

Ambition

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1. Ambition is a primary part of our rebellion against the law and government of God.

In the first discourse on the tenth command, I observed, that an inordinate desire of natural good seems to be the commencement of sin, in a being originally virtuous. The two great branches of this spirit, or the two great modes in which it operates, are ambition and avarice. Of these, ambition is without a question the most universal, and the most powerfully operative. It extends to more objects, exerts itself in a far greater variety of modes, occupies, so far as we can judge, the minds of much greater multitudes, is more restless, vehement, and, if possible, more craving. In every just consideration it holds, of course, the primary place...

2. That ambition is fatal to the happiness of the ambitious man.

It is proverbially acknowledged, that envy and discontent are only other names for misery. Yet these wretched attributes are always attendant on ambition. No mind can be contented whose desires are ungratified. In this world ardent wishes were never satisfied, nor high hopes ever indulged without disappointment...

Under the influence of ambition, several of the Persian emperors, Alexander the Great, and several of the Roman emperors, claimed divine honours, and demanded sacrifices and libations. The Bishops of Rome also have arrogated to themselves the peculiar titles of Jehovah, and have accordingly granted absolutions of sin, and passports to heaven. Nay, they have abrogated the commands of God, substituted for them contrary precepts, ascended the throne of the Redeemer, assumed the absolute government of his church, permitted and interdicted its worship at their pleasure, claimed the world as their property, and declared all mankind to be their vassals. Beyond all this they have given, openly and publicly, indulgences or permissions to sin. Thus has this man of sin, this son of perdition, exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. Thus has he, as God, sat in the temple of God, showing himself to be God...

The only language of his heart is, I will ascend into heaven: I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the Most High. What submission, what obedience, what worship, can co-exist with this language, and the thoughts from which it springs!

(Beauties of Dwight; or, Dr. Dwight's System of Theology, vol. iv, by Timothy Dwight, London: Francis Westley, 1823, e-book, 155, 156, 158, 159)