



Berean Christian Fellowship

DEVOTIONAL 75.0

June 18
2015

Renouncing Underhanded Ways

“But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4:2 ESV).

While the angels in Heaven do nothing but the will of the Father, we fallen creatures have willful desires that wrestle against the will of God. God has a will and He has a plan: *“For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?”* (Isaiah 14:27). We also have wills that set plans in motion: *“Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap [Jesus] in what He said”* (Matthew 22:15). Like the Pharisees, Believers sometimes dress up their will to look like God's will, and they set it in motion using the disgraceful, underhanded tactics of satan himself, for he was the first of creation to set *his* will in motion (Isaiah 14:14). Just so, *“the scribes and the Pharisees were watching [Jesus] closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him”* (Matthew 26:59). Why? Because they had convinced themselves that He was a problem, and they were going to “deal with Him” to protect their “ministry.”

It is our flesh nature to see “problems” around us. We easily see the “faults” or “needs” of other people, their families, or their churches, but rather than trust God's sufficiency to deal with it, we often see in ourselves “God's solution” to the “problem.” This appeals to our pride. “I know how to fix this,” we might think, like a young Pharisee named Saul who made himself believe he was doing God's will, when he was really fighting Him.

There can be a danger when the labor of our witness or ministry feels fruitless or endangered and we feel we need to “do something about it.” But this presumes we know God's plans in the situation. We so easily presume that what we want is what God wants—that the peace, strife, success, or abundance we want is His will. The danger is greatest here, because we act in our flesh when we should wait in the spirit, and vice versa. In so doing, we put satan's methods into motion, and like him, we believe we are competent and sufficient for the task. This is an all-to-present temptation in the Church today, and almost daily we see churches falling into sin because people employ disgraceful, underhanded ways to get to the goals they tell themselves are God's.

When we feel things aren't how they should be, our approach should be that *“having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart”* (2 Corinthians 4:1), because it is God's ministry through us and not our own—and He is sufficient where we can never be. This was Paul's approach when he felt His mission to Troas was “unfruitful”, but he saw the sufficiency of God through the Holy Spirit: *“thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere... Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ”* (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). Paul is saying no one could have planned it better. What people might have thought was a disastrous missions trip was exactly what God planned to spread the Gospel: *“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God”* (2 Corinthians 3:4-5). Even so, Amen.

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