



Living in a World of Critics – Part 3

Looking for Christ's Commendation

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Well, I'm sure there must be some who played Simon Says as a kid. Do you remember that game? A stupid little game? Yeah, I played it too a few times. I got corralled into playing the game and, you know, you picked your bossiest friend, or at least your bossiest friend volunteered to be Simon. And then they barked out all these things you had to do. And if you didn't comply or you complied at the wrong time then everyone pointed at you and they laughed and you got ridiculed and, you know, that's basically the game. Well, the game doesn't really stay confined to our childhood. The essence of the game continues into our adult lives. There are plenty of voices that are telling us what to think, what to do, how to act and what to believe. It's just happening all the time. And if we don't comply, we don't do what we're told there are plenty of people to censure us and to criticize us and just to condemn us for not toeing the line. And that is the problem that we face.

By the way, in my childhood had it been done on the lawn at my Long Beach home maybe with the windows open and in earshot of my parents, had the little bossy classmate called out for me to do something that I know would have been out of bounds with the ears of the real boss inside. Say they would have said, you know, take a rock and throw it through the window, or, you know, blurt out this vulgar word. You know, there were certain things I would know. I don't care what you say. I know that there's a voice inside that if I were to comply with you, there are consequences attached to that voice and I'm just not going to do what you say. There was always a sense, even in my childhood, I knew that there was someone that outranks you. And that really is the challenge. And it is the calling of what the Apostle Paul is trying to say to us in First Corinthians Chapter 10. And he's going to tell us how to think that way, because it is hard for us to think that way, because we often think that in our lives what really matters is having people around us approving of us. We often think that's what it means to be a Christian, to be nice, to be, you know, getting along. And, you know, we need to be a kind of loving people and making sure we fit with all the people around us. We'd like people to speak well of us, and we think that's a goal in life. Well, Jesus said woe to you when all people speak well of you, that certainly shouldn't be our goal. And yet we often seek that. And God is trying to say to us, when it comes to the critics in our lives, you have to think about people coming into your life and telling you what you should and shouldn't believe, what you should and shouldn't do.

Now, I said this in the first installment of this series a few weeks back when we started in Second Corinthians Chapter 10. This is not a series in this particular passage where we're learning about people coming into our lives and trying to give us godly admonishment, when they're trying to give us godly correction, when they're trying to bring a biblical principle to our life that we may have some blind spot and we need that kind of brotherly correction. Like here, you need to see this, right? There's so much in the Scripture about having a listening ear to that kind of correction. That's another passage. That's another sermon series. That's not what we're dealing with here. This is the kind of criticism that comes to us, maybe in our own household sometimes, as Matthew Chapter 10 says, certainly in our secular workplace



and even in our neighborhoods and lots of different places we'll get this where they criticize us to try and move us away from biblical truth. They're trying to get us off what we're supposed to be doing, what we're supposed to be thinking, what we're supposed to be valuing. And that's where we need the kind of grounding that we're going to get in Second Corinthians Chapter 10.

Now, it's a short series and we're here at the last installment. And if you take your Bibles out or your devices out and pull up Second Corinthians Chapter 10, we're going to tackle the last part of this, verses 13 through 18, and see how we can implement the kind of thinking, to be clear in our thinking, to work faithfully and to live for the approval of the voice that ultimately matters. Because if we're not going to stand before our critics at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, we're going to stand before Christ. And that's the voice that really matters. So we need to get that as Paul responds here to the critics. Now, if you're new to this you really should go back and listen to the first two installments of this series because there's a lot that precedes this, and it's almost like we have to kind of build the picture of the critics who were stepping in and trying to influence the church at Corinth. And Paul was talking to the Corinthians about this third party who is trying to get in the way of people who are supposed to be listening to the Apostle Paul. Paul had a rightful place in that church. And here were the critics chirping away about the Apostle Paul trying to be a wedge between Paul and these Christians in Corinth. Right? He's an apostle of Christ. He was the church planter there.

So he's going to lean into this and he's actually going to give us, I think, some of the most important principles that should help us as we leave this short series to know how to deal with the critics who are trying to get us off of doing what we ought to do. So let's read this here with a little bit of commentary as we wrap up this series. Second Corinthians 10:13 through 18. Let me read it for you. "But we will not boast beyond limits but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labor of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence." Now that interesting phrase there, which has kind of a double-layered meaning, first of all, that was what the critics were doing. They were actually stepping in and taking a lot of credit for what the Apostle Paul had done. And it's also something we need to understand in light of Paul's calling when he talks about the assignment there in verse 13. But we need to know why he is doing that, right? I mean, what's wrong with going to a place and kind of augmenting what someone else has started? Well, that's not the assignment of the Apostle Paul as we'll see.

And then this quotation, you'll see it in quotations here in the English Standard Version and almost any English translation, which in most of your reference Bibles you'll see, it probably has Jeremiah Chapter 9 verses 23 and 24 next to it, which is legitimate, but there are plenty of other passages. I think this is really a conflation of plenty of principles, but we'll look at that when we get to it. But it says this in verse 17, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Now that's a word that's used four times in this context, starting in verse 13. So we need to



understand that because you often think boasting is wrong. Well, in this context there's a kind of boasting that's completely right. He's trying to establish in his defense that there's a place of authority that he has that's right. It'd be like you as a parent, say you have some, you know, grade school kids and someone is stepping in between you and your kid. And maybe it's, I don't know, it doesn't matter who they are, it could be the ice cream truck guy. I don't know, they don't have ice cream trucks anymore, or maybe they do, I don't know. But somebody is telling your kid that they shouldn't listen to you about when bedtime is or how many ice creams they should eat, and you're trying to step in for your kids to defend your role as a parent.

Well, it is your God-given role. You're the parent, right? So I don't care what the ice cream man says. I don't care even what your teacher at school says. I don't care what the guy at the park says, right? I can set your bedtime. I am your parent. So the defense here is very important. And he's making much of his role as he ought to. And boasting that's part of what this word is caring throughout this context. And we'll see why he's boasting in the Lord as it relates to that authority there in that text. Verse 18, "For it is not the one who commends himself who's approved." And you can glance up to verse 12, that is what they were certainly doing, commending themselves. And that doesn't make you approved, if you pat yourself on the back, "but the one whom the Lord commends," and that is clear, the one whom the Lord commends. It's very important that we look at that. The only reason you should have any sense you're doing the right thing is if, in fact, the Lord is the one saying you're doing the right thing. It doesn't matter if you say you're doing the right thing, or even if you get other people patting you on the back. So this passage is helpful. It leaves us right where we should be left if we're going to move away from this topic to know how to deal with our critics. What matters is the critique of Christ, not the critique of our critics. We have to make sure we know who we're trying to please.

All right, let's break this down. Let's start with the first couple of verses here, two and a half verses, verses 13 through 15. And let's start with a heading that I think will be very helpful. Verse 13, "we will not boast beyond limits." We'll get into that here, our first sub-point in a second. We "will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us," such an important principle, "to reach even you. For not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you," in Acts Chapter 18 by the way, that's what he did, he came all the way to Corinth, "with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others," right? We didn't come to a place where you were already reached like these people he's going to call the super apostles in the next chapter, right? We came there, we established this church, we're apostles of Christ, I am, he says, an apostle of Christ, and I am someone who is rightfully in a place to tell you and admonish you, as I have been. And so this is appropriate for me to say I have the right to say these things.

The whole first book of Corinthians, the first letter to the Corinthians as we have it in our Bibles, he's admonishing, admonishing, correcting, rebuking, all of that is appropriate for his role. And so he's saying I'm not doing more than I should do, I'm not boasting beyond limits. Now, if I were teaching perhaps to a bunch of apostles, that's a joke. I would never venture to do that in the first century. Or I was even just teaching missionaries who are going around to



places and planting churches around the world, this would be an easier historical distance to bridge. But I'm talking to us just as normal 21st-century Christians on the other side of the planet in Southern California. So how do I teach this? Well, let's extract principles. We'll be criticized about our role and how we do our role, whatever our role might be. He's being criticized about his role. So I'll take these principles and give them a heading and then we'll break them down into three categories. So let's give it this heading just like Paul is doing here. He's thinking honestly about his role. I need you, number one, to "Think Honestly About Your Role." You have a role and you need to think honestly about it. He's thinking honestly about his role. Okay.

Now three things, right? If you're going to build sub-points here on your outline. And I hope that you'll take some notes. That's a good thing to do. Bring your devices. We don't have outlets yet on the chair in front of you but one day maybe. We'd love for you to bring your devices, it's a good way for you to take notes. And as I often say, if the sermon gets boring you can always watch the Masters, you know, on your device. Hopefully I'll keep you engaged and you can follow along. But here's the thing, right? He is saying in this first phrase I'm not boasting beyond limits. In other words, what I'm saying in establishing my role is I'm not saying more than is appropriate. I'm only saying the right things. It would be like you defending yourself giving a bedtime to your kids. I'm not telling all the kids in the neighborhood when they can go to bed. I'm telling when my kids can go to bed. I'm not making more of my authority than I have. Right? I'm saying what is appropriate here. So that's the principle for the Apostle Paul. What's the principle for you? And let's just talk generally about that. And I think this is an adequate sub-point and it's certainly true throughout the Bible.

Let's just put it this way. Don't exaggerate. Don't ever exaggerate. Right? Don't say more about yourself. Don't pass yourself off as having more authority than you have. Don't make yourself out to be smarter than you are. Or don't say you've had more experiences than you've had. Don't present yourself as more important than you are. Don't try to take credit for stuff you didn't do, right? Just stop exaggerating. Right? As Leviticus 11 says, don't lie to one another. Whereas Exodus 20 says, the Ten Commandments, don't "bear false witness." The New Testament repeats it all over the place. Ephesians 4, don't lie, speak the truth. And when you have to say something in response to the critics about you, it's easy for us just to start, you know, fudging a little bit on the truth here and trying to come back with something that is more than it should be. And all I'm saying is Christians of all people, even though the world works on exaggerating, they exaggerate all the time about what they do. You know, whether it's at a dinner party telling stories, augmenting their resumes, whatever they do. We as Christians of all people should be honest about ourselves and we should never be exaggerating for whatever reason.

And we often do it when someone's taking shots at us. We try to make ourselves out to be someone we're not. Right? If you don't know it, you don't know it, right? Don't take credit for stuff you didn't do, an education you didn't get, a degree you didn't earn, a promotion you didn't have, an account you didn't acquire, you know, a business you didn't grow. Whatever it might be, don't take credit for things you didn't do. Don't exaggerate. And it happens all the



time. It's a very simple thing but let's start with that. People love to do it, and I think you should be very careful that you don't do it because that would be just at the basis of a very common problem. And it's a problem that the Lord has condemned from the beginning to the end of the Bible. Don't lie. Exaggeration is lying.

All right, then he says, this very important thing in verse 13, "boasts only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even you." Okay, now he knows his goal was to go there. God has assigned him to be this traveling missionary as an apostle this middle of the first century traveling missionary with the authority of Christ without a Bible that has yet to be written, a New Testament that has yet to be written. He is there speaking the truth of Christ with the authority of Christ. Planting churches, moving from Antioch north of Israel, all the way across modern-day Turkey into Greece. Right? And he is doing what God has called him to do, and it certainly extends to Corinth. Okay? Great. That is his job, right? You have been assigned something. So the second sub-point I would say is you need to know your God-given assignment. And this is very important because the more you can be knowledgeable of what God has assigned to you. Right? Affirming this. Very important. Like what has God made you to be? Right? Which I don't want you endlessly trying to, you know, suss this out with some frustration that you don't know exactly, he didn't send you some certified letter with the instructions on it. But I just want you to know, with a high view of God's providence and sovereignty, that he's directed you into a path where you find yourself. Let's start with you.

And the way to help you with this is, I suppose, going to Romans Chapter 12, a classic passage. So please take your Bibles and look at Romans Chapter 12. Put your eyeballs on Romans Chapter 12. Let's start here in verse 3. And let's see if we can't find something very, very helpful in starting with yourself and then we'll look at how that relates to your God-given role. If this, by the way, is understood, I can save you a midlife crisis. I can save you from your next divorce. I can save you from a lot of things. We can finally get around to First Timothy Chapter 6, which says godliness is really about contentment. As a matter of fact, if only there were a good book written on envy recently that we could defer to. Because really, that's the problem. As I wrote in that book, by the way, it should be on the back of your worksheet. If it's not, I don't remember if I put it there or not. But that book that I wrote that nobody's reading, I want to try and get people to understand that your beef is not with the person that you're embittered against, right? Your beef is not with the guy who has a higher position at work or makes more money, or the gal that's more charming or beautiful than you, or, you know, has more stuff than you. Your beef is not with that person, right? If you understand how this works, First Corinthians Chapter 4 says that everything a person has been given to them by God. If you understand that then you understand your beef is with God, right?

Even Cain and Abel. The first example of envy, right? Here is Cain. He's mad at Abel and he's willing to kill him over this. God has to come to Cain and say, hey, before you kill this guy, just know this is between me and you, right? If you would just do well it'll all be good between me and you. In other words, get your eyes off of your brother and let's deal with this. Your temptation is to be embittered toward your brother and you want to lash out against him. But just do right. I'll accept your offering. It'll be fine. And you couldn't do that, see? Because



everything you have, whether it's the opportunity, whether it's the beauty, whether it's the brains, whether it's the brawn, whatever the position in life you have, whatever the gifts that you've been given are doled out by God's providence and sovereignty. So we have to say I need to stop thinking it's really about that person. It's really about God's providence.

Romans Chapter 12 verse 3, is the assignment that God has given. I love that Paul practices what he preaches here in the first line. Are you with me now, Romans 12:3? Y'all looking at that? Okay. 10% of you. This is usually the interactive crowd. Are you with me? Last week I noticed this was a little down. I know it was Easter week and we had a lot of visitors here, who had never been here, but it's usually the most interactive group. Romans Chapter 12 verse 3. I was going to say my favorite group. (audience laughing) But I say that to every service, so. And everyone's on to me now about that. Romans Chapter 12 verse 3. "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you," let's just stop there. Who are you to say, if I'm a blacksmith in Rome sitting there, you know, in the assembled house church in Rome, sitting with the wealthiest guy who has the biggest house. I'm sitting there listening to someone read this letter from Paul. I'm thinking, who is this guy to say that? I should be the guy giving letters to the... Now he has to realize, as Paul is in the position of the Apostle of Christ, he's going to write to Timothy and say, hey, I was the worst persecutor of the church. Blasphemer! You know, it's amazing. God just chose me to show his great patience and all that, right? Paul knows he has the position to exhort and admonish these people in Rome. He's never even been to this church at this point. He's saying because of the grace of God, I know this is God's providence. He's given me this role. He starts the book that way, by the way, Romans Chapter 1 verses 1 through 4, this apostleship has been granted to me by God. So I'm saying this because of the assignment I have.

He says, now, I don't want you to think of yourselves, right? Everyone will say this. Do "not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment." I like that, and that's a great follow-up line, because as C.S. Lewis rightly said, the goal and the virtue of Christian humility is not for you to think as low of yourself as you possibly can, because that is what often people think. They read some of the old literature and they think my goal is to think as low about myself as I possibly can. Now, you should think of yourself rightly as a sinner in desperate need of the grace of God. But as Lewis rightly said humility is not having a beautiful woman thinking she's ugly or an intelligent person thinking he or she is stupid. That is not the goal of the virtue of Christian humility. That is not it. It's for you to think so as to have "sober judgment," because the tendency of humans, much like exaggerating, is in our own minds to exaggerate about ourselves and to think we're more than we should be. And thinking I should have that role. And it does lead to envy. It starts with jealousy then it goes into envy, and envy adds to the layer of bitterness toward people who have what I don't have which is really a misplaced frustration. Not with people, it's a frustration toward God. Because "what do you have that you did not receive?" Right? You've received it, why do you act like you have it? And the point is God is doling these things out. So the point here is you have to think rightly about yourself.

The other thing I had to battle in writing this book about envy, if you just look at the back cover and you read a couple of lines in the book you'll think I know what this book is going to do. It's



going to thwart or blunt ambition. And people don't like that. I'm not going to read this book because if I let my teenager read this book they're never going to be ambitious. They're never going to accomplish anything, because if they're supposed to be content, First Timothy Chapter 6, and eschew envy in their life, well they're never going to be ambitious. And that's why I quote in the book an old writer, William Law, it's a good quote, one of the best quotes in the book, I think. William Law, who spoke years and years and years ago about the problem of teaching our children to be envious under a different name, but ultimately to be envious, in trying to take them on a path of ambition which is nothing other than instilling in their hearts envy. Now, here's the thing. There's no problem with us being biblically ambitious, but it's not, as I try to write in the book, it's not about us constantly doing the lateral comparisons that we left in the last installment of our series in Second Corinthians Chapter 10. It's about me knowing that before God I have a stewardship, and the stewardship I have should be to fully become all that God would have me be in the role that I have. But I'm supposed to be content in the role that I have, knowing that the role that I have is a role allotted to me.

And by the way, if you're a parent of a 13, 14, 15, 16-year-old, 17-year-old, do not set them up to think like the world that they're supposed to be out there finding some self-realization in whatever job or whatever spouse or whatever, you know, place they're going to live in, that is not the goal of your young person. The goal of your young person is, to put it in terms of what we're talking about here, to find honest, legitimate work and to know this: when you set them out on this, there are going to be thorns and there are going to be weeds and there's going to be sweat of your brow to quote Genesis 3. And do your honest work, do it well, do it with all your heart, do it not just as a man-pleaser, but do it to serve the Lord, to quote Colossians Chapter 3, and excel in it. But, you know, you don't have to keep switching jobs or switching spouses or switching homes to find the ideal realization of your life. That is not the goal of Christianity. You have to think about your lane, and you have to be comfortable in that lane, and you have to say this is my lot, and I have to be comfortable with that. As the book of Ecclesiastes teaches, that is the thing. And as he writes, by the way, another good quote on the topic of envy, Solomon says I've watched how people expend so much effort motivated by envy. And that's the problem. Sin is driving so much of the competitiveness in our lives that is not godly ambition. It's what James condemned as selfish ambition. I have no problem with godly ambition. We should have it.

And speaking of Lewis, he talks a lot about what God offers us in holding out rewards for us. We should be godly ambitious. It's always though between God and me, God and I me. Think about John Chapter 21, even when here, you know, Peter is frustrated as God is talking to John about his future, the Apostle John. And here he says like he takes his face, metaphorically, and says, would you stop worrying about the other guys? Right? "You follow me!" I have a path for you. You follow me, stop worrying about everybody else's track, and you should stop worrying about everybody else's job, everybody else's role, everybody else's brains, everybody else's beauty, everybody else's brawn. Stop worrying about all that. Right? When you look in the mirror, that's you. When you look at your business card, that's your job. When you look at your address, that's your house, right? This is your life, right? Are there going to be some adjustments? There may be, but I'll put it this way. When there's an adjustment it'll be irresistible. There will be something clear, right? It'll often be like Peter,



James and John when the finger is in the chest and God is going to say you follow me, it'll be so clear, right? Stop searching always for the pot of gold at the end of the next rainbow. Just put your head down and do what God has called you to do. Stay in your lane.

Do you remember King Uzziah? Do you remember that name, King Uzziah? If you've been around the block in the Christian life for very long you probably remember that name because you've all been preached or quoted Isaiah Chapter 6. Because in Isaiah Chapter 6, Isaiah is going to see this vision of God which is so memorable. It's quoted and preached on all the time, but it starts with "in the year that King Uzziah died." And if you ever hear that preached around here usually you're going to have a preacher talk about the fact that he'd been a king here for over 50 years by the time he dies. Now, if you're a king for over 50 years there are a lot of good things with long-term leadership. Just a lot of stability came and a lot of economic prosperity came to Israel because of his long tenure as king. But if you read, and here's a passage that should really stick in your mind, Second Chronicles Chapter 26 verse 16, he did not want to stay in his lane. Listen to this summary of the end of his life. "When he was strong," this is King Uzziah, "he grew proud, to his destruction." The pride was envy. His pride was discontentment. Why? "He was unfaithful to the Lord his God." Unfaithful to what? Well, unfaithful to God. But what? To the role he had. Listen, because he "entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense." What's wrong with that? You're the king. Yeah, but you're not a priest. You're not a Levite, right? You're not a descendant of Aaron. That's not your role. Stay in your lane.

Yeah, but I want to, God, I want to. I've always wanted to, God, I've wanted to. You think the grass is greener, right? Stop. Stop pining away. Right? That is the problem of covetousness, which is another word. Envy is not covetousness. Envy is not jealousy. Those need to be separated in our minds, but they all are interrelated because one feeds off the other. But covetousness is going to eventually lead to envy. But covetousness starts all of this discontentedness. I have to have my neighbor's house, my neighbor's oxen, my neighbor's tools, my neighbor's wife. All of that becomes the problem of discontentment. And you need to say, I know I can't boast beyond my limits. I have a place that God has assigned to me, and I'm comfortable with that. And that may mean that it's not going to be all that you thought it would be, because you were probably taught if you grew up in the generation I grew up in or anywhere after that, you certainly were taught that you can have (mockingly) Johnny you can be whoever you want to be, right? No, Johnny cannot be whatever he wants to be. Johnny cannot play in the NBA, right? I'm pretty sure that, right? Johnny cannot do a ton of... You can't be in Mensa. There's a lot... I could tell you a lot of things your Johnny cannot be. Just let me spend 30 minutes with him. So a lot of things Johnny cannot do. And you're telling him lies. And you know what that's going to do? Set him up for a life of discontentedness, chasing rainbows and pots of gold.

Just teach him to do honest work. Teach him to sit down and be content with what he has. Teach him to stay in his lane, teach him to be King Uzziah and finish well and say, yeah, if I were to let my flesh lead me I might dream of being a priest and burning incense but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to say I'm going to be the best king I can be. This is my lane. I'm going to do what I'm supposed to do. Now there's a lot that I'm peeling out of this principle,



but I want us to know that we should think honestly about our role, which, by the way, just to say it and I already quoted it but Acts Chapter 18 is his confidence anchored in truth. Paul's claim is played out here and in First Corinthians Chapter 4, because he did Acts Chapter 18. In Acts Chapter 18 he came to Priscilla and Aquilla. He moved in next to the synagogue. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, became a Christian. Paul stayed there 18 months, 18 months, planted the church, stayed there and taught for 18 months. I mean second only to Ephesus. He stayed there so long. Yes, he anchored all of his authority based on the fact that he lived it, right? He had the right to be who he was. He had the right to say what he said in First Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 14. He says, "I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children." How dare you think we're your children? Well, "you may have many countless guides in Christ, you don't have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." I was your church-planting pastor. Not to mention I'm an apostle of Christ. Yes, I can correct you in this book and I'm just four chapters in, to use modern nomenclature, four chapters into a book and I'm going to correct you on a bunch more stuff. But I'm telling you, I have the right to that. I'm admonishing his children. I have the right to do it because of Acts Chapter 18 and because of the beginning of the book. Right? I start here in First Corinthians Chapter 1 reminding you of my apostleship.

Keep your confidence anchored in truth. Stop chasing a lot of things you shouldn't chase. And if we could just do that, I could save you so much trouble. God can save you that trouble, I'm just highlighting what God has said. Verse 15, middle of the verse. We'll get off that uncomfortable point because I know you're crying uncle right now, right? Oh, no more on point number one. The old 11:00 service would just chuckle at that, the old 11:00. (audience chuckles) All right. Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 15, "But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence." So we're not doing what the critics are doing, trying to step in on top of what I've been doing and claiming that it's their work. And I don't want to do that because that's not my role.

I am a church-planting apostle. I'm out there taking the gospel where it hasn't been. I'm an apostle to the Gentiles, as he says in the book of Acts, enlarging and making much and magnifying my role. And I'm going to go out and find more Gentile lands. And like he said to the Romans, I want to go on to Spain, I'm going to keep going west. I'm going to go west, west, west with the gospel. That's my plan. That's my hope. And so he's doing this with plans to enlarge his footprint. And he says I hope that my role in your life, even though these letters and the visits that are yet to come, I hope to increase your faith. I hope you're strong. I hope you're spiritually mature. I hope the area of influence among you can be greatly enlarged. I hope there's numerical growth and I hope that we can preach the gospel beyond you. I hope we can do what we've done with you in other areas. I just want to do the work as I said in Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 13 that has been assigned to us, and I want to do it even beyond you. I want to keep doing my job. There's the ambition. Do you understand that? There is ambition, it's just not selfish ambition. It's stewardship ambition.



So I want you, let's put it this way, number two, to "Recommit Yourself to Faithful Work." And faithful works are going to take a Christian work ethic. Yes, you're going to sweat and you're going to have calloused hands, and you're going to get stung by thorns and you're going to pull weeds, and there's going to be problems, but you're going to faithfully work. You're going to lean into the work, and it's going to be work. Put your energy into the work. And when I talk about work and working and working for God, I just have to reiterate Ephesians Chapter 2 verses 8 and 9, and you know this. Ephesians Chapter 2 verses 8 and 9, Ephesians Chapter 2 verses 8 and 9, which remind you you're not saved by your works. When you do good works, you're not saved by your good works. And if your good works are through your work at work, your secular work, or its work in ministry at church, or its work in your home in your domestic role at home, or in your neighborhood, I'm just telling you that it does nothing to earn your salvation. You know that. You're saved by grace, "not as a result of works," because if it was then you could boast about it before God that I earn my salvation.

But verse 10, Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10, Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10, "We are his workmanship." Oh, he worked in you. You are his work, "created in Christ Jesus," you're a new creature in Christ, "for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." So he's created good works for you. It's like a pathway filled with things that you're supposed to do, and you're supposed to go like driving this course, like a video game, picking up all those whatever they call them. I don't play video games, but you're picking up those things and you're picking up every good work along the way and you're steering your way through this course, and there's the path. Stay on it and pick up every good work you can along the way. Those treasures, or whatever they're called, you'd yell it out, but then you'd expose yourself as a gamer. What are they called? They're called something. What? Now you're not going to do it. I've already shamed you on this.

Anyway, that's what you need to do. And let me just say this metaphorically. You ought to keep your focus 95% of the time looking through the windshield at the course. And I'll say this based on Titus Chapter 2 verse 14, that's why God has made you his workmanship. Right? Because he says, "he gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness ... a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." so that you'd lean into this, right? You'd put your forehead next to the windshield and your hands on the steering wheel and you'd say I just can't wait to get into this and get my job going, so that at my secular workplace I would be a light and I would be salt, and in my home I would be a godly father or godly mother. I would be a godly child, whatever your role is. And at church I'd get a ministry post, as it says in First Peter and I would do that as a good steward of the manifold grace of God, that you would do your work well.

That should be what you do 95% of the time, because you have two other choices, and you should split the other 5% between those two other choices. There's a rearview mirror, right? And occasionally you need to look in that. That's why it's there. It's only there because you might need it every now and then, but you're not going to be a very good driver catching your little treasures on the road if you're always looking in the rearview mirror. So is it there for a reason? Yeah. But you know, Philippians 3:13 says, yeah, let's just forget what's behind and press on to what's ahead. But there is a time to look back. You should look back if there's a



pressing need to look back. But generally speaking we're not using the rearview mirror very much. So if something's holding you back whether victory or defeat, just stop looking back. If it's a defeat just confess it and move forward. Right? Just be grateful for forgiveness and move forward. If it's a success praise God for it and forget about it and move forward. Just move forward. Look through the windshield.

Now the critics or even the fans can be seen through the side windows. There's your other choice. We have the windshield, we have the rearview mirror, and we have the side windows. You could be looking there. And sadly, that's what the series is about. We spend a lot of time looking through the side windows, and you have to stop doing that. Because even if it's the fans cheering us on would that make for a good driver in a NASCAR race? Always looking out the side window, look at my fans, man. Yeah, yeah. Not a very good idea. Or the cars pulling up next to me being my critics trying to run me off the road. Right? That's our series. That's not good. Right? Occasionally I need to look out the window. So split the 5% between the rearview mirror, which occasionally I must look in for some pressing need. Or the side window. Of course, I'm going to have to look. That's why I have an opening to look on the side, if not just board it all up. No. Occasionally I need to look out the side of the car. That is important occasionally.

Let me give you an example. Go to Nehemiah Chapter 6 in your Bibles. Please, please turn there. Please? Nehemiah Chapter 6. You can find it on your phone at esv.org. Nehemiah Chapter 6. It's very good for you to look at these texts with me. Nehemiah Chapter 6. Now, if you're a Sunday School grad, you know what he was sent to do. What was he sent to do Sunday school grads? What was his job? That's his assignment. Build a wall, right? That's his assignment. In the book of Ezra we learn about the building of the temple foundation. Nehemiah is called to build a wall. That's a spiritual priority first, the political protection second. Nehemiah comes in to build a wall. He knows his assignment. Now, if you graduated with honors from Sunday school you'll remember he had critics. His famous critics were who? Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. Those three guys were the kingpins of criticism.

So Nehemiah had an assignment and he also had critics. Paul had an assignment and he had critics. If you have an assignment and you're going to have critics. You probably have some critics already and you can probably name some of them. Verse 1, Nehemiah Chapter 6 verse 1, "Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of the enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not yet set up the doors and the gates.) Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, 'Come and let us meet together at the, 'H-place, 'in the plain of Ono.'" Sorry, I didn't practice that name, "but they intended to do me harm." I know this wasn't to encourage me, I knew that. We weren't going to have coffee and talk about what a great job I was doing. They didn't have good intentions because I already knew they were enemies, verse 1. Now put your eyeballs on this verse. "And I sent messengers to them saying, 'it'd be good to highlight, it'd be good for you to memorize, 'I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come down to you?' I love that. 'I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should I stop while I leave it and come down to you?' I have to



be looking through the front windshield. Why am I going to spend time talking through the side window to you? I have no time for that.

Now, again, this is not a series about taking your brother's admonishment who has your best intentions in view. This is about the critic who wants you to think in a worldly way, do worldly things, you know, not be such a religious fanatic, right? These guys and the critic that wants to get you off of your walk with Christ, you need to say to them, why would I stop doing such a great work? Why would I stop being salt and light? Why would I stop being the kind of person I'm supposed to be, to stop doing that for you? I have to keep my eyes on the road. And I love the way he puts it. He didn't just say stop doing the work. He didn't even say stop doing the work God's called me to do. I just love the way he says stop doing the great work. I can't stop doing a great work and come down and talk to you. Nehemiah Chapter 6 verse 4, "And they sent to me four times in this way." Wow, talk about a pest. "And I answered them in the same manner." This is on repeat. I'm doing a great work. I can't come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you? I have no time for my critics.

This is so important that you have this view of what your focus should be, and it is the ambition that God calls you to have. How can you be a good Christian worker where you're called to work? How can you be a good Christian family man where you're called to be in a family? How can you be a good Christian part of a church where you're called to worship? How? How can you be better at that? How can you do it in a great way? Do the great work there. Don't desire to be someone else. Don't be chasing in some envious way some other thing that God has not assigned to you. He says one more thing in our passage. Go back to our text now, please, "So that we may preach the gospel," verse 16, "in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence." Now the double-layered meaning here, of course, is, as I've suggested, which we pick up from reading both Second Corinthians Chapters 10 and 11 that's what the critics were doing. I'm going to step in and take credit for what Paul did, and now I'm going to take the voice of the Apostle Paul and I need you to listen to me and don't listen to Paul. The critics are doing that by taking potshots at Paul.

So that aside let's just look at the principle itself. Paul's not going to do that. Right? He's not going to boast about work that someone else has done in an area that someone else has done. Why? Because he's a church planter. I already said that. But I just want to take that concept there and say, well, that's not the work he's called to do, and someone else is doing that work. Let the other person do that work and let's give credit for that to the other person. That's what the critics were doing, they were taking credit for work that Paul was doing. I just want to say this when I think about committing yourself to the work. When you do work, sometimes you start getting recognition for the work, I don't want you to ever take credit for work that you didn't do. And I think Paul's going to be very careful, like not boasting beyond limits. I know this is a recapitulation of that, but I do want you to recognize that it's easy for us to safeguard this by you learning to be very generous with giving honor "where honor is due." And that's a quotation, by the way of Romans Chapter 13 verse 7. Right? "Respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."



If someone does something praise them for it, right? Don't let someone give you credit for something at work that you didn't do. You ought to be the best at your secular workplace at giving credit to other people. And even if you're not their manager or their supervisor, if someone does something good write them a note, that was great how you handled that client, that was great what you did there. Be encouraging to them and give them credit for things that are creditworthy. That's what you should be doing. And I know that especially within the church because of Romans Chapter 12 verse 10, it says, "outdo one another in showing honor." We should be like profuse in this. And speaking of that, Priscilla and Aquila, who were two Christians in Corinth when Paul writes to the Romans in Romans Chapter 16, which, by the way, is a long list of people whom he's praising. Just go read it today. Talk about words that are hard to pronounce. All these first-century names, right? Don't read it out loud because it'll take you twice as long.

But he praises early on in that chapter Priscilla and Aquila. Prisca, he uses her other short name. Prisca and Aquila, those two names for three verses. He praises them to the Romans, what great people they are! They risked their lives. They are amazing people. He is not going to take credit not even in Corinth, but not even to the Romans. They might have heard the great things that went on in Corinth. He's going to praise Priscilla and Aquila for this. He's going to show honor to them. He's not taking credit for what they did. It's just amazing how he's so generous in his giving honor. If you do that, you'll never take credit for other people's work. Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 17. Two super important ending verses to this chapter. This is in quotations as I said, as your reference Bible is going to say Jeremiah Chapter 9. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." More on that in a minute. Verse 18, "For it's not the one who commends himself who is approved," right? Objectively approved. You're not approved objectively. Of course you're approved by the person who is approving you, but that's you. So that doesn't count, right? "But the one whom the Lord commends," that's the one who's really approved.

So that's our view. And let's just get the main point out of that. The main heading, number three, "Aim for Christ's Approval." Duh. That should be the definitional thing that Christians should be known for. We want to please the Lord. We want to hear from him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That's obvious. It should be obvious, but it's not easy if you're deft and want to get there quickly, John 12:42 and 43. Such a powerful passage and you need to understand the context. We're just three chapters away from John Chapter 9 when a blind man, think about this, a blind man who now can see. He's been blind from birth. Now he can see. And the Pharisees are pressing him about this miracle. And because he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. I mean, in that sense, that's what he does. And they kicked him out of the synagogue because they had the power to kick him out of the synagogue. Now it says in verse 42 of John 12, "many even of the authorities," could have been the rulers of the synagogue, "believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue."

We know the Pharisees were putting people out of the synagogue, e.g. by example, John Chapter 9, even a guy who was a recipient of an amazing miracle. Why? What's the diagnosis? Verse 43, "For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that



comes from God." Glory. What are you talking about? Approval. Applause. They love the applause that comes from man more than the applause that comes from God. The commendation that comes from man more than the commendation that comes from God. Do you know why that's so easy to do? Because I can hear it. I can read it. I can see it with my eyes. I can hear it with my ears. I can soak it into my brain right now. And if I capitulate to my critics, if I adjust my life, if I stop the work and sit down and reasonably across, you know, with a coffee in my hand to Geshem and Sanballat and I say, yeah, yeah, maybe we should stop. Maybe we won't even do the gates. I'll get praise from Geshem. He'll say, you know, I knew you were a reasonable guy, Nehemiah. Yeah, I like you. I get praise from my critics because I've adjusted to my critics. And if I like the praise that comes from people because I get it now, I get it immediately, I can hear it. That's easy.

But the praise, the glory, the applause that comes from God, what's the problem with that? Its future, right? I have to wait for that day when I meet him and hopefully I'm going to hear, "well done, good and faithful servant." And that means I'm going to have to trust in what he says in his Word that are God-breathed words, where his mind is recorded on the pages of Scripture, and hope that what he says is actually true and what he says is true, and therefore he's going to be faithful to his promise. That takes faith on my part. Here's the problem: it is very easy to walk by sight, by hearing, it's very hard to walk by faith. But Paul confesses that's what we're supposed to do. "We walk by faith, not by sight." Do we, though? Do we? When it comes to our critics that's hard to do, really hard to do.

So I need us to learn to love the glory that comes from God rather than the glory that comes from man. And to do that, at some point, if you're not going to bend to the critics you're going to have to write them off. And I would do that declaratively. At some point you're going to have to declare that my critics don't matter. I'm not talking about admonishing brothers. I'm talking about the critic. He doesn't really matter. Jot this one down. Galatians Chapter 6 verse 14. Galatians 6:14. You should know your Bible. You should know this passage. Jot it down. Galatians 6:14 and next to it put Galatians 1:10. These two verses together should be so helpful. Here's Galatians 6:14. Paul says, I'm going to boast only "in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." That's just helpful stuff, right? I'm going to be excited about, magnify, and make much of the cross of Christ. That's the message that I'm preaching in all these churches I'm planting, Paul says. And you know what? I have been crucified to the world. They don't like me. They've kicked me out of their synagogues. They've run me out of the synagogue in Corinth. I've been run out of the synagogue in Corinth.

But here's the thing: the world is crucified to me. He says, I don't really care what they say. Why? Because he not only doesn't really love the glory that comes from man, he doesn't care. How do I know that? Galatians 1:10. He says in Galatians 1:10, "If I were still," seeking the approval, the glory of man, "trying to please man, I wouldn't be a servant of God." I've given up on that. And all I'm saying is this, right? You may be called in for an annual review. You may get written up at work, blah blah blah. I get that. You're going to have to sit down and hear those things, but I'm just saying this: whenever it impinges on your commitment to Christ, your values in terms of what Christ has said, I'm just saying you have to love the



approval, the applause that comes from God more than the applause that comes from your workplace, even your family members under your own roof, or even the people who might be your best friends for years in your life.

Proverbs 29:25. It's a good one to remember, a very simple line from the proverbs, "The fear of man lays a snare." It's a trap. And that's the problem. When you start imbibing on the praise of man. In other words, when you adjust your life just a little bit and you like that Geshem says to you, yeah, you're a nice guy. Well, now I'm going to want Tobiah. And what does Sanballat say next? Well, I'd love to get another nice note from him. Right? It just is an addictive thing. It's a snare. It's a trap. If I really am afraid to get disapproval from people, "The fear of man lays a snare," in our lives. Now, this concept here that I talked about in verse 17, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Now I get it. Jeremiah Chapter 9 talks about people who are wise. They can boast in their wisdom, and the people who are rich or they're mighty, they're strong, they can boast in their might. People who are rich can boast in their riches. I get all that. But we should boast in knowing God, that we understand him and we know him. Great. That's true, that comparative is true. And we can see that because it certainly seems to be close to what we're saying. We shouldn't boast in those things. And it seems like a comparative here, but I think there are a lot of passages that probably are behind this statement.

And I'm going to give you one that I think may be even better depicts the idea contextually of what's going on here. And that's Psalm 34. And actually the wording itself is there. So turn to Psalm 34 and let's get a sense of what's going on in Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 17, to boast in the Lord. What are we talking about? Here's what we're talking about in this Davidic psalm, Psalm 34 verse 1. These words are important. "I will bless the Lord (Yahweh) at all times. Bless is "Barak." The root of this word is "to bow down." It's submissive. Right? I'm submissive. I'm bowing down. I'm giving homage to the Lord all the time, right? All the time. And that's going to be this Hebrew parallelism to the word "continually." His praise. What is praise? I'm accrediting to God the things that are true. He's great. I'm saying he's great. He's sovereign. I'm saying he's sovereign. He's intelligent, he's omniscient. I'm going to say he's omniscient. "His praise shall continually be in my mouth." So all the time and continually.

So if I'm constantly giving submission in my life and blessing him and praising him, then it's like I'm practicing his presence, I'm remembering he's with me, I'm thinking of him, I'm humble before him all the time. Now look at verse 2, "My soul makes its," here's the same phrase, "boast in the Lord," My soul it makes it boast in the Lord. Now boast, I said in the context, isn't me thumping my chest in Second Corinthians Chapter 10 saying, I'm great, I'm great, I'm great. Paul is not saying I'm great. He is affirming, like the illustration I started with that a parent has the right to tell a kid when to go to bed. And if someone wants to get between a parent and a child in that simple statement, he has no right to do that. And so for Paul to say, I have the right to be who I am to the Corinthians, right? He's making much of his relationship as a parent to a child or a church planter and a founder of the church, to his people as an apostle, most importantly to those Christians. And so to boast is to make much. And he's making much, as we saw in Romans 12:2 of the fact that this has been given to him as a



gracious gift, his apostleship, Romans Chapter 1, his apostleship is a grace given by God. God gave him this apostleship.

So he's making much of God. We're making much of the fact that God has given us our assignments. He's given us our gifts. "What do you have that you did not receive?" So he says, I'm making much of the Lord. And when we make much of the Lord, bowing down to him, submitting to him, praising him, lifting up, making a lot of him, well "the humble hear it and be glad." They're glad because they too are bowing down to him. They too make much of him. They're happy about that. So let's together do it. Verse 3, "Oh, magnify," let's make much of "the Lord (Yahweh) with me." Hey, let's all do this. "Let us exalt his name," all that he is "together." Do you see this? This is all about what we're seeing happening in the context of Second Corinthians Chapter 10. He says, I sought Yahweh, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me." I love what it says here, the object, he "delivered me from all my fears." The whole nemesis of our series in how to handle criticism is fear.

Why in John Chapter 12 did they not want to confess Christ which they were supposed to do? It's the fundamental thing Christ asks people to do, right? Don't be ashamed of me before men, it's because they were afraid. Afraid the Pharisees might kick them out of the synagogue. Who cares? Let them kick you out. But they're afraid. "I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears." As a matter of fact, talk about being bold in Psalm 34 verse 5, "Those who look to him are radiant," and their faces are shining, right? Not literally, but their countenance is uplifted. "Their faces shall never be ashamed." Once you get addicted to standing up for Christ and being confident in Christ because you're submissive to Christ, verse 1, you praise Christ, and then together with others, you exalt his name, you're in church when the doors are open and you're all about exalting him together, magnifying him together, it's a good thing. This is the concept, I think, that we have going on in Second Corinthians Chapter 10, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Let's lift him up. Let's understand that what matters the most is the commendation that comes from God. Let's make that our resolve.

Colossians 3:18 through the end of the chapter is all about seeing that whether we're a wife, a husband, a child, a father, whether we're a worker, a slave, or whether we're a master and employer, all of this needs to be seen with Christ being the ultimate one whom we serve. And when you go to work that's the voice you care about. Matter of fact, speaking of voices, John Chapter 10 verse 27 gives us a definitional statement about who we are. Listen to these four phrases. Jesus says this about us definitionally, right? "My sheep," here's the definition, "hear my voice, and I know them," okay? "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," right? They're my sheep. They hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. Okay, if you're his sheep. Right? The great thing is you're supposed to hear his voice, right? Which is going to imply the fourth thing. And he knows us and we're supposed to follow him. The din of voices, the things that are going to try to influence us between now and the time we meet Christ face to face, there are going to be a plethora, there are going to be many. And what we need to do is to tune in to the one voice that matters and say the voice that matters is not the critic. We're never going to stand before our critics and answer.



And Christ is not going to say, hey, how many of your critics did you please? He's never going to ask you did all your coworkers like you? He's never going to ask you, did your neighbors think you were the best neighbor on the block? You better be kind. You better be sweet. You better be the kind of person who is ready to help and generous and ready to share. Great, right? But you're not going to bend when they say you shouldn't think that, you shouldn't value that, you shouldn't define things that way, you shouldn't go to church, you shouldn't whatever, whatever they think you shouldn't do that's going to compromise your walk with Christ, you say I don't care. Christ is going to say did you listen to me? Did you follow me? Were you faithful in what I told you to do? And if the answer to that is yes, then he is going to say something commending, well done or some equivalent to that. And I pray that's the truth for you.

Let's pray. God, as we end this series what a great way for us to end it with those words. We want to make sure that objectively we will be approved. I know that's not guaranteed for all of us. We can be saved by grace but not get a great grade at the end of this Christian life. We want to get a really good commendation from you. We want to, as Peter put it, get a rich welcome into the kingdom. We don't want that First Corinthians Chapter 3 just to get saved so as by fire, we don't want that sense of no gold, silver or precious stones. We want your reward not just to indulge in some kind of reward. We want it because it reflects the fact that you're pleased with us.

So God help us, please, to know what it is to stay in our lane, to have a godly ambition, not a selfish ambition, to know what the assignment is for us and be okay with that assignment, to lean into our work even this week. Let it start tonight and tomorrow. Say we feel good about doing our job, even though it has thorns and thistles and weeds and all the rest. We're ready to do our work this week. Serve in our homes the way you've called us to serve, and then God to be able to say what we want every day is to lift you up, to make much of you, to boast and magnify you, that we might get your approval one day. Let us have that sense that we're living in a way that is pleasing to you. I think of some great quotes from some great theologians 500 years ago that put it so well that "pleasure as imperfect as our obedience" is, right? The fact that we have the opportunity to please you. What a great truth that is, God. Just imprint that upon us this week as we seek to walk with you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.