

GOD'S VIEWPOINT OF SUCCESS

Guest: Dr. Charles C. Ryrie

Host: Dr. Stanley D. Toussaint



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TODAY**

A radio ministry of
Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204
(214) 824-3094

MONDAY: "A DEFINITION OF SUCCESS"

Toussaint: Dr. Ryrie, let's begin with a definition. What is success?

Ryrie: Well, Dr. Toussaint, I looked that up in the dictionary expecting that you would ask the question, and the dictionary says that success is "turning out well" or "achieving your goal." And of course that is the expected definition one would normally find in a dictionary: "turn out well," "achieve your goal." But it certainly does not answer all of the questions involved in your question, "What is success?"

Toussaint: Well, that obviously brings up the next question, "What does it mean to turn out well?"

Ryrie: Exactly. By whose standard are we to turn out well? I suppose the average person, including the writers of the dictionary, thinks that turning out well means achieving whatever goal you thought was worth achieving. To some extent that's success, because you achieve something. But if we're going to examine success from a biblical Christian viewpoint, we really need to know what it means to turn out well and what our proper goals are. We can't set our own goals up if they're improper, and even if we achieve them, then we've achieved something that's improper. We need to have good goals and know what it means to do something that's good.

Toussaint: Is the term "success" used in the Bible?

Ryrie: Yes, but very rarely. As you know it's only found in the Scriptures one time, which is rather interesting. You could not really erect a very detailed doctrine of success on the word itself. But the one time it is used, it is a very significant verse and tells us something very basic about God's viewpoint of success. That one time is in Joshua 1:7 where the Lord said to Joshua, "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go." The basic thing here is, of course, God's formula (if we may reduce this to a formula) for success; and the formula is: obey the law. This meant, of course, to Joshua: obey the Mosaic law. For us who have the completed and full revelation of God in the written Bible, it means: obey the Bible. And if we obey it, then God says we have success. That doesn't mean necessarily we'll achieve all the things we want to achieve, or the goals we think are the most important or turning out well by our standards, but this is success by God's standard.

Toussaint: Dr. Ryrie, from what you said I take it that you mean submission to the Scriptures brings about success. I hear people talking about God's guidance and leadership in finding His will. What do you think about this in achieving success?

Ryrie: Well the verse is saying to us that we should not deviate from the Scriptures if we're going to find success. In fact it says it very specifically, "Don't turn from it to the right or to the left; don't deviate at all in either direction; just stay right on course." It is true that many people, when you talk about the will of God, conjure up the image of something rather subjective: maybe a vision or some kind of existential experience, some kind of mystical guidance--sitting in a rocking chair and have lightning strike--or something like that. But the will of God is, first of all, concrete in the Word of God; and there are many, many hundreds of specific, detailed commands in the Word of God which do constitute His will. Now I realize that doesn't answer all the questions, but it certainly is a place to begin. If a person wants success, he's got to know the Word of God. And the will of God is revealed in the Word of God as a very foundation of his success.

Toussaint: When all is said and done, Dr. Ryrie, what is God's viewpoint of success?

Ryrie: God's viewpoint of success is the life that has measured up as far as possible to the revealed will of God for that person.

Toussaint: How does this relate to a counseling situation where you may be encouraging somebody or giving direction in a question about business, or marriage, or some decision in life?

Ryrie: We're all tempted to go for the expedient and the immediate, the temporal and what's seen. And, of course, when we do that we may be entirely on the wrong track, because our perspective is wrong. In a counseling situation or when we're trying to decide a matter of business, or marriage, or personal integrity, we cannot foresee consequences of our actions, so we must obey God's Word, because He knows everything; and we simply have to give obedience to Him. You remember that the Bible says, "We're very tempted to go by the temporal, but the things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal. We must appear before God's judgment seat to give an answer for the things we have done." So we must obey God's Word, and that's the measure of success for any life. It's really a character matter, and the conduct flows from that character.

Toussaint: Dr. Ryrie, you said that this relates to the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. How is it concerned with eternity?

Ryrie: You remember in Hebrews 4:13 the writer says that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Verse 12 says, "The Word of God exposes all of our being, including the thoughts and intentions of our heart." Put those two verses together and I think you've got the answer. The Word of God is the standard. When we appear at the judgment seat of Christ we shall give our report or our word to Him. The extent to which our word conforms to His word and the extent to which our report conforms to His revelation, to that extent we shall be appraised and rewarded. To the extent that we lack, then, we shall lose reward.

TUESDAY: "COMMON CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS--PART 1"

Toussaint: Dr. Ryrie, what are some common criteria we often hear for measuring success?

Ryrie: I suppose today one of the more common ones we hear is that, if you're getting bigger and more influential, obviously you are a success. That's true whether it's an individual or an organization. We expect things to grow, and growth is usually determined in size. Increased size means obvious success.

Toussaint: But isn't that partially true? Doesn't health produce size? For instance, on the day of Pentecost 3,000 were won to Christ. The number is specifically given. Later on 5,000 were won to the Lord. What about numbers as a measure?

Ryrie: It's true that after the day of Pentecost we have those two instances of the recording of large numbers of people who were saved, but I notice you didn't go on and cite a third one, because there isn't a third one. Those are the only two times that statistics are given. And we know that Paul, for example, had very few results in certain places: he shook the dust off his feet as a sign of judgment against the places that did not respond to the gospel. Who's to say that he wasn't successful in those places? Yet there were very few results. As a matter of fact, he was successful, for the gospel is a savor of life unto life and death unto death. When the gospel is preached, even if people do not respond, God's will and God's purpose is being done, because they are now condemned for having rejected the truth which they've heard. And that's a successful aspect of ministry.

Toussaint: Since size is so often held up as a measure of success, who's responsible for this kind of mentality in our Christian community?

Ryrie: Well I suppose the responsibility falls on a lot of us in a lot of ways. There's great pressure on Christian leaders to be enlarging the spheres of their work by increased numbers, whether it be a church or some other kind of organization. We're certainly not saying that, if God gives the increase, that there's something wrong. Of course there's not. Growth in numbers is often in the will of God and would then be a proper measure of success. But sometimes growth is forced and is not in the will of God. The responsibility sometimes falls on the leaders because they want to see numerical growth, and perhaps from perfectly sincere motives. Numerical growth calls for greater facilities; greater facilities calls for more money; more money calls for more ways to get the money; and pretty soon a monster is created that has to be fed just to keep the machinery going. And the ministry is lost sight of, in the midst of all that machinery, to keep the thing ever increasing.

Toussaint: Would you lay all the blame at the feet of the leaders?

Ryrie: No, certainly not. For those of us who receive these appeals, those of us who give, those of us who observe the Lord's work, and those of us who are involved in one way or another in supporting it, we have responsibility as well. We respond more easily to appeals that talk about increased size and improvements. If a missionary sends a prayer letter home and talks about a new church he has planted, that's much more apt to bring money to his support than a missionary who sends home a prayer letter and says that he's had no visible results, even though he's been just as faithful in sowing the seed of the Word. So we're responsible too, because we respond on the basis of criteria that aren't always biblically oriented.

Toussaint: Let's suppose I received those two prayer letters, Dr. Ryrie, and the one man said that he had founded a church and the next man said that he'd visited three villages, didn't have any converts, and nothing happened. Suppose I knew both men about equally as well. How could I decide which person to support?

Ryrie: Well I think we're back again to what we said in yesterday's program, and that is that this is a matter of character first and conduct second. And if you knew the character of these people and they were equally committed, faithful, godly workers, then your support could go to either or both. I think you have to test the character of the worker, and the character of the organization, and the faithfulness of their stewardship, not only in money but also in time, and effort, and activity, and goals. The responsibility for giving is a very serious and sober responsibility

on the giver, because, after all, he's the one that makes the gift, and he's going to have to answer for where his or her money has been placed.

Toussaint: How can we in our churches change this mentality so that size is not the only criteria for success?

Ryrie: God wants to present us mature. Perhaps we ought to substitute the word "mature" instead of the word "size," and think of increase in terms of maturity when it comes to people in our churches or the success of a church. Is it maturing the believers? Is the body of Christ being built up? Now this will mean additions to the body of Christ. God's workers are planted in all parts of the world, but some parts of the world are not responsive to the gospel. Yet these workers are doing the will of God and therefore are successful. Some churches are in more responsive areas of even the same city than another church might be. So success cannot be measured infallibly by increase in size. But increase in maturity of the people that we're responsible for is a good measure of success.

Toussaint: How can we measure maturity Dr. Ryrie?

Ryrie: Maturity, I think, is measured by our conformity to the image of Christ: by our Christlikeness.

WEDNESDAY: "COMMON CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS--PART 2"

Toussaint: Yesterday we saw that size is used as a common measure of success. Dr. Ryrie, what other criteria are commonly used today?

Ryrie: I suppose, Dr. Toussaint, we could summarize it by saying the criteria of the great American dream: healthy, wealthy, and wise. And if you're healthy, wealthy, and wise, then obviously you're in God's will, and you must be a success, and His blessing is on your life. If you're sick and poor and don't have a degree, then God's blessing has departed from your life, and you'll never be a success.

Toussaint: Well what really is unbiblical about that? What's wrong with saying to be healthy is not a measure of success?

Ryrie: Just about everything, to be honest about it. We know, for example, that there are many reasons why a person can be sick in the will of God. God may want to bring some illness into his life to teach him something.

Toussaint: Can you give me an illustration of that from the Scripture?

Ryrie: Yes, certainly. I suppose the most famous one is the Apostle Paul, who was ill with something. We are not sure what it was, but he called it "a thorn in the flesh," and it seemed to be something chronic that never left him, but recurred now and again and hindered him considerably in a physical way. He prayed about it more than once, but God did not take away that illness. God said, "I want you to learn through the illness that my grace is sufficient." So you see, had he been totally healthy, he might not have learned the sufficiency of God's grace through that illness. So sometimes a sickness can be in the will of God, and health is not necessarily the criterion of success.

Toussaint: Could good health ever be an indication that a person is out of the will of God?

Ryrie: Yes, it could. If a person can be ill in the will of God, then being well might be outside of the will of God. For example, someone might overprotect himself to maintain good health by avoiding doing something God wanted him to do but which would involve risking that good health. A biblical example is the man, Epaphroditus, who gets high praise from the Apostle Paul. If anybody could write over our lives words like these, "My brother, my fellow worker, my fellow soldier, who is your messenger and minister to my need, who was longing and distressed when he heard that you heard that he was sick, and he was sick, and he was nearly dead because of it," we could not be sick and out of the will of God. But he was sick because he worked too hard in the Lord's work. Epaphroditus was willing to risk his health and almost died for the work of the Lord.

Toussaint: What about that next one, being wealthy?

Ryrie: I also think in that case a person can be wealthy or poor in or out of the will of God. If I may elaborate on that for just a moment. A person can be wealthy in the will of God, and he can be wealthy out of the will of God. He can be poor in the will of God, and he can be poor out of the will of God. All the options, I think, are quite possible and quite biblically true.

Toussaint: Do you have some Scriptures to substantiate that point?

Ryrie: Wealth is never condemned in the Bible. It's the misuse of wealth or the wrong attitude toward wealth that is condemned. The love of money is the root of all evil, and wealthy people are told not to trust in their riches but to use them to do good to other people. Poverty can be in the will of God too. The Apostle Paul is another example of that. He said, "I know how to abound," that is, to have enough, and "how to suffer want," that is, to have a lack. I take it he meant a lack of the physical necessities of life: maybe not enough to eat, not enough money. He was poor in the will of God. It wasn't because he was unfaithful or failed to be generous himself, but simply because, at that point in his life, he was to learn something from his poverty, his being in want. James makes the same point in the first chapter of James. He says, "Let a person in humble circumstances (that's the poor person) glory in his high position (in his calling in Christ), and let the rich man glory in his humiliation (that is, in perhaps some circumstance that may come into his life which would make him realize that money really doesn't mean much and is at best a transitory thing: like the flowering grass that passes away, just as his life will too)." But these passages don't say that the rich man should give away all of his riches: that it's wrong for him to be rich. They don't say, either, that the poor man shouldn't be ambitious to better his circumstances; but they do say that both circumstances--wealth or poverty--can be in the will of God.

Toussaint: Now the third one is wise--healthy, wealthy, wise. It seems to me the Scriptures do put a priority and premium on wisdom. What's wrong with using wisdom as a measure of success?

Ryrie: I think the thing that's wrong is how the wisdom is used. Perhaps we should put it this way: the common criterion for success today is the acquisition of knowledge. Perhaps we should distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. If a person has acquired knowledge which is often measured by degrees, attainments, and academic achievements, it is assumed that he will automatically be wise. The Scripture does put a premium on wisdom, but wisdom sometimes comes, not because a person has acquired a lot of knowledge or a lot of facts, but because the person has steeped himself in the Word of God. He has God's perspective on things and begins to think God's thoughts after Him so that he can apply them to the situations of life in a truly wise way.

Toussaint: Dr. Ryrie, to bring this to a conclusion then, you're not depreciating the value of health or wealth or wisdom, are you?

Ryrie: Not at all. If God gives you good health and money, and a lot of knowledge and the wisdom that goes with it, then turn it back to Him. There's nothing better than sanctified health, wealth, and wisdom: that is, health, wealth, and wisdom that are set apart for God's use and ultimately for His glory.

THURSDAY: "GOALSETTING AND SUCCESS"

Toussaint: It seems to me, Dr. Ryrie, that an important element of success would be goalsetting. Is there any proper place for goalsetting in achieving success?

Ryrie: I would say, "yes," there could be a proper place; and "no," it could be used improperly.

Toussaint: Could you explain what you mean by that?

Ryrie: We all have things that we need to improve in our lives. Let's take the area of discipline to do certain things we know are according to God's revealed will. For example, we need to be faithful in praying. That's something that doesn't come easy for most of us. So there'd be nothing wrong--in fact it probably would be very helpful--to set up a goal: I will pray for so many minutes, or I will pray before I get out of bed, or I will pray when I get out of bed before I do something else, or I will pray through the activities of the day before I start the day in some way. I'm not saying that everybody has to do it the same way, but everybody needs to be disciplined to pray.

Toussaint: Is there any other area where you would apply goalsetting?

Ryrie: Yes. In the matter of witnessing, for example. I like to ask people sometimes, "If God crossed your path with somebody who needed a witness so obviously, so clearly, so dramatically you couldn't doubt that this was somebody you ought to say something to, would you know what to say?" Or failing to get a good answer to that question, "Would you know what to say? Would you have a tract to give him?" Most of us don't even carry a tract on our person to give to people if God should say to us in some way or another, "Witness to that person. Leave a tract." Now if we had a goal--I will always carry tracts on my person--that would be a good goal and would enable the Lord to use us at any opportunity that He would direct in this matter of witnessing.

Toussaint: Let me ask you a perhaps controversial question, Dr. Ryrie. Many churches set a goal for a building fund, a goal for evangelism, a goal for Sunday school. What's your feeling about these?

Ryrie: Well, of course all goals must be tested. It's not having a goal that makes us a success, but it's having the right goals that make us a success. And those goals all have to be tested, I think, again by the will of God. So any organization or any church that feels it should have a goal to do this, or that, or the other, or whatever is necessary to achieve it, certainly has to be sure that God is guiding. And that's a very heavy responsibility on the pastor, and elders, and deacons of the congregation, if God is leading them to this goal. I think so often we want something, or we think this would be good, and so we set the goal or establish the project, and then we ask God to bless it. And really we ought to be prompted by the Lord. A number of the leaders ought to be prompted and be able to say, "This is what we're supposed to do; this is the emphasis we ought to give this year; or at this time in the ministry and history of this organization this is the God-prompted

emphasis for this period." And if God is prompting some of the leadership to do this, then undoubtedly this is a God-originated goal, and God will supply the needs for goals like that.

Toussaint: In our church, instead of setting goals for a certain number of converts, we set the emphases that we want: we're going to stress evangelism and we're going to stress worship, without any particular goalsetting. And that has been a good approach in our church. Dr. Ryrie, how does this whole idea of goalsetting relate to faith and sight in the Scriptures?

Ryrie: I think you have raised a very important ramification or relationship here. If our goals are God-initiated, they may seem good to us, they may seem of top priority, or they may not. We might get together and say, "Well, I don't really see why God would be prompting us to have this emphasis." But we must walk by faith, not by sight. The reason we must walk by faith is that we're not omniscient: we don't know everything. God knows, and God knows how he wants to work the thing He's prompting in our heart as an individual, or our heart as an organization or a church. God knows how He wants to work that together with other things He's doing in the world for this time. When we're obedient to that, then we're truly walking by faith; and the Bible says we're supposed to walk by faith and not by sight. Too often we set our goals and make our plans by what we think--and I'm certainly not against the logical use of our faculties that God has given us. But let's be sure that God is prompting us, that we're open, that our communication with Him is open and sincere, without any alternative motives or any self-seeking, and then I think we can hear the Lord's voice, and we'll be doing His will. And that's success.

Toussaint: Do you know of any illustrations from the Scriptures of men who were disciplined and had goalsetting as part of their lives?

Ryrie: I suppose those who were disciplined all did have some goals. They probably are not mentioned in the Scriptures specifically, but they must have had goals. We know Daniel was highly disciplined; and he must have had as a goal in his life never to violate the Mosaic law. That's why he made his great commitment there in the first chapter of the Book of Daniel. And we certainly know that the Lord had a goal, and He stated it several times. He came to do the will of the Father, which was to give His life a ransom for many. He always did the things that pleased the Father, and He didn't do the things that were necessary to please the people. But His goal was very clear, and obviously His life was totally disciplined. Yes, there are such examples. The two do seem to go together when they're properly used.

FRIDAY: "THE MEASURING OF SUCCESS"

Toussaint: Dr. Ryrie, what are some criteria we can use to measure if we are successful according to God's standards?

Ryrie: I think the main criterion goes back to the idea of character. Are we the kind of person that pleases God? Then our conduct will flow from that kind of character and will be pleasing to Him too, and thus we'll be successful. The kind of character that pleases God is the kind that most imitates His Son, Jesus Christ. First John 2:6 says that the person who abides in Christ should walk as He walked. That's a perfectly proper biblical doctrine of the imitation of Christ.

Toussaint: Could you just imitate Christ without really being Christlike in your being?

Ryrie: You could, so I think we ought to couple with 1 John 2:6 the fruit of the Spirit passage in Galatians 5:22. This is character: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. These are characteristics of a person which get right down to the heart and root and depth of the matter in all our lives.

Toussaint: Well still, can't you counterfeit love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and so on, where they are just superficial?

Ryrie: Yes, I'm sure you could. People do feign love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and so on. I think we need, first of all, to be clear that there are many facets to love, for example. It's not a counterfeit kind of love: but genuine love is both caring and correcting. Love can be expressed in a number of ways; so can joy. Joy can be expressed in heaviness of difficult circumstances. You can still have joy in heaviness, Peter says. And inner peace can be expressed even when life is full of turmoil. So I think we need to realize that these characteristics have many facets to them. But, to get back to your question, can't they be feigned or counterfeited? The answer is certainly "yes." We all know people who pretend to be Christlike, but it's sort of a veneer on top of pretty cheap wood, a pretty barren spiritual life. You scratch the veneer and you don't have to scratch very deeply to get down to the unstable, or immature, or even carnal, or backslidden Christian underneath. What we all ought to strive for is the kind of imitation of Christ and the production of the fruit of the Spirit that makes our total being good, rich mahogany, so to speak.

Toussaint: What, then, should our motive be in imitating Jesus Christ?

Ryrie: We should want to do it because we love Him. We know this pleases the Lord: this is the will of God, even your sanctification, your holiness. We know that God chose from the foundation of the world to have a people who would be conformed to the image of Christ. That's His desire for us now as well as His desire which He will perfect totally in heaven and in eternity. We do love Him, and we want to act in a way that's responsible and pleasing to Him.

Toussaint: All around us there are people who measure success by size and wealth. How do we overcome that pressure? What are some practical things we can do as Christians?

Ryrie: That's a very difficult question to answer, but a very important question. We are besieged on all sides--from the world, from the church, from our friends, from our inner compulsions--to be a success; and we must fight, not to be a failure certainly, but to be a success according to God's standards, according to the things we've talked about during these programs this week. And that is a fight. There are a few words that come to my mind. One of them is "simplicity." I think in the day in which we are living it's important to try and keep life and lifestyle as simple and uncomplicated as possible.

Toussaint: Now why do you say that?

Ryrie: Well I think this keeps us from being caught up in the whirlpool of success characteristics that the world puts on us, lays on us, pressures us with. If we try to keep life as simple and uncomplicated as possible, then we can keep our goals straight, our perspective oriented toward heaven. And I think, for one thing, it will give us more time and more money to do things properly. I don't mean simplicity only in regard to lifestyle, economics, social status--things like that--but simplicity with regard to the ambitions we have in life: what we ought to be doing. So many are trying to achieve things they really are never called upon to achieve.

And by trying to do what they're not called upon to do, they sometimes miss the things they really ought to be doing for the Lord.

Toussaint: Now you said that there are a number of words that come to your mind. "Simplicity" is one. Are there any other words?

Ryrie: Well I can think of another one: "godliness." And along with it, that goes together in the Scriptures is "contentment": contentment in the will of God, to be doing the will of God. And we're right back where we started from because that really is a successful life: the one that has done the will of God and can look back on his life and say, "That's what I did to the best of my knowledge and with His help and power." We're all going to fail, but that's a great goal for all of us to have. This is exactly what is said in 1 Timothy 6:6: "Godliness is actually a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment."

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