

Motivation 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

Last week we talked about the spirit of faith that the Holy Spirit have given to every Christian so that we don't fear life or death, but serve God faithfully. In today's scripture Paul again reminds us that "We have this ministry.... We have this treasure.... We [have] the same spirit of faith.... We have a building of God" (2 Cor. 4:1, 7, 13; 5:1). What a testimony Paul gave to the reality of the Christian faith!

As a tentmaker Paul saw the human body as an earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4:7) and a temporary tent; but he knew that Christians would one day receive a wonderful glorified body, suited to the glorious environment of heaven.

Paul said we can always be confident (vv. 6–8) wherever we are. As people of God we can always be found in one of two places: either in heaven or on earth (Eph. 3:15). Christians on earth are "at home in the body, but absent from the Lord" while Christians who have died are "absent from the body, but present with the Lord."

Because he had this kind of confidence, Paul was not afraid of suffering and trials, or even of dangers. This is not to suggest that he tempted the Lord by taking unnecessary risks, but it does mean that he was willing to "lose his life" for the sake of Christ and the ministry of the Gospel. He walked by faith and not by sight. He looked at the eternal unseen, not the temporal seen (2 Cor. 4:18). Paul looked for the heavenly city and governed his life by eternal values.

In this section of 2 Corinthians, we can see how Paul had courage for the conflict and would not lose heart. He had a glorious ministry that transformed lives. He had a valuable treasure in the earthen vessel of his body, and he wanted to share that treasure with a bankrupt world. He had a confident faith that

conquered fear, and he had a future hope that was both a destination and a motivation.

Paul tells us of his motivation for ministry. Paul thought what we believe and how we behave must always go together. Paul usually connected duty and doctrine, (our actions and our beliefs) because what God has done for us must motivate us to do something for God.

“You would have preached a marvelous sermon,” a woman said to her pastor, “except for all those ‘therefores’ at the end!”

Paul would have agreed with the pastor, for he usually used “therefores” and “wherefores” liberally in his letters. Paul moved from explanation to application, and his theme is motivation for ministry. His enemies had accused him of using the ministry of the Gospel for his own selfish purposes, when in reality they were the ones who were “merchandising” the Gospel (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2).

Paul said his ministry and our ministry was to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:11, 20). It is not our job to force people to trust Christ, or coerce them by some deceitful approach. Like Paul, “Our message to you is true, our motives are pure, our conduct is absolutely aboveboard” (1 Thes. 2:3,PH). As Christian workers we must have the right motive for ministry as well as the right message.

Paul stated two acceptable motives for his ministry. First was his fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9–13), and second was the love of Christ. This fear of the Lord is not about being afraid of God, but giving God respect and honor. Because he feared God, Paul and his companions labored and were “ambitious.” There is an ambition that is selfish and worldly, but there is also a holy ambition that honors the Lord. Paul’s great ambition was to be well-pleasing to Jesus Christ. The Judaizers ministered to please men and enlisted them in their cause; but Paul ministered to please Jesus Christ alone (Gal. 1:10).

There is nothing wrong with godly ambition. It was his godly ambition to preach the gospel that compelled him to take the message where it had never been heard. If, led by the Spirit, Christians would put as much drive into Christian living and service as the world does for athletics or business, the Gospel would make a greater impact on the world. A saintly woman named Maggie Thomas told me when she became a Christian she “wanted to be as zealous for God as I was for the devil!” The 30 years I knew her, her life was greatly used of God.

Paul said that part of his motivation was that he and we must all appear before Christ (v. 10). Not every Christian is ambitious for the Lord, but every Christian is going to appear before the Lord; and now is the time for us to prepare. The Judgment Seat of Christ is that future event when God’s people will stand before the Savior as their works are judged and rewarded (Rom. 14:8–10). Paul was ambitious for the Lord because he wanted to meet God with confidence and not shame (1 John 2:28).

When Paul said “judgment seat” he was thinking of the platform in Greek towns where orations were made or decisions handed down by rulers (Matt. 27:19; Acts 12:21; 18:12). It was also the place where the awards were given out to the winners in the annual Olympic Games. This “judgment seat” is not be confused with the Great White Throne from which Christ will judge the wicked (Rev. 20:11–15). Because of the gracious work of Christ on the cross, Christians will not face our sins (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1); but we will have to give an account of our works and service for the Lord.

All Greek citizens were liable to serve as judges, or, as we would say, as juror. When an Athenian sat in judgment on a case he was given two bronze discs. Each had a cylindrical axis that was hollow and that disc stood for condemnation; one was solid and that disc stood for acquittal. On the platform there stood two urns. One, of bronze, was called “the decisive urn”, because into it the judge dropped the

disc which stood for his verdict. The other, of wood, was called “the inoperative urn”, for into it the judge dropped the disc which he desired to discard. So at the end the jury dropped into the bronze urn either the disc that stood for acquittal or the one that stood for condemnation. To an onlooker they looked exactly alike and none could tell the verdict the judges gave. Then the discs were counted and the verdict given.

The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a place of revelation. As we live and work here on earth, it is relatively easy for us to hide things and pretend; but the true character of our works will be exposed before the searching eyes of the Savior. He will reveal whether our works have been good or “worthless.” The character of our service will be revealed (1 Cor. 3:13) as well as the motives that impelled us (1 Cor. 4:5).

It will also be a place of reckoning as we give an account of our ministries (Rom. 14:10–12). If we have been faithful it will be a place of reward and recognition (1 Cor. 3:10–15; 4:1–6). For those of us who have been faithful, it will be a time of rejoicing as we adore the Lord by giving our rewards back to Him in worship and in praise.

Some people think the desire for reward is not a proper motive for service. But the fact that God does promise rewards is proof that the motive is not a sinful one, even though it may not be the highest motive. Just as parents are happy when their children achieve recognition, God is pleased when His people are worthy of recognition and reward. The important thing is not the reward itself, but the joy of pleasing Christ and honoring Him.

How can the Christian prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ? To begin with, he or she must maintain a clear conscience (2 Cor. 5:11). No doubt some of the enemies at Corinth were saying, “Just wait until Paul stands before the Lord!” But Paul was not afraid, because he knew that his conscience was clear (see 2 Cor.

1:12). The truth about each one of us will be revealed and Jesus Christ will commend us for those things that have pleased Him. But we must take care not to depend on the praise of others (2 Cor. 5:12). If we live only for the praise of men, we will not win the praise of God at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To live for man's praise is to applaud reputation over character, and it is character that will count when we see Christ.

As we perform our ministry to the glory of God, we must ignore the criticisms of others (2 Cor. 5:13). Paul's enemies said that he was crazy. Paul said that he was "mad" when he was persecuting the church (Acts 26:11), but his enemies said he was "mad" since he had become a Christian (Acts 26:24). But people said that Jesus was mad, so Paul was in good company (see Mark 3:21). "If I am mad," Paul was saying, "it is for your good and the glory of God—so that makes it worthwhile!"

We must examine our own lives regularly to see if we are ready for the Judgment Seat of Christ. Wanting to give a good account before Christ is a worthy motive for Christian service.

The other motivation for ministry for Paul was the Love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–17). Yes, Paul had opposite emotions of fear and love dwelling in the same heart. It is like children who love their parents and also respect them and their authority.

The phrase "the love of Christ" means His love for us as seen in His sacrificial death. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). He loved us when we were unlovely; in fact, He loved us when we were ungodly, sinners, and enemies (see Rom. 5:6–10). When He died on the cross, Christ proved His love for the world (John 3:16), the church (Eph. 5:25), and individual sinners (Gal. 2:20). When you consider the reasons why Christ died, you cannot help but love Him.

Christ died that we might die (v. 14). When Christ died, we died in Him and with Him. Therefore, the old life should have no hold on us today. But Christ also

died that we might live (vv. 15–17). We not only died with Him, but we also were raised with Him that we might “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Because we have died with Christ, we can overcome sin; and because we live with Christ, we can bear fruit for God’s glory (Rom. 7:4). Christ also died that we might live for Him, and not live unto ourselves (2 Cor. 5:15), but serve Him with faithfulness.

It has been said, “Christ died our death for us that we might live His life for Him.” When we understand what Jesus did on the cross, how can we spend the rest of our lives life in selfishness? Our new relationship to Christ has brought about a new relationship to the world and the people around us. We no longer look at life the way we used to.

For one thing, we have a new view of Christ. We do not worship a Babe in a manger; we worship a glorified Savior on the throne.

Because “all things are become new,” we also have a new view of people around us. We see them as sinners for whom Christ died. We no longer see them as friends or enemies, customers or coworkers; we see them the way Christ sees them, as lost sheep who need a shepherd. When we are guided by the love of Christ, we want to share His love with others.

But we also look at other Christians as a part of the new creation, and do not evaluate them on the bases of education, race, finances, or position in society. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).^{1 2}

There was a time when Paul had judged Christ by human standards and had set out to eliminate the Christian faith from the world. But after he met Christ his standards were different. Paul who had tried to destroy the name of Jesus now

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 2 Co 5:1

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:566

found the name of Christ the most wonderful name in the world because Christ gave him true friendship with God which he had longed for all his life.³

The question for us remains: what is our motivation for the ministry that God has given to us. Is it the fear of God or the love of God or both? Either way, we must share the gospel with all we meet. We thank God for allowing us to be partners in this great ministry!

³ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 203