of weeks of February and seeing the cards there for Valentine's Day. And on some of them you'll see the naked flying cherub, this little baby with a bow and arrow, shooting bows and arrows. Right? And this is on the lead-up to Valentine's Day. And of course, this guy has really nothing to do with Saint Valentine, the historic figure of church history, which don't get me started with that, the conflation of things in our world.

But Valentine's Day is marked by this little fat, naked flying guy. And he has a Latin name. What's his name? Cupid. Okay. Cupid. Cupid is his name. He carries a bow and arrow and he shoots it. Right? It was a Roman god in the pantheon of gods. But cupid is the word that has made it into English that translates that Latin root from which we get the word covet or covetousness. And I wouldn't mind you combining those images in your mind of a word that just seems an old fashioned Grandpa's word, covetousness, and then taking this image of a little, you know, flying archer and he's shooting arrows and to combine those because it's a good memorable picture of what we're talking about, cupid.

There's even a word in English and we don't use it very often, but "cupidity." Now, you didn't use that in a conversation this week. Cupidity. But cupidity really is the essence of the idea of what we're talking about. Cupidity is the idea of a strong desire, like covetousness is a strong desire, and Cupid flies around, at least in modern lore, and he shoots his arrow. And if it gets shot into your heart and it's for this gal, you have this attraction and this desire and I want to be with them and I want to talk to them. It's a romantic attraction and we feel like we're victim to the arrows of Cupid that brings us this strong attraction to this person. That's the idea. Cupidity or covetousness is that strong attraction.

You may feel victim to it just being a human being that there are certain things that you are strongly attracted to that you do not have. And we're starting to get into the idea of what this is. How important is it to God that you are not struck with pangs of strong desires for things you don't have? So important is this to God that this is extracted from your life that you can say among those you live among, work among and serve among, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel" or X-Y-Z, whatever it might be that God ensconced this on tablets of stone coming in Moses' hands off the Mt. Sinai, and he gave it as one of his first sets of instructions to human beings. Certainly the first written instructions from God came from this mountain with these commands and the 10th commandment ensconces this command and prohibition into our lives.

And it's unique, and I'd like you to put your eyeballs on it. So go back with me when we see the first reference to this, this idea of covetousness and how God thinks about it in Exodus Chapter 20. Go back to Exodus Chapter 20. This is the passage of the Ten Commandments. It would be a good chapter for you to commit to memory, at least where it's found, the reference. If someone said, where are the Ten Commandments, you say Exodus Chapter 20. This is the first reference to the Ten Commandments. Moses brings them down and here they are and reads and explains what they are.



Well, in the quotation of them you can see just looking above, if I have you look down to verse 17, that's where we find this command. It's a prohibition - "Don't do this." Look above, let's just start in verse 13, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Those are just staccato, rapid fire, bam, bam, bam, bam. Don't do these things. Then you get to this one, number ten. And look how long this is. It's starting to reflect some of the lengthier ones in the beginning of the Ten Commandments, like commandment number two about idols and all the explanation.

Well, we get to this one and it's explained in a way that is very broad. Here it comes. "You shall not covet," there's our word, strong desire, "your neighbor's house." And then we have a semi-colon in our English text here because it's going to keep going. I might look at his house and go, "Wow, he's got a really cool house. Look at his deck. Look at his view. Look at how many rooms he has. It's really done up nice." And you think, "Well, I have a strong desire to have a house like that. I want that kind of house. I don't like my house as much as I like his house. I want that." That's strong. It's like I've been struck with the arrow of desire for that.

And then it's not just like your house, right? It could be, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." So this goes beyond just stuff, now. This could be relationships. It could be you shouldn't want to have his male servants or his female servants. In other words, it could be all of these resources and employees in an ancient sense, or his implements of work, his ox or his donkey. I mean, he's really got nice like tools of farming. No. Or anything else that is your neighbor's. I don't want you to covet anything. I don't want you to have this strong desire for anything that you do not have. Okay. That's a huge statement. And if I just said this, that's where I would just stop the sermon right now and say, hey, identify any of that in your heart. You might be able to find some.

And let me give you some more definitions so that we can do some exploring to understand what this is. Here's a definition for it. One of several definitions we could give. But let me just give you this one. Coveting something, coveting someone, coveting wanting to be someone that you're not, whatever it might be, coveting, that I can't be happy without it. That's the sense of feeling, I can't be satisfied without it. I can't be happy without it. I'm going to struggle living and seeing and imagining my future without that. I need to have that. Versus the core, it just means like a strong desire. It's a craving. It's that kind of incessant sense of I'd really, really like to have that. I'd really like to be that. I'd really like to have that relationship, have that job, have that office, have that home, have that ministry, have that influence, have that respect, have that income, whatever it might be. Anything else that is your neighbor's.

And your neighbor is not just the guy who lives next door, anyone around you, anyone you rub shoulders with, anyone that you see. And in our day, the information age where you can look into everyone's personal life. Now we have so much opportunity to start to say, I really want that and I really don't know that I could be all that happy imagining my future without that or something exactly like that.

Here's another definition that may help. It's always good to kind of define things by its antithesis. And this is a good word that I hope that you've had some sense of developing a



definition of in your mind for and let me just give you the antithesis. What is coveting the opposite of? Coveting in Scripture is the opposite of contentment. So you know that word, right? Contentment. And Paul talks a lot about contentment. Think about Paul's life. He's had a lot, he's had a little, he tells the Corinthians all kinds of stories about times of deprivation in his life. And yet he explains that it wasn't a problem.

To the Philippians in Chapter 4 he says, "I know the secret of contentment. I know how to have a lot, and I'm fine. I know how to have a little bit, and I'm fine. I know what it is to be in poverty. I know what it is to have riches. I know what it is to be hungry. I know what it is to be full. And you know what? It's fine. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Which is not just a verse for varsity football games, right? This is about really living the Christian life with contentment. It's about having the peace of Christ dwelling in your heart.

It's really another sense of defining the concept of the fruit of the spirit that is peace. I'm okay. It's the old hymn, right? "It is well with my soul." In the interior of my heart I'm okay with what I've got, with who I married to, with what my house is like, with my job, with my income, with my neighbors, with all of that. I'm okay with it. "It is well with my soul." I'm all right. Anything that disrupts that would be something to identify. Is there some kind of tentacle of covetousness creeping into my life? And it would be good for us to identify like, what is that? In this passage it's repeated twice. It's the only one of the Ten Commandments, the only one where you have the prohibition repeated twice. Don't covet and then don't covet. Don't covet what he's got and what he lives in. Don't covet the relationships he has. Don't covet his employees, don't covet his implements of work. Don't covet anything that is your neighbor's. I mean, this is a serious thing to God and if it's a serious thing to God, we just need to stop and say it needs to become a more serious thing to me.

And since this is not preached on very often, I'm just guessing you haven't heard a lot of sermons on this lately. It's the reason people don't come to you and say, "Man, I'm really struggling with covetousness." This is not a sentence coming out of most people's mouths. And yet we need to say it was so important to God that he said it so early in the biblical revelation, and he continues to drive this home throughout the New Testament. We need to identify it.

If you need any help with identifying it, here's something I dare you to do, right? Pray the prayer of Psalm 139. Psalm 139 and you'll remember this one I quoted for you, the verses in particular, Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24. And this is a classic text that I think anytime anyone brings up something in terms of something that would grieve God this is the passage to pray. Ready? "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" Of course he knows my heart. He sees everything. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him with whom we must give an account to quote the book of Hebrews. Yes, that's clear. But the psalmist is trying to say let me see those. Right? "Search me, God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!"

Which, by the way, covetousness is the thing that percolates under the surface. It motivates decisions. It motivates like the allotment of your time and your effort. So covetousness is one of these insidious sins. It comes in camouflaged under the surface and so it's there residing in



the interior life, in your heart, in your thoughts. And you need to say to God, "God, just look at me, search me, try me, uncover this. See if there is any grievous way in me."

The presence of covetousness in your heart, this is a good word: grievous, it grieves the Holy Spirit. And eventually you'll find out one of the reasons God so graciously gives us a command to not covet is because it will grieve you. You will never have contentment. You will never have peace. You will never live the Christian life and be able to say what Paul says, "It doesn't matter how much I have, doesn't matter where I live, doesn't matter what my income is. What matters is I have Christ. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." You'll never live with that peace until you get rid of this problem.

And so you want to say, "God, if there's a grievous way that grieves you, I know it's going to grieve me in the long run. I've got to cut this out of my life." And I love the next line here in verse 24, "and lead me in the way everlasting!" Lead me in the right way, the path that is going to be the eternal life. I'm going to live in eternity with contentment. I'm going to live in eternity with contentment. I want to have that now. I want to extract covetousness from my life.

Do you remember that statement? If you know your Bibles well, you remember Paul gets the argument in Romans Chapter 7 and he starts to talk about the effects of the law on our sinful bent. And, you know, it's all in a larger argument but he says something about the way sin works and he injects this discussion about coveting and he says, "If it weren't for the law pointing this out I wouldn't have known what coveting was." I certainly wouldn't have known that it was displeasing to God. But as it is, God said, do not covet it. And therefore, it was like sin was just like everywhere. It was like the light of God saying, "You shouldn't do this." And once I understood what it was and that God prohibits it, I started to see it everywhere. I was coveting everywhere.

And that's what a sermon like this can do. At least the beginning of the sermon can say let's just at least start by understanding what it is, identifying where it is. What is it that you say, "I can't imagine my future without this. And if I didn't have this, I would not be content," and say, okay, that is a problem for me. My neighbor's wife, my neighbor's house, my neighbor's car, someone that I'm watching as an influencer, someone I'm following online, something I constantly look through the magazines to look at and kind of fantasize about, it'd be great if I had that. If you have this in your life identify it and start to see it here, there, here, there, here, there and say, okay, what do I do now? The Bible is so clear once we see sin in our lives, just to kind of develop this wholly as a pastoral interest in your life. I'd like to pastorally guide you to see sin, you identify it, you know it grieves God. And then simply to put it in the terms of First John Chapter 1 verses 8 and 9 you need to confess it.

But let me give you another verse that might help you. It's so good as it regards this concept. Proverbs 28 verse 13. Proverbs 28 verse 13, "Whoever conceals his transgressions," it's buried underneath the surface anyway and for you, you might say, "Well, no one knows about it anyway. Why don't I just continue to keep it concealed?" Certainly with these kind of motive sins like envy and jealousy, and in this case, coveting, it's just under the surface. Well, the



Bible says if you don't let it out, if you don't make it clear, if you don't bring it to the surface, you're "not going to prosper, but he who confesses," that means we're bringing it out and confessing, "God, this is wrong." That's what confession means. I'm agreeing with you. This is not right. This should not be in a Christian's heart. If you "confess it and forsake it you will obtain mercy."

And I'm not naive to think that this sermon can't just bomb and harsh a lot of people out. And I know it can. Because if you start looking like Paul says in Romans 7 for where you see sin of a particular kind, you can be overwhelmed with sorrow that you're such a loser when it comes to this concept, right? It's like I am full of covetousness, Pastor Mike. If you're honest you may feel that way. But here's the good news. As soon as you see it, wherever you see it, I want to confess it and I want to say, God, I don't want that here. I want to forsake it. And here's the wonderful promise of God, "Confess your sins, he's faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

I mean, right there, you can start afresh right now with this concept. If something came to mind and just kind of pricked your conscience when I said what is it that you got to have to make you happy? What is it that someone else has that you really have this strong desire to have? What is it that you pined away and feel like I just don't have that, poor me? Whatever that thing is you just need to be able to say, God, today I want to confess it, I want to forsake it. And then here's the promise, you'll find mercy. I mean, that's just a good, good promise of God. And I want to claim that promise and say God, okay, that's who you said you are. And so I want to claim that and I want to start fresh. You can start right now fresh with the sin of coveting. But then you're going to have to stay on close guard regarding this.

Matter of fact, turn to one last passage before we leave this first point. Go to Luke Chapter 12 with me, Luke Chapter 12. Here Jesus has a guy come up and his brother is standing in the wings because you can see by the way he addresses this in the pronouns. And these two guys are there and this one guy speaks up and says to Jesus in Luke 12, I need you to adjudicate and arbitrate and mediate between me and my brother in the inheritance of my father's. They got a dead father, he's got all this money, and he's concerned that he gets exactly what his inheritance should be. Split this inheritance. And Jesus says something weird that you wouldn't expect. "Who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And you're thinking, wait a minute, this doesn't match all the Sunday school lessons. He is the judge and the arbitrator over all things.

But the real concern that the guy has is I want this to be a monetary division of wealth that's equitable and fair. And what Jesus says is the problem isn't the docket, the case. It's not really an issue of fairness and justice. It really is an issue of what's driving all of this. So let's jump into the middle of this real quick in Luke Chapter 12 and let's see what he says in verse 15. He says to these guys, instead of let's hear the case and I'll make it clear. And what did you pay for that? Did you cover that? When your dad was sick did you do that? Okay, this will make it fair. He doesn't do any of that arbitration. He says to them, verse 15, Luke 12:15, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness." There's our big word. Against all



covetousness. "For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And the world doesn't get it.

Do you want to talk about this thing that I'm trying to extract from our life this morning? It is the thing that will make you less useful to God, increasingly useless to God. It will curtail your usefulness to God. But the world thinks that's what this is all about. The world, I mean, they're the kind who want you to cut things out from magazines and put them on the refrigerator and say, "This is what I want. I want this house. I want this yard. I want this, you know, this family. I want this yacht. I want this retirement." They want you to... this is what it's all about. Life is that to them. And Jesus' whole response is your covetousness underneath the surface is deceiving you into thinking that's real living. That's not real living.

You need to take hold of that which is really life. And if you know your Bibles well, you know, I'm quoting right there First Timothy Chapter 6. It's not about you putting your hope in the uncertainty of riches. Riches come and go. And maybe in your life they've come and gone. I don't know what the circumstance of you and riches is all about, but that's not what's certain. What's certain is your relationship with God, your usefulness to God, and you can be useful to God no matter what you drove to church this morning. You can be useful to God no matter how big of a house you have. You can be useful to God no matter what your business card says or how big your office is. It doesn't matter. You can be extremely fruitful and useful to God, but you got to get this covetousness out of your life because your life is not about the abundance of your possessions.

And so Jesus tells a story. He tells a parable, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, what I shall do for I have no place to store my crops." Where am I going to store my crops? Verse 18, "And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns, I will build larger ones. I will store all my grain and my goods in them. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.'" Are you with me on this verse 19? "Relax and eat and drink and be merry." Verse 20. Note very carefully verse 20. But God said to him, that's a great idea. You should start a podcast. You should start a financial program that will help people do that because that sounds like a great plan. It's all about financial management and storing up a lot so you can relax and eat and drink when you get old, you can stop working. It would be awesome. God says Yay! Verse 20. Did you highlight all that?

This is almost a surprising response. I mean, it is a surprise. And "God said to him," it's a one-word sentence, four letters, "Fool!" You're a fool. That messes up a lot of Christian programming right there. Right? You're a fool. You're a fool. "This night your soul is required of you, and the things you've prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." I love that phrase. It just hangs out there like a carrot. I would like to be, whatever it means, rich toward God.

And that's where the predicate of this whole series is. I want you to say I want to be useful to God, and God would say, great, we're going to impact people for the Lord. Your whole life you should be saying, "How can I impact people for Christ?" And that's great. But here's the





problem. If you have a covetous heart, you're going to constantly be pursuing the things of the world that the world says this is real living and it's not this over here as Jesus put it in Matthew 6. This is "seeking God and his kingdom and his righteousness." On the other hand, the Gentiles are chasing after all these things, what they're going to eat, what they're going to wear, where they're going to live. They want all of this and they've made this the focus of their pursuit. That's what a covetous heart does. But over here, it's about God, my relationship with God, and how it can affect people for God. That's the distinction.

I'd like to be rich toward God, as Jesus said, storing up for myself treasure in heaven and God saying, good job. That's exactly what you ought to be doing. But those who say, "Well, I got to get all this," God said that's foolish. It's foolish. Not because he wants to deprive you of things or nice things even. It's that that's not the focus. Matter of fact, the sin in the Bible that says in First Timothy Chapter 6 that you want to be rich. That's exactly what this guy... I want to be so rich that I can relax at the end of my life. Wanting to be rich no matter what you think the justifiable reason is.

I've had people say all kinds of weird things. "I just want to be rich so I can give a lot away." Right? Whatever your desire is that leads you to want to be rich I can assure you it's somehow connected to the concept of covetousness. Cupid has shot his arrow into your heart. And it's not for a person, it's for a certain lifestyle. It's like the apparel, like a certain reputation. It's about a certain strata. It's about a certain kind of luxury. Whatever it is, it relates to this problem and it needs to be extracted so you can say that's not real life. And when God provides it he may provide it, as he said, "If you seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, all these things will be added to you." But let me deal with that. You deal with my kingdom and my righteousness.

Now, there's something about God's righteousness that is revealed in what Paul says next. And in point two and point three of this message this morning, back in Acts Chapter 20, take a look at it. In verses 34 and 35, he gives us the antidote. He gives us the safeguard against covetousness. First we confess it, we identify it, we see it, we forsake it, we say, God I don't want this. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have this. A Christian shouldn't be hankering for things and desiring and craving and pining away for things we don't have. That should not be my focus. Great.

Now, how do I counteract that? Well, I do what Paul did here because this is the biblical thing to do. Take a look at the text with me back in our passage, verse 34. He says, "You yourselves know how these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me." Notice the word necessity and a lot of people don't like that when we talk about financial planning. They don't like it. Necessities. Because it isn't about necessities for people who want to be rich. It's not about necessities. They can call it necessities because they think, you know, a five-bedroom house with a view and a lot and a gated community. That's not a necessity, you understand. Necessity, as Paul rightly confesses in First Timothy Chapter 6 with "food" and covering. Right? I need "clothes." I need a house, "with these we will be content." You need a place to keep you from the elements, you need clothes to wear, you



need food to eat. And he says, with that, Paul says in First Timothy 6, "We will be content." We'll be content.

But we need to work to provide the necessities. And there are so many passages that deal with this in Proverbs, Paul writes the Thessalonians about this. You've got to work to provide the necessities. And I love it, it's a great passage because he's not only providing for the necessities of himself, he's providing for the necessities of his band, of his team. And if you happen to be a parent here, you provide for the needs of your family. You've got a circle of people. You might be saying, okay that's what I've got to do. And what kind of work is it, verse 35. "In all these things I have shown you that by working hard in this way." Now, let's just take the rest of that in a minute. But let's just start with that. This is hard work. This is working with his own hands.

Now, Paul, what was his education? He was a Ph.D. in Jewish studies, right? He was a biblical scholar. He even sat at the feet of Gamaliel, a stellar and renowned rabbi. And he was on his way to the Sanhedrin. That's like the Supreme Court of Judaism. He's got a Ph.D. in Jewish studies, in biblical studies, and he's working with his hands. What was he doing? You've been in this series. What was he doing in Ephesus? A tent maker with Priscilla and Aquila. He's making tents because he's in Ephesus where Diana, the temple there of Artemis, these people would come much like they would to Jerusalem at the Feast of Booths, and they would pitch their tents out there and they would come and bring their honor to Diana, to Artemis. And there was a lot of need for tents.

And so it wasn't that he was condoning the worship of idols. But this was a need. It was a thing that he could do. It wasn't like, you know, working for some missions organization, but he was building tents in a secular society, even being used often for secular reasons. And he's out there working with his hands. He's taking a job that you would clearly argue is beneath him. You're overqualified for this. And yet he's doing it, he's working hard and he's providing for needs.

This is starting to get to the heart of what we call a Christian work ethic, a godly work ethic. And I would say this: one of the antidotes to covetousness is maintaining, number two, let's just put it that way, you need to "Consistently Maintain a Godly Work Ethic." And I mean that throughout your life, even when you envision your older years and your old age. I want to continue to be a hard worker, whatever my capacities might be, whatever my opportunities might be, I am willing to do whatever it takes to reflect whatever the Bible says about a godly work ethic.

So let's try and define what that is. Are you ready? A little systematic theology study here. If I were to ask what is a godly work ethic, what is it? What is it in the Bible? Well, I'd have to go back to Genesis 1 and 2. God creates unique individuals here, Adam and Eve. He makes them in his image and he's exercising dominion over all things invisible and now visible in the created world. He's in charge. And he not only makes things but the Bible says he sustains things. And so he creates these miniature people who reflect his attributes as sovereigns who are able to create and exercise dominion and to take the canvas of earth and do stuff with it to



make it useful and beneficial. And he puts them in a garden, he says, now till it, work it, cultivate it and make something of this. And he gives them a job and they work. That's pre-fall. That's pre-Genesis 3. And God makes men and women to work. That's how he starts the universe as a working God, he makes people to work.

So that's how the Christian ethic starts, is that there's a virtue in the act of working itself. Working as a concept is itself a virtue. Matter of fact, jot this reference down if you would. As Jesus was accused of being a workaholic and working too hard and why are you working? Just pass the plate. You don't have to work. John Chapter 5 verse 17 is a passage you need to underscore in your thinking. Here's what Jesus said. And remember, his family was coming after him because he was working all the time. I mean, his disciples talked about, you know, take a break. His family thought you're just doing this all the time. They tried to go into where he was teaching and pull him out of that and he wouldn't even let his parents, you know, get involved in his working life, keeping him from working and his brothers were out there trying to extract him from all this teaching and all the stuff he was doing.

And here's what he said. Just a great simple statement about work. John Chapter 5 verse 17. "Jesus answered them, "My father is working until now, and I am working." I just love that. God is a worker. I am a worker. Now, that's post-fall. I get it. But the concept is there that God, the eternal God, the Holy God, no effect of sin, God is a God who is holy and exalted and transcendent above all things. Here is a statement theologically from the Son of God. "The Father is a worker and he's working until now."

Now, if you think about work, you'd think, well, yeah, if you think about God working, I think back to the creation week. Is that not where you go in your mind, creation week? Yeah, he's a worker. He created in a unique way. He could have just said with one word, BAM, everything and everything would be there. He could have intended that with the purpose of his will and everything with it. But he didn't. He did it in segments as he spun this earth around. Every time it turned around he did something. Every time it turned around he did something morning and evening, the first day, the second day, the third day. He works for six days on creation, creatively just saying things, popping them into existence. And then on the seventh day, he doesn't do anymore in creation work.

And he does all that according to the law of Moses because it's becoming a template for us. And the point is he knows your battery capacity, he knows how your gas tank gets low and he knows that you need to have about a 6 to 1 ratio of work and rest. And so he sets that up long before it becomes the covenant sign of the nation of Israel. He says, I want you to know it's work and rest. Now you can say, well, he did that. And that was a once for all thing and he set it up and he was done. That's what the deists teach, right? That's not what Christianity teaches.

Christianity teaches he set it up, yes, and he did work to create it. And it was a template for your work and my work in our capacities as human beings. But the Bible says he continues to work within creation as a constant upholder and sustainer of all things. And that's very important for us to catch. He doesn't just wind it up as the clockmaker and walk away as a lot



of people used to think in church history. It was that he's actively involved. All you do is read the Bible and see that. He's helping the calving of the calves. He's feeding the mountain goats. He's feeding the eagles. He's doing all these things as someone involved in his creation that seem mind-blowing, that God has an interest in ants or in grasshoppers or in the solar system or whatever it might be. But he is, he's actively sustaining all things. And as Jesus said, showing he is the creator, the agent of creation, "he upholds all things by the word of his power." I mean, that's a great example of God always continuing to work.

So Jesus says he's working all the time, I'm a worker. Now of course, he's going to take the rest that God's prescribed and certainly fulfilling the law. He was going to take the Sabbath rest as he ought to. We'll deal with all those passages and exceptions that come to mind. They're not exceptions. You got to look at those closely. But I'll talk about that another time. But to say that work itself is a virtue is the beginning building block for having a Christian work ethic. When you're working that itself is a virtue. God says, I'm pleased with that because I work, you work. Right?

In Genesis 3 what happens? Sin, messes everything up. Rebellious hearts, sin against the law of God and then God comes in and says, well, there are some penalties for that. And one of the penalties is the world that I created, the canvas that you're supposed to work on, here's the deal, I'm going to mess this up to rebel the way your heart rebelled so that the canvas is going to match the painter. Right? It's going to be rebellious and you are rebellious so you're going to have to suffer the consequences of that. And so we got pain in childbirth and then we have thorns and thistles. And we have the fabric of creation now messed up. And then he says something about his work. You were made to be a worker, but now you're going to work by the sweat of your brow you're going to eat your bread. There's going to be thorns and thistles you're going to have to work through. Work is going to become increasingly painful. Okay.

Two things. Let's think about the work ethic of Christianity, which is Christian work is a good virtue. We can say there's something about covetousness that says every time I work I just want to get paid. And for instance, like the parable of the fool in Luke 12 if I just keep working enough I can get to the place where I don't have to work anymore, and then I can take my ease and relax and eat and drink and just I can just chill out for the rest of my life. We can focus on the temporal paycheck, that is a vice the Bible tells us called covetousness. Right?

And then there's another problem, a preoccupation not with the temporal paycheck, but a preoccupation with the pain. And the preoccupation with the pain of work lets people do another sinful vice, and that is that they fall into the sin of sloth and laziness. And they say, "Oh, I don't want to work. I'm going to work in such a way as to barely get by. I'm not going to be a hard worker as Paul said he was reflecting the Christian work ethic, I'm just going to work just enough so I can have enough just to get by and pay my rent and have my food for me.

That's not how the Christian work ethic works. We are not supposed to be preoccupied either with the paycheck or the pain, one leading to covetousness, the other leading to laziness. I'm



supposed to focus on the work itself, that the work has inherent virtue. If it's honest work, right? If it's legal work. If it's work that contributes to the good. If it takes the canvas of creation and makes it better and useful, that's a good thing. If it's for the good of society, if it's for human flourishing, that's good. Now, just do that work and find the pleasure in that work.

Now, you shouldn't take a job in the workplace if you know you have to provide for your necessities where they say, "We want you to work. We're not going to pay you." This is Finances 101. This is the Christian version of financial Christian radio. Right? Make sure they're paying you at your job. Start with that. Make sure they're paying you. If you're paid to work, that's the right thing. It is, as it says in Scripture, an obligation for you if you work to have pay. Terrific. But I'm not obsessing with the paycheck or even the amount of the paycheck or saying, well, I'm really above this work, I should be paid more. And I'm not saying there's not a time to go in and ask for a raise from your boss, but that's not my preoccupation.

I should be content with my wages as John the Baptist said to those he was preaching to, repentant hearts, trusting in Christ. They are not people who are disgruntled about their worth in the marketplace. They're focused on the virtue of their work itself and when they are guess what normally happens with those people. And I'm telling you this as an employer, right? Having hired plenty of people, all strata's from the, you know, the executives down to the workers, not that I'm directly involved in all that. But I mean, whether it's the sweat of your brow or the sweat of your brain, I can tell you this, the thing that's hard to find in our current era, which I think has been hard to find throughout all of history, is people who are willing to work hard and see the virtue of hard work. And when you find that, guess what you want? You want to keep them and you usually end up paying them more.

Let me take you to a passage of Scripture in Colossians 3 that'll kind of tie this all together. And perhaps it's familiar to you, but it's a great text to kind of drive all this home. Colossians Chapter 3. Let's start in verse, I don't know, to just see the context verse 22 starts the section on bondservants obeying their earthly masters, but it says in the middle of verse 22, "not by way of eye-service, as people pleasers." I have all kinds of people who apply for jobs and they're like that, right? They will work only so long as there's some like pleasure given or some affirmation from the boss. They're not looking at the virtue of the work itself, "but with sincerity of heart." Now, here's the thing. Looking as we all we should beyond the temporal paycheck, beyond the temporal horizon of this life to the Lord, I "fear the Lord." I know I'm going to stand before the Lord one day.

But what kind of work does the Christian work ethic demand? Verse 23, "Whatever you do work heartily." Now that English translation in the English Standard Version translates the word "Psychē," the word "soul," the interior of your soul, your heart. That's what it's translated "heart" here. We usually think of the word "Cordelia" for heart in the Greek New Testament. But psychē is like the whole like your fibers of who you are, right? You need to throw your soul into this, right? And you're going to work heartily. You're going to work from the inside of your heart "as for the Lord." If the Lord asks you to build an Excel spreadsheet or a balance sheet, or put together a project or do whatever it might be, design whatever you do, if the Lord were the client I would hope that you would be like I ought to put my whole heart into this.



Well, you should be doing that with every client, even with everything you do. "Not for men," even though the projects are coming from human beings, "knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive the inheritance as a reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

There is the thing that takes the virtue of work to an entirely new level in the Christian work ethic. And it is something that I just got to tell you what happens when you find people who have that Christian work ethic as an employer, and some of you are employers, you know those are the people you got to keep. Those are the people who do so well for whatever it is that you're doing, and those are the people who you usually pay more. And here's what happens. Talk about Matthew 6. "All these things will be added unto you." The problem is you can't aim at it. But when it comes to what you're going to eat and what you're going to put on, which he says in Matthew 6 is the concern of the Gentiles, they're chasing after all these things.

They're running, that's a strong Greek verb. They're running after all these things, right? Not so with you. That's not the way you're supposed to do it. "Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness," God's kingdom and his righteousness, "and all these things will be added to you." And they will because the pattern is people who have a godly fear of God, they work for the Lord, right? Those are the people who generally God starts scooping more money into their paycheck. You can't aim at it. That can't be your heart's desire, right? You can't even say, "Well, I'm going to kind of say it's not my desire, but it really is my desire." Well, then you're wanting to be rich and God says desist from that. You can't. Stop trying to work to acquire wealth. "Do not toil to acquire wealth," the Bible says in the book of Proverbs.

And yet what I want to do is to work because the virtue of work trying to find something that just at least adequately matches my capacities, even if I think it's beneath me, I'm going to work, I'm going to work for the Lord and then guess what's going to happen probably in most cases? Those who fear the Lord, "The reward of fearing the Lord," to quote the Proverbs again, "is riches, honor and life." And usually that's what happens. That's the proverbial equation. And you will probably do better than your colleagues when you give yourself to a Christian work ethic. And you'll have, as the text says here in our passage, Acts Chapter 20, you'll have enough to not only meet your necessities, but the necessities of others.

Now on to verse 35, "In all things I've shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak." Now all of a sudden I have money to now even help other people. People who can't help themselves. People who don't have all that I have. "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than receive.'" You will be in the position of actually being able to give and be generous. The more you give yourself to a Christian work ethic.

Now you can't say I'm going to have a Christian work ethic, wait to see the payoff and then I'll start to give. That's not how it works. The Christian work ethic always involves generosity. It starts from the beginning of knowing that I'm trying to imitate Christ. Christ knows that the blessedness of being a Christian is learning to give like Christ gave. And Christ gave up his throne in heaven to come and be found as a servant to serve. He said, "I didn't come to be



served. No, I came to serve." Right? I came to serve. "I didn't come to be served and to give my life as a ransom for many."

So I need to see my life as saying, okay, I'm going to work hard. I'm going to see the virtue in work. I'm not going to be overly obsessed with the paycheck or with the pain of it. I'm just going to give myself to the work. And I'm going to the whole way through remember God's statement that the importance of blessing is really being able to be a giver as opposed to being on the receiving end. And so I want to love to give. I want to learn to love to give. I want to, as it says in First Corinthians 8, I want to be a "cheerful giver." I want to be able to give in a way that is just I find great joy in. Blessed, by the way, is a word that really should relate to our emotions. It has that sense of not just God's favor upon us, but the joy of engaging in that thing. And there is something I think that all of you can say is joyful and more blessed to be giving than receiving.

I mean, we hail people like the Good Samaritan. I think of Margaret Thatcher's statement in an interview once she said, "We wouldn't even know about the Good Samaritan if all that he had was good intentions." Right? "He also," Margaret Thatcher, this is her wit, "he also had money." Right? And the point is he had money and was able to give that money and he was able to help someone with that money. So here's the thing. There is no virtue in poverty. And I'm not saying we need to take a vow of poverty. I'm saying we need to make a vow to be committed to a Christian work ethic, always rooting out covetousness in our lives because that's always going to derail our usefulness not only to the marketplace, but most importantly, to God as serving the Lord. I don't serve for the paycheck and I don't eschew or hide from work because of the pain. And I am always going to see that the blessing of everything in life is being like Christ in giving.

Number three, we need to "Intentionally Imitate Christ's Generosity." The reason he taught about it and Paul gave that to us is because Jesus embodied it. He was the generous one. He was the one who gave his all to be the person who would advantage others by his sacrifice. And some of you know what it's like to be on the giving end and some of you know what it's like to be on the receiving end of giving from other people. And you know it is a blessing to have your needs met by people. Maybe you got a small group, you went through a hard time and someone provided for you in some extravagant way. And it's like, wow, that's great. But how much better is it even in the blessing when you're the one who's able to give? That's a wonderful place to be. And we need to say that's the thing that needs to be our joy ultimately because that's where God wants us to live.

And I'm telling you, I did say these two points are to be safeguards against covetousness. And I say that because Jesus himself prescribed this to a guy who was filled with covetousness and that was the rich young ruler in the second half of Matthew Chapter 19. Do you remember that guy? He comes to Christ and he's rich and he wants to be right with God. So he keeps talking about the law and he keeps saying he kept the law. And the problem is commandment one and commandment ten he didn't keep. And that means God is above all things, "no other gods before me" and covetousness was what his life was all about. And to prove it, Jesus says this. The God-man says, here's a command which he's about to say no



to, which means he's certainly not a keeper of the first command, and he's going to prove that he won't say yes to God, the God-man, Jesus Christ, because his heart is filled with covetousness.

Because you remember what Jesus said when the guy said, "Well, what do I lack?" He says, here's what you lack. "Sell everything you have, give it to the poor and come and follow me. And he went away sad," the Scripture says, "because he owned much wealth." So he had this wealth and it shows me his attachment to the wealth. That's what it was about. To him his life was in the abundance of his possessions. He was a covetous man, and he wasn't able to recognize that the problem of covetousness could have been absolutely decimated that day if he just was willing to give when God prompted him to give.

And some of you are fighting God's prompting to give, at whatever it might be, to someone who needs a car in your small group and you've got more cars than you should have and you should give one. Or for our lobby or for the church or for one of our church plants or for something that you got going on and you see the need in the world and you say, I got to give here to this project that's going to advance the gospel. And we need to say, God, you're prompting me to do that and maybe the reason I'm even resistant is because of my covetousness.

Let me take you to those passages I was just referring to, Second Corinthians. Second Corinthians Chapter 9. Chapter 9 is where that phrase is found. Let me just make sure you highlight that in your Bible as you have it. It's in verse 7, Second Corinthians 9:7. "Each one must give as he's decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Now, look at this statement in verse 8. "God is able to make all grace." Now, this is the theme of this whole section, giving and grace. Grace, the favor of God, the empowerment of God, God's abundant blessing upon people. Right? The sense that they have even the ability to not covet but to put God first.

"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." Now that's a great sentence. Read it again. "God is able to make all grace abound to you," he's able to do this, "so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." If you see as a good Samaritan, a guy beaten up on the road to Jericho, you will have the means to meet the need, right? He will make you ready to do every good work when there's a need and it needs some kind of material response you'll be able to do it. You'll have the opportunity. You'll have the open door. You'll have the credentials. You'll have the bank account. You'll be able to meet the need. God is able to do that.

And then he quotes this Old Testament text in verse 9. It comes from Psalm 112, "He has distributed freely and given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever," connecting the concept of giving and righteousness, which is all throughout the Scripture. And then he makes this statement, verse 10, "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food," from the beginning to the end, from the consumable product to putting the seed in the ground, "he will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." So





we're talking metaphorically here about seeds and bread, although sometimes it manifests itself in that I need seed and I need bread. But he says it's all about the harvest of righteousness. It's about in verse 8, those good works and the material things. Sometimes you need to carry out those good works like the Good Samaritan.

Now look at this verse, verse 11. "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God." See, if I say I just want to be enriched so I can do that, well, you need to know that it is not setting your sights on the riches. You cannot put your focus on the paycheck. Right? Now, you got to have a paycheck. Don't work for someone who is not going to be giving you a paycheck in terms of your secular jobs, but I'm not obsessed with that. But when I obsess myself with God's work ethic and serving the Lord in my work the paycheck will come. And when it does, God says he's able to "enrich you in every way so you can be generous in every way, through which he will produce thanksgiving to God."

So this ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, because the Achaian Christians here in Corinth and elsewhere around that area are giving, because they have surplus, to the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering. And Paul's going to broker that gift to them. And he's saying, man, they're going to be overflowing in many thanksgivings to God when they get this. Verse 13, "By their approval of this service" of your generosity, "they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the Gospel of Christ."

You say you love God and as First John 3 says, you can't say you love God, see a need and you have something to meet that need, but you don't meet that need, "you close your heart to that person and you can't say you love God." Well, what kind of connection to the gospel do you have? "And the generosity of your contribution for them and for all the others while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you."

Now, this is what the book of Acts has shown us at least twice in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. "There was not a needy person among them" because if someone in a small group needed something, the people in the other small group were meeting those needs. And even if on a large scale, if there were a bunch of widows who couldn't make their rent payments and didn't have food to eat, the church would meet that need. "There was not a needy person among them" because of the tangible expressions of their love for one another, which I'm sure was provided through all kinds of people like Barnabas in the church by having property they could liquidate, lay at the feet of the apostles in Chapter 4, and the needs would be met.

This was the great picture of a church that had a thriving budget to meet needs and do whatever it was to advance the gospel and care for the flock because God's grace was settled upon those people like here in the church of Corinth. And then he steps out to the theological imitation of Christ. "Thanks be to God for his," verse 15, "inexpressible gift." Ultimately, this is about a reflection of Christ. You cannot say you reflect Christ. You can't say you're Christ-like if you are not known as a generous person. That's why no one who's to lead in the church can ever be a greedy person. They cannot be a covetous person. It is a discrediting and



absolutely disqualifying feature of a human being, they shouldn't be a leader if they love money, they cannot be covetous, they cannot be greedy.

But it's those people often, as they focus on the job and the work in serving the Lord, as I have said, that, you know what? They're enriched in every way so they can enrich others. That's the great picture of God's inexpressible gift. And let me just take you now back for one verse in Chapter 8, just to wrap all this up. Look at Chapter 8. Look at verse 8. We'll look at like two verses, sorry. "I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine." I want this to be clear, a tangible expression, "for," verse 9, "you know the grace of the Lord Jesus." You want to talk about the embodiment of having the favor of God, the blessedness of God, having the enablement of God, "the grace of the Lord Jesus, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich."

There was the picture of Christ laying down his life so that you could have full acceptance with the Father, his suffering, his sacrifice for your benefit. If that's not the template that should define Christianity and your Christ-likeness, that's it. Are you that kind of person? Do you lay down the comforts of whatever it is that might be in your asset column to say I'm willing to help whenever it's needed to be generous and equipped in every way to meet those needs? Well, you got to root out covetousness and you got to be committed to a Christian work ethic and then you've got to be generous. These should be the values of your life, right? No coveting, hard work. Right? For the right reasons. Right? And massive generosity.

If our church was like that, they would be writing statements like they did about the early church in Jerusalem in Acts 2 and Acts 4. There wouldn't be a needy person among us and the grace of God, like Paul was just demonstrating here, would do nothing but put into a real-life, real-time example of the generosity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Imitate that. That's the key.

Pray with me, God, we do want to surrender our lives. And that part of that is just the transparency about our sin. And so we know that in of ourselves, there's no good thing we could accomplish. But we ask for your grace, your mercy, your empowerment to keep focused on the right things, the priority of my relationship with you and my sense of a pursuit of your righteous dictates of your kingdom. And then let all the other stuff just fall into place and be content, whether it's a lot or a little, whether it's easy or whether it's hard, whether there are thorns or whether the path is paved.

So, God, let us be good at not being preoccupied with the pain or the paycheck and look to you and the kingdom. And I pray that would make us great leaders in the church as we bring all of our experience from our workplace into our ministries here, that we're not covetous people, we're great servants of Christ because we see what's most important. We're generous and ready to share as First Timothy 6 says. Let us be that kind of church. We know that would be a blessed place to be a part of that, to would be a great place to fellowship, it would be a great place to call our church home. So make that a reality for us today.

In Jesus name, Amen.