

**2 Corinthians 5:4-17** <sup>4</sup> For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. <sup>6</sup> Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> We live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. <sup>11</sup> Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

### **“What Are You Aiming for?”**

One of my favourite movies is “A Christmas Story”. It’s about a little boy named Ralphie who all he wanted for Christmas was a Red Rider BB Gun. There was something in Ralphie’s wish that struck home with me. I always wanted a BB gun but unlike Ralphie, I never got one. Although I never had a BB gun I still got my BB gun experience. My best friend Ronnie had not only a BB gun, but a pellet gun also, and at some point he wound up with a BB pistol.

BB guns can be used rightly or wrongly depending on what you’re aiming at. Obviously, you don’t shoot people with BB guns...but inadvertently that’s what little boys do with BB guns. I don’t remember ever shooting anyone but I do remember being shot in the back of the hand by a boy down the street who denied it up and down. Another of my friends got shot, I think in the thigh, and the BB was embedded enough to have to be pried out with a knife.

You’re not supposed to shoot peoples’ pets either...but that’s what little boys do with BB guns. A pellet gun pumped only once will only sting an animal. You came make a cat jump four feet in the air and assure they will never return to your yard like that. I remember Ronnie’s neighbour had a dog penned up in the backyard that barked incessantly. Ronnie solved that problem. Every time the dog started barking he cracked the screen on his bedroom window and shot it in the bum. After a couple of days, the dog immediately stopped barking at just the sound of the screen cracking open. Another thing you shouldn’t shoot are animals in general...but that’s what little boys do with BB guns. Ronnie and I

needlessly killed bunches of birds and squirrels pretending to be hunters. The smaller the bird, the better shot you had to be. I remember one time while spending a week at my great-grandmother's, we even shot a bull in the cahones. We were expecting him to run off in a rage, but he only twitched.

The right way to use a BB gun is shooting appropriate targets like cans or Bull's eye's (not a real bull's eyes) under parental supervision. Ronnie was always a better shot than I. When it came to a can on a fencepost he rarely missed. I, on the other hand, more often than not missed. My genius lay in a different use for a BB gun...killing flies with the air burst and stuffing grasshoppers by the head into the end of the barrel and using the airburst to make a big splat. (I'm glad I'm not preaching for the call with this sermon.)

Now hold to your thoughts here on the difference between Ronnie's marksmanship and my own and let's talk about sin. The NT Greek word for sin is *hamartia* and it's an archery term meaning to miss the mark. Sin, biblically speaking, isn't just a collection of things we're not supposed to do. If the life that we've been given were a BB gun, sin isn't simply that we use our BB gun to shoot things we're not supposed to shoot, though that's a part of it. Rather, sin would be that we have a problem with our aim. We can't hit the target. So, even when we are shooting at things we're not supposed to shoot, though it may seem fun or beneficial, whether we hit or miss there is a down side. Either we kill what we're shooting at or if we miss there is always something nearby that's going to be damaged by the stray BB and usually, it is the people we care about the most. Sin is the fact that the human aiming system, how we orient our lives towards goals, our ambition, our endeavouring is fundamentally flawed. Sin even comes through in people who are religiously oriented. There is no such thing as saying I'm going to stop sinning and on my own effort start trying to please God that always leads to legalism and self-righteousness because we will supplant pleasing God with serving religious laws.

Sin means that there is a problem with our aim. In our NIV translation 2 Corinthians 5:9 reads, “We make it our goal to please Him (God)”. The NT Greek word there for “making it our goal” can also read “we make it our aim” or “we have as our ambition”. Sorry for yet another Greek lesson. The word is *philotimeomai* and it consists of two words being smashed into one and then being made a verb. The first word is *philos*. We know it as one of the root words for philosophy. *Philos* means friend or devoted to. Philosophy simply means a friend of wisdom or devoted to wisdom. The next word *time* means honour. So, *philotime* means friend of honour or devoted to honour. The last part of the word, the ending *-omai* makes the word a verb in the sense of “I do this for my own benefit, for myself.” So, to make something your aim, to *philotimeomai*, is to be a friend of honour or devoted to honour for one's own benefit. When we talk about sin as a problem of our aiming mechanism, we are saying that we have a fundamental problem with the way we try to make ourselves honourable, with the way we bring honour or respect to ourselves. There is nothing wrong with striving to be an honourable person, that's the BB gun, but we use that striving, that BB gun in the wrong way and not only that we just can't hit what we're aiming at when it comes to being honourable.

Paul says that the right way to bring honour to oneself is to please God. Yet, because of sin, we cannot do that on our own. But God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – has fixed the problem. Because the Father loves us he sent the Son to become human and be honourable for us and also to take our dishonour upon himself and die with it putting it to death. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our Father raised Jesus from the dead and through his resurrection set in motion New Creation in which by the gift of his Holy Spirit indwelling us we can now rightly aim to please God – Father, son and Holy Spirit – by living according to faith and not by sight because we are new creation. As Paul says, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! Trusting the steadfast love and faithfulness of God the Father by means of our union with Jesus, the Son, in the Holy Spirit is the way we aim to please God, the way we *philotimeomai*, the way we strive to bring honour to ourselves.

So now, what does this look like in real life? Speaking for myself as a minister, it is very easy for me to strive to bring honour to myself in God’s eyes by the way I preach, teach, and pastor. I think most people would say, “That’s a no brainer. If even a minister can’t be pleasing to God by doing those things, then God is impossible to please.” But, my striving to carry out this call would be unpleasing to God if it were not done in faith. It would be just doing my job. I can’t preach and teach what I think ought to be said and then use Scripture to back it up. I have to proclaim Christ by saying what the Scripture says trusting He will speak through my garbled ramblings. When I visit and pray with the dying I don’t walk in there saying, “God’s going to heal you” and call that faith. No, I listen to them and intercede for them, even if it is asking God to take their life, and walk away hoping they feel that not only have I heard them but that God has.

It’s difficult for me to say what walking by faith looks like for you folks out there in the real world. I guess it starts with simply asking the question of how am I striving to bring honour to myself and is it pleasing to God. Does our cultural value of striving for wealth bring true honour in God’s eyes? Is it true that wealth is God’s blessing upon those who work hard and are morally upright? Or is true honour found in being compassionate to those you work with and to neighbours and to strangers and to the downcast, caring enough to listen and to pray for them; just letting yourself be a vehicle through which God proves his steadfast love and faithfulness. Ponder this. God has put his own Spirit in you for you to be just that. That Spirit is fixing your aim, making your aim to become more and more like Jesus’. You are a new creation. The old life is gone. It’s wrapped up in death, in a holocaust of stray BB’s. You have become new. Paul says we will all have to go before the judgment seat of Christ and though we are forgiven, the question is whether we will go to glory in honour or in shame? Have we lived for Christ or simply continued on living for ourselves? Amen.