

“WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?” **(2 Corinthians 5:11-15)**

This morning I want to talk to you about motivation. Parents and teachers and coaches and bosses all know that motivation is one of the key factors in accomplishing goals. I know when our kids were growing up, finding out what motivated them was not always easy. Every Saturday was clean-up-your-room day, and we told them that as soon as their room they were done cleaning their rooms, they were free to do what they wanted the rest of the day. With one of our kids... and I won't say which one... that motivation worked to perfection... they were done in about 15-20 minutes and headed out the door to play. The other child, however, took their own sweet time – sometimes all day – and the incentive of freedom didn't seem to persuade them.

When it came to disciplining children – the parenting books said it's very simple – take something away from them they value – a toy or a privilege – and wanting it back will motivate them to change their behavior. I remember very early on taking away one of our kid's toys – one of the toys they played with all the time. We said, “When you do what you're supposed to do, you can have the toy back.” They said, “That's okay, I was done playing with it anyway” and moved right on to another toy. The books didn't say anything about that. As far as I can remember, they never got their toy back.

While people are often hard to motivate, the fact remains that everyone is motivated by something. Psychologist Abraham Maslow was famous for his theory that people are driven by a hierarchy of needs, beginning with the basic needs of water and food and shelter and air to breath – next on the list is the need for safety for yourself, your family, and your property – then come social needs like love and acceptance and belonging. Behind everything we do is a motivating reason.

What is it, then, that motivates us to live a life pleasing to God? What makes us want to obey Him, and read our Bible and pray? What makes us go to church and serve the needs of others? What motivates us to look for opportunities to share our faith with others? We know we are supposed to do these things, but we often lack the motivation to do them.

Without a compelling motivation to serve God, we become like the church of Laodicea Jesus rebuked in Revelation 3. He said, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15). A lukewarm Christian is someone who believes in Jesus, but somewhere along the line the passion and zeal they had for Christ has cooled off and they've become tepid.

All of us will admit to times when we've grown stagnant and lackadaisical in our zeal for God – perhaps even right now. How do we get out of lukewarmness? It helps to have a role model, and we find one in the Apostle Paul, who had no lack of passion and zeal. He had his human moments of discouragement like we all do, but throughout 2 Corinthians we see his passion for serving God overriding his discouragement. Despite all that he went through – all the beatings, the ridicule, the rejection, the slander and criticism, the pain and suffering – he was as determined as ever to serve God. Paul was not super-human – the same thing that kept him going is the same thing that keeps us going.

Today we're in 2 Corinthians 5:11-15, and these verses are a continuation of Paul's defense against opponents who had come into the church at Corinth after he left, and were stirring up the people he led to the Lord to join them in opposing Paul. Paul was not so much interested in defending himself personally as He was in defending the gospel message he preached, and making sure the Corinthian believers were not led astray from the truth.

He writes... “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 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. If we are ‘out of our mind,’ as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 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.”

These verses take a little work to understand at first, but they are anchored by two motivations for living the Christian life. The first motivation, in verse 11, is fear of the Lord; and the second motivation, in verse 14, is the love of Christ. Fear and love, which seem to be very opposite, are the primary motivations of the believer.

Let's begin with fearing the Lord. Paul begins verse 11 by saying, “Since then (or therefore) we know what it is to fear the Lord.” This connects verse 11 back to verse 10 that we looked at last week... “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

Paul lived with the continually awareness that we will one day stand before Christ and give account for how we have lived our lives. This is not a judgment to determine whether or not we're saved – Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. This a judgment of commendation, where Christ will evaluate how we lived our life after we were saved and reward us accordingly. It's one thing to be evaluated by a human boss, but to stand before the God of the universe who knows every detail of our lives, and every motive and every deed – that should catch our attention. This is why Paul says the fear of the Lord motivates us. What is the fear the Lord?

In the Bible “fear” can mean being frightened or it can mean respect. I think in this context that fearing the Lord has an element of both. As a kid, for example, I knew my dad loved me and I never doubted that he loved me – but there were times I was fearful of him. When I did something wrong, and waited for my dad to get home, I feared what might happen to me – especially to my backside. Fear of my dad actually kept me out of a lot of trouble.

But an even deeper motivation was respect for my dad. I knew that if I disobeyed him, it would displease him and even hurt him – and because of the respect I had for my dad I never wanted to hurt him or do damage to his name. The same is true in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. To fear God means that we acknowledge that He is God and we are not – He is the Creator and we are the creation – and one day we will give an account for all that we have done, whether good or bad.

When we squander our time, when we're consumed with the things of this world, when we pay little or no attention to Bible study or prayer, when we are casual about our commitment to Him, it reveals a lack of awareness that we will one day give account to God for how we have lived our lives – it shows that we don't take God seriously.

Fear of God does not mean that we live in continual dread and worry – it just means that we take God seriously and have a reverential respect for who He is.

Paul says, “Knowing I will one day face Christ motivates me to persuade others.” Persuade others of what? Let me suggest three things that are found in the context of chapter five. The first, of course, is that he is motivated to persuade others of the truth of the gospel. Paul talks about this later in verse 20 where he says... “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” Paul longed to see other people reconciled with God and implored them – he didn’t twist arms or use dishonest methods to deceive them – but tried to persuade them that they needed a Savior and need to put their trust in Christ for salvation.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 Paul talks about a crown we can receive on judgment day for winning souls to Christ. He says, “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” God will give a crown to those who have witnessed to others and led people to Christ – He will not judge us for how many people we have led to faith in Christ, but for the opportunities we have taken to tell others about Him. Paul sought to persuade others to accept Christ.

Secondly, in light of the judgment seat of Christ, Paul sought to persuade believers to make it their goal to please God, as he said in verse 9. He didn’t want his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to squander their opportunities, but to maximize their time and energy and resources for the Lord. Hebrews 10:24 says we are to consider how we may spur fellow believers on towards love and good deeds. If you see a brother or sister in Christ who is struggling or who is not showing up to church, consider what you can do to persuade them and encourage them to live for Christ.

And third, as we’ve seen throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul is trying to persuade the Corinthian believers of his integrity in the face of the false allegations made against them. He wants them to know that he’s not in the ministry for money or popularity or any other worldly motive, and his life is open for all to see. At the end of verse 11 he says... “What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.” He knew that God knew the truth of His motives, which brought him comfort – even if others misread me or say false things about me, I can rest in the truth that God knows my heart and He will reward me at the judgment seat of Christ.

Paul hopes, as he says at the end of verse 11, that the Corinthians know in their heart of hearts that he is honest and trustworthy, and not trying to promote himself. He says in verse 12... “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.” The problem with Paul’s opponents is that they were all wrapped up in external appearances – they evaluated things by what culture thought was cool and acceptable – and by these standards Paul simply fit the profile of what they thought an apostle should be: good-looking and eloquent and powerful. And by these standards, Paul’s gospel didn’t measure up either – a crucified Savior? That didn’t fit the profile.

Paul wants to persuade them that what really matters is not external appearances, but what’s in the heart, because that’s what God looks at. You might remember in 2 Samuel 16 when God told the prophet Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and anoint one of his sons as the next king. Jesse brought all of his sons before Samuel and when Samuel sees the oldest son – tall, rugged, and well-built – he thought, “Surely this is the Lord’s anointed.”

1 Samuel 16:7... “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” This was one of the main points Jesus brought out in the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees looked at how people practiced external religion – public fasting and public prayer and publicly giving money to the poor – but Jesus said, “Show me your heart. Show me what you are when no one is looking.”

Paul’s enemies wanted to take people back to the old covenant of evaluating people on external behavior, but Paul wanted to move believers forward in the new covenant and focus on the heart. He wanted them not to focus on the jar of clay, but on what’s in the jar. He wanted them to radiate the light of Christ and His glory through their lives.

Verse 13 seems to suggest that those who judged by outward appearances and worldly norms did not understand Paul – they didn’t get him. They didn’t get his message – they didn’t get his zeal – they didn’t get his willingness to suffer – they thought Paul was a bit crazy. Verse 13... “If we are ‘out of our mind,’ as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.” Paul says, “You can think whatever you want about me – you can think I’m crazy – as long as God is honored. Everything I do is for the glory of God.”

The phrase “out of our mind” is the same phrase that was used of Jesus. In Mark 3:21 it says... “When his family heard about this (speaking of Jesus’ ministry to the crowds), they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’” If you dedicate your life to living for the Lord, you’re naturally going to stand out and be different, and people will think you’re a little wacky. I love what Warren Wiersbe says, “Unbelievers do not think it’s strange when people wreck their bodies, destroy their homes, and ruin their lives by running from one sin to another – but when a drunk person becomes sober, and an immoral person becomes pure, they think they have lost their minds!”

They were saying the same thing about Paul’s zeal for the Lord, but Paul didn’t care what other people thought of him, he only cared about what God thought of him. He was motivated by the fear of God, not the fear of people. When your primary concern is what other’s think about you, you’ll be like some of the leaders of Israel in John 12 who believed in Jesus, but out of fear of the Pharisees and being social outcasts, they would not openly acknowledge their faith, for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Caring what others think of you makes you tentative and cautious – but when you care only about what God thinks of you, you are set free to live for Christ without holding back. You don’t have to be paralyzed by fear because the only person you are trying to please is Christ. And when you live confidently, it has a positive effect on others. In verse 13 Paul adds, “If we are in our right mind, it is for you.” Paul’s point is this: “All I do is either for the glory of God or for the spiritual welfare of other believers – it’s not about me or what others think of me – if they think I’m crazy and out of my mind, I can live with that so long as God is honored – and if appear right-minded and rational, it is for your benefit – that is what motivates me.”

Fear of the Lord was not the only thing that motivated Paul, it was also the love of Christ. Verses 14-15 says... “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 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.”

The love of Christ compels us, Paul says. This could be taken one of two ways. It could be Christ's love for us, or our love for Christ. Paul is probably speaking primarily of Christ's love for us because verses 14-15 speak of Christ's death for us, which is the ultimate evidence of His love.

He says the love of Christ compels us. The Greek word "compelled" or "controlled" according to some translations, means to be "hemmed in" or "constrained." It's like the water of the Rogue River that is hemmed in by the banks of the river and has no choice but to follow the direction set by the banks. Paul says, "I have no choice – I'm driven, I'm controlled, I'm compelled by the love of Christ who died for me – it pushes me forward with a power that cannot be resisted."

Paul says, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." Over and over again the New Testament links the death of Christ with His love for us. Let me read you a few examples. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Galatians 2:20b says, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." 1 John 4:10 says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." And the list of verses could go on and on.

When we think of who Christ is, and who we are, the love of Christ seems almost too good to be true – that the Son of God who created all things – loved us and gave Himself for us. That's why we sing so often about His love. Karl Barth, one of the greatest theologians of the past century, was once asked to summarize all of his vast theological writings. Barth said, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Paul goes even deeper into meaning of Christ's death when he says, "We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." This reminds us that we all deserve to die for our sins, but one man – Jesus, the perfect man – died for all. Verse 21, later in the chapter, is one of the clearest explanations of what happened on the cross found in the Bible. It says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." All of us have sinned and deserve death, but one man – Christ, who had no sin – bore our sins on the cross and died in our place to pay the penalty of our sin.

When Jesus died on the cross for us, Paul says, we all died – we died to the power sin held over our lives, and have been set free to live a new life according to the Spirit. This is beautifully pictured in baptism where going under the water symbolizes death – we die to our old way of life without Christ – and then we are raised up out of the water symbolizing a the new life we have in Christ.

This means that our life is no longer our own. Verse 15 says, "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." Because Christ was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice – to die for all – we who believe in Christ should be willing to no longer live for ourselves – we should die to self and live for Christ.

Listen to how Galatians 2:20a puts it... "I have been crucified with Christ (when Jesus died, I died) and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." In Philippians 1:21 Paul says, "For me to live is Christ." Can you say that?

John Piper preached a famous sermon to a group of students called *Don't Waste Your Life*, and you can listen to it on YouTube. He tells about reading an article in Reader's Digest about a couple named Bob and Penny, who took an early retirement and moved from the Northeast to Florida where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells. Piper said, "As the last chapter before you stand before the Creator of the universe to give an account with what you did: 'Here it is, Lord—my shell collection. And I've got a good swing. And look at my boat.'" Talk about stepping on toes. But it's true. There's nothing wrong with collecting seashells, but if you are not investing your time in serving God and others, then you are living for yourself. And if you're living for yourself, then the love of Christ is not compelling you and driving you. And for that matter, the fear of God is not on your radar.

It doesn't help that we live in a self-centered, self-indulgent world where everything is focused on self. But the passage before us this morning is calling us to live for something greater and grander – something that has eternal purpose and meaning – and not just collecting seashells.

Paul devoted his life to serving God and others, and in the process, he was persecuted, slandered, imprisoned, and beaten – and here we learn why he kept going: the fear of the Lord and knowing that he would stand before Christ and give account for how he had lived his life. There was a reverential respect for God and living a life pleasing to Him. But there was also the love of Christ that compelled him – pushed him – and drove him – to take the gospel to the ends of the earth – how could he not give his life for the one who gave His life for him?

All of us need motivation. Life is not easy – there are situations and circumstances that drag us down and cause us to lose heart – there are distractions right and left that bog us down and rob us of time and energy to serve God and others – that's why we must be gripped and controlled and motivated by the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ.

And as we close in prayer, would you take this opportunity to pray quietly and ask God to renew your zeal and passion for Him and for giving your life in service to Him. If there's anything you need to confess, any lukewarm tendencies that you've drifted into, take the time to let God renew your heart and soul.