

Motivating Factors in Service

by J. Glyn Owen

The fear of God and the love of Christ are the motivating factors that inspire Christian service, leading us to persuade men to serve God and leave their sinful ways.

Duration: 47:18

Scripture: Exodus 20:20, Deuteronomy 6:13, 1 Samuel 12:14, Psalm 5:7, 2 Corinthians 5:10-15

Topics: "Service"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the two motivating factors that influence our service to God: the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ. He encourages listeners to examine their own level of influence from these motives and challenges them to be willing to cross boundaries, speak up, support evangelism efforts, and sacrificially give for the spread of the gospel. The speaker highlights the importance of being persuaded by the reality of God, the abundance of His grace, and the finality of His revelation in Jesus Christ. He reminds listeners that true conversion is a work of God, but that reasoning and truth play a role in the process of evangelism.

Transcript

Our subject this morning, as you will see from the calendar, is motivating factors in Christian service, and this is to be based on verses 11 to 15 in that great chapter that has been read to us, namely 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Those of you who were present will remember that last Lord's Day morning and evening we were meditating upon the previous half, the first half of this chapter, verses 1 to 10. In the second half, the Apostle Paul deals with two main things. The motives that should always inspire Christian service, and then toward the end, beginning with verse 18, particularly he comes to the message that the Christian has been given to declare.

It's the message of reconciliation. Now this morning we are considering the former of these, motivating factors or motives in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is it too much to take it for granted that all of us here this morning not only know our Lord Jesus Christ but desire to please Him and to serve Him in this life? If you know Him not, then the message of the last section of this chapter has got something very, very relevant to say to you.

It's the message that is of prime importance to all of us, and all of us need to hear it. Some of us have, and if any of us have not, let us do so today. The Apostle Paul says that the very word of God comes to men and women through even his lips, and he called himself the chiefest of sinners.

He put it like this, I beseech you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. This is a primary need in every human life because we have all gone astray like lost sheep. We have wandered from Him in heart, in emotions, in mind, in actual practice, in our moral living, in our spiritual concepts.

On every level, in every way, we have wandered from God and we need to be reconciled to Him. But now having become reconciled, what then? Well, the Apostle Paul tells us, if I may dare encapsulate the meaning of the passage before us today, that there is no way out of serving Him. And we shall end up with this amazing statement of his, that the love of Christ hems us in.

If we are really reconciled to God, if we have really seen the meaning of the cross and have profited from it and know that we have, then the love of Jesus Christ hems us in, it circles us around, and it leaves us no option. We simply have to serve Him. Now that is where we shall end.

Let us take the steps that the Apostle takes in order to come to that ultimate conclusion. And as we do so, may I ask you as I do myself for myself, may the Spirit of God show me and show you what He has to say to us individually as well as corporately as we come to a very singular passage such as this. God is here speaking.

Let us attune our hearts and our minds to what He has to say. Now if you look at the passage, verses 11 to 15, you will see that there are two motivating factors here. The first comes right at the beginning and the other comes at the end.

I shall read the first verse, and then verses 14 and 15. Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord. Now that is the first.

Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord. We try to persuade men. What we are plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.

Now go down the page to verse 14, and here we have the second to which I have already referred. 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.

Two motivating factors, therefore, are here, and you will see them exhibited on all hands at all times in the life of the Apostle Paul, for he lived a remarkably consistent life of service for his Lord. The fear of God and the love of Christ. And the two, not the one without the other, not the first without the second, not the second without the first.

The two wedded together, constrained him and sent him out, cast him out, catapulted him into action for his Lord, and kept him in orbit in the will of God until at last he lay down his life, having finished his course. Now let us look at these. First of all, the fear of the Lord.

Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord. We try to persuade men. Now the King James Version, great and majestic as it is, really uses a word here which is a little misleading.

It says, Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord. That is a nuance of the same word which goes beyond the concept of fear, and it goes beyond it in such a way as to exaggerate it. You see, there is a fear of God that Christian people should not know.

They have been saved from it. The terror of the Lord should be unknown to the believing men and women of every age. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And if Jesus Christ is your Savior, you believing men and women should never be terrorized by the fear of God. If you are terrorized, it means that the blood of Jesus Christ is not allowed to do its work. It means that you never see the cross of Christ standing between you and the Holy One.

It means that something is wrong. Jesus is not where he ought to be, and you are not where you ought to be. You should know no terror.

Now Paul says that categorically. This is not my idea. He says that in writing to the Romans, chapter 8 and is it the first half of verse 15, you, he says to the Romans, did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.

And the concept there is of terror. You are not a slave to terror. You are not frightened out of your wits by God.

If you know him in Christ, ungodly men and women will know that terror. Not only in this life may they know it, but they will certainly know it at the end of life. This is a very sobering note, but let me read to you one of these challenging passages from the book of Revelation.

Let me read to you from chapter 6, verses 15 and 17. There is coming a day, so we read, when the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. You see, it is described as if it has happened already.

They called to the mountain and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand? Now that is terror. That is terror.

That is not Paul's subject. It is related to it, but it is not that kind of terrorizing fear of God that makes you want to hide in the rocks from the fury of his presence. That brings us then, first of all, to the nature of the fear which inspires Christian service.

It will be clear from what has been said that there is a baneful as well as a beneficial fear. One is our friend, the other is our foe. Whence does it come, this beneficial fear of God? Such is the majesty, such is the holiness of God, that the knowledge of his nature and of his being can hardly avoid creating a fear of him in the minds of the thoughtful.

When you think of the immensity of God and the majesty of God, the sovereignty of God, as well as his sanctity, if you and I really take these things seriously, then surely, surely, surely they make us afraid. What may be utter terror in his enemies, however, who know neither Jesus Christ as Savior nor the Holy Spirit as Indweller, to change their hearts and give them peace through Christ, is transformed into a wholesome, awesome reverence in the redeemed. What is terror in the unbeliever becomes an awesome sense of reverence in the people of God.

In the Old Testament, for example, the people of God were called they that feared the Lord, they that feared the Lord. Malachi chapter 4, for example, that is just an illustration. And you have exactly the same thing in the New Testament.

And this is significant. There is no change in the New Testament. The proselytes from paganism to the Jewish faith and thereafter to Christianity were called God-fearers.

We read about Cornelius that he feared God. We read of the whole church in Antioch that they were fearers of God. There was a sense of reverence there when you entered into the presence of the community.

There was another there. There was a factor, there was an element, there was a something about the atmosphere which spelt the presence of one unseen by human eyes but felt by the human spirit. Now this wholesome fear of God which manifests itself in reverential awe found expression and should find expression not so much in an emotionally crippling dread as in a moral and spiritual respect for God and all that has to do with God.

And of course the Bible as always is very practical here. It tells us how we ought to express this. I have no time to go through all the details this morning but the Old Testament, for example, is very, very specific.

You can't riddle out of this if you really want to make sense out of it. It tells us that first of all this fear of God manifests itself in the keeping of his commandments, Exodus 20, 20, 23, in serving him, Deuteronomy 6, 13, and 24, in listening to his voice, 1 Samuel 12, 14, and in worshipping at his shrine, Psalm 5, 7. Now will you notice Paul has introduced this thread into his reasoning against the background of verse 10 which ended the last paragraph. And there in verse 10 he says, We shall all have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, in order that we may receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether good or whether evil, we shall receive exactly what is in accordance with and consistent with our works in the body.

We shall be judged. He is talking to Christian people. Now this is not the judgment which determines whether a man is saved or lost.

As I indicated last morning, Sunday morning, that has been settled out of court. That has been settled right here upon earth. We do not go to the judgment day to make peace with God.

We find him in Christ here and now, and so we know whether we are saved or lost. But the issue with the meaning, the texture of your character so-called, in terms of 1 Corinthians 13, it is what you build upon the foundation of Christ, whether it takes the character of straw, hay, wood, stubble, or of the metals that not only abide through the fire but are purified by it. Now it is against that background of verse 10 that Paul comes in verse 11 and says, Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord.

We Christian people, he says, because we believe what God has said about himself, we have a sense of awe. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I wonder whether we have allowed this to be blunted a little. I wonder how much you and I know this morning of awe in the presence of God.

I know people who have what they call a sense of awe in the presence of great men, sometimes great men who are morally utterly unworthy of our last or least thought, and yet we treat them as if they were the great beings of all creation. What do we know about an awe in the sense of an almighty God? This is a salutary reminder of some of the realities of the New Testament message. You see, our words and our works outlive us.

And the words we utter as well as the works we do in the flesh mean this. We shall receive according to the words we have uttered, the thoughts we have entertained, and the works we have done. We shall

receive accordingly at the bar of Jesus' tribunal.

Well, may we have a sense of awe as we contemplate this. Someone has said, nothing is more frequently opened by mistake than a human mouth. You know, it is true.

And that is why the psalmist prayed in Psalm 141 verse 3, Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips. For every word out of place we shall give an account, says Jesus, at the day of judgment.

And what has been spoken in secret will be announced on the housetops. And the secrets of man's hearts will be revealed. The Lord is grieved whenever we engage in murmuring or gossip.

He notes each sentence that comes from our lips, and he warns us in this quotation from the Psalms, for example, that we will have to give account of every idle word as well as every false deed. You know, there is a certain nation. I will not mention it for obvious reasons.

The nation is no worse than other nations. But there is a nation, and in one of its province there is a pagan habit, a pagan practice engaged in. There they have gods for almost every aspect of life, gods representing them in various fields.

And in one province of the country concerned they even have small kitchen gods whose special duty is to overhear the conversation within the family circle in the kitchen and in the bedroom. Now these gods are gods of paper, but somebody has put the figure, the facial figure of a god on each one. Once a year these idols, which are made of paper, are destroyed in a ritual of burning.

And the point is that when they are thus destroyed, according to this religion, their spirits leave the gods, the images, the spirits leave them and go to the sovereign creator of the earth and report on everything he has heard. You know, they have a very peculiar usage. Before they burn these gods and their spirits are thereby released to go to the sovereign creator, they smear the mouth of the gods with honey so that they give a sweet report.

You know, we laugh at that. We smile at this strange custom, yet it indicates that even pagan people have a sense of being answerable, being answerable to an almighty god. They may not know, but they have a sense that their words will come back to them.

In that they were wrong, but they were certainly correct in this. They believed that an accounting will be required. I'm sorry, they were wrong in the fact that you cannot change the record, you cannot sweeten the truth, you cannot cover it up with honey.

Our God is an all-knowing God. And whoever he was who wrote that little verse, I think he was theologically certainly correct when he said, guard your lips, for God is listening. He notes every word you say.

In the judgment books will open, all will be reviewed that day. The words we speak in time will echo in eternity, and the works we perform in time will face us before the judgment seat of Christ. And according to what we've said and thought and done, we shall receive a reward or be denied it.

To my mind, one of the greatest of Scots theologians of the last two centuries, Dr. James Denny, has a comment here which I think I must pass on. A motive so high, he says, and so stern in its purifying power,

no servant of Christ can afford to dispense with. We need something to suppress self-seeking, to keep conscience vigorous, to keep the message of reconciliation itself from degenerating into good-natured indifference, to prohibit immoral compromises and superficial healing of the soul's hurts, the fear of God.

Now the apostle takes it for granted, takes it as axiomatic, that the Corinthians and himself, that the Corinthians with himself knew something about this. Knowing therefore, he says, the fear of God, we persuade men. He brings them in with himself.

Whether it was really true of them, I do not know. Certainly it wasn't of some of them. It may have been of others.

But it was certainly true of the apostle, a realization that he was answerable for every word he uttered, every place he went to, everything he refused to do. He was answerable for all. It was with him all the time.

And he wanted to please his Lord. And he spoke of the crown that awaited him at the last, and not only him, but all those who, because they had obeyed their master, loved his appearing, looked forward to seeing his face. Now the consequences of knowing such a fear of the Lord are mentioned here in these words.

Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we persuade men. You persuade men. Now we hear quite a lot, or we did some years ago, about the hidden persuaders that we encounter on the television screen.

I'm not talking about that kind of hidden persuasion which has guile in its heart and in its spirit. But what I'm thinking of is the open persuasion. Are you a man? Are you a woman who has a sense of mission in life to persuade men of the reality of God, of the infinity of His grace, of the finality of His revelation in His Son Jesus Christ? Do you and I know anything of this? Do we deem it our life's ministry to be persuading men to leave sin and Satan and to turn to God, to serve Him and to love Him and to worship Him? In vain, my dear friend, do you hold the doctrines of grace and the teachings of the Bible if your feet have not yet begun to move in this way.

Something is miscarried. In the case of a newborn babe coming into the world, miscarriage is a tragedy. And I know what it is to be disappointed when a little one is forming in the womb and you're expecting the day of its arrival and there's a miscarriage.

Many here know that. But I'll tell you a miscarriage which is even more tragic than that. It is men and women who take the name of Jesus on their lips, who sing His praises, who believe the doctrines, who talk about the Bible, who even teach about it, but they've never gone a step to seek a soul from death.

They've never persuaded a child nor a grownup, a Gentile nor a Jew, a black nor a white, a rich nor a poor. They've never persuaded anyone to leave his way of living and turn around and become a man and a woman of God. I tell you that's a miscarriage.

Something's gone radically wrong. You wonder what it is. Now to be true to the passage here, I have to say that these words can be interpreted in two different ways.

It's very difficult for a preacher. If you want to be honest with the Word of God, it kind of knocks you out of gear a little bit. Which one are you going to choose? Well, I must let you choose.

And I can tell you what the two are, and both of them are equally possible. Paul may well be meaning by the words, we persuade men. He may well be meaning that he, in particular, is opening his mind and opening his heart and revealing his motives, as he does in this context, in order to silence those who are accusing him of being a false apostle.

Or, as we learn earlier on in this epistle, of trying to laud it over God's heritage. Or later on, around chapter 3, some people were charging him with preaching for money to get gain. And he answers them, he says, we are not traffickers in the Word of God for our own gain.

He says, I earn my own living, and so forth. He's answered those negatively. Now he comes, it would appear, if this is the right understanding of the Word, he would come and he's saying, we persuade men that we are honest before God.

Jesus Christ in Mark chapter 3. Do you remember that occasion at the end of Mark chapter 3, where his mother Mary and the rest of the family, his brothers and his sisters, went after him, because the crowds were gathered around him. And they thought that he was, beside himself, mad. And they thought he was just plain sailing into the jaws of death.

And because they loved him physically, they didn't understand him spiritually, but they loved him physically as the member of the family, they went to try and snatch him and get him out. They thought he was mad. That's the Word.

Just like the master before him, then, the apostle Paul is being charged with being madness and his reply is this, well, whether you think I'm mad or not, my madness is for God. And when I'm not mad and in myself and in control of myself, it is for your sake. So I do nothing for my own sake primarily, but for God's glory and for your good, whether I'm sane or insane, in the body or out of the body, it's for God's glory, your good.

Can you say that about your service? One commentator says this, that the real enthusiast always runs the risk of seeming crazy to lukewarm people. Kipling tells how on a world tour at a certain port, General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, boarded the ship. Booth was seen off by a horde of tambourine-beating Salvationists, as the record goes.

And the whole thing revolted Kipling, Kipling's fastidious soul. Later he got to know the general and he told him how much he disapproved of this kind of thing, the arrogance of it. And the older man, the old general, put his hand on his shoulder and he said, young man, if I thought that I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my hands and beating a tambourine with my feet, I would learn to do it.

The real enthusiast does not care if others think he is a fool, if his conscience is clear before God. You are only concerned about yourself when self is on a throne which it should not occupy. But when the glory of God and the will of God is the primary thing in your life, you do not mind men and women calling you a fool, for Christ's sake.

Can I come to the second explanation very briefly? The second possible explanation is this, and I believe that this is probably the right one, but as you note, I want to avoid any dogmatism. If we consult the book of Acts, we shall discover that the term to persuade is regularly employed by Luke to describe Paul's evangelistic work. It reflects both the determined object of his ministry and the constant method whereby he exercised that ministry.

Now, first of all, the object of Paul's evangelistic efforts was clearly to persuade men, and this brings into Paul's ministry the intellectual aspect of things. Paul was not just a scholar. Now, we must rid ourselves of this concept.

Paul appealed to the conscience, too. He does in 2 Corinthians 5 here, talking about standing before the judgment seat of Christ. That is an appeal to the conscience.

He would appeal also to the heart, to the emotions, as he does later on. The love of Christ constrains us, he says. But Paul's basic mode of evangelism was to convince men or to persuade men, the same Greek word.

He declared the truth. He reasoned from the Scriptures. And so he would persuade men and women of the fact that Jesus was the Christ, that God spoke in his Son, that the Son who spoke the Word, the truth of God, died and rose again and was ascended up on high, led captivity captive, sent forth his Holy Spirit, gave gifts to men, lives on in the church, and is King of kings and Lord of lords.

He would insist upon that, and he would reason it out. You read his messages in the book of the Acts. So that I'm not surprised when I read the book of the Acts, I find this word persuasion coming up over and over and over again.

May I give you two or three illustrations? In Thessalonica, Acts 17.4, some of the Jews were persuaded to join Paul and Silas, and did a large number of, and sorry, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. Come to Corinth in Acts 18 and verse 4. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Gentiles. Come again to Acts 19.26. This time we're in Ephesus, and Demetrius, the Ephesian silversmith whose business was being affected by converts to Christianity from paganism.

You see, says Demetrius, you see and hear how this fellow has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus, and impractically the whole province of Asia. Come again to Acts 26 and verse 28. He's before Agrippa.

Says Agrippa to him, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. Agrippa sensed the persuasive power of Paul's logic, as well as the pressure of the morality that he taught. Finally, Acts 28 and 23, Paul is in his hired house in Rome, a prisoner.

And we read that they came in large numbers to the place where he was staying from morning till evening. Now imagine this man in prison, waiting for his death, waiting for his execution. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God, and tried to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and from the prophets.

You see, Paul's evangelism was a persuasive evangelism. He expounded the word of God, and he gave a reasonable basis upon which he urged them to believe, to have faith in God. Now this reflects Paul's method of evangelism everywhere.

He did not simply appeal to the intellect. May I remind you, Paul was fully aware of the fact that mere intellectual argument can never save a soul. Go back to 2 Corinthians 4, just the last chapter.

How is a man brought to Christ? Well, he says, here it is. It is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has to shine into our hearts. The God who said in the beginning, let light shine out of darkness.

The Lord God of all creation causes the sunshine of his glory to arise in the face of Jesus Christ, and it penetrates our hearts, and we are born again. That is an act of God. Human reasoning does not bring that about, but in the process of evangelism, God apparently moves on the basis of reason and of truth, and marches into the soul of men by the Spirit to take control, to bring life and forgiveness.

The motivating force of the fear of God. I have taken a lot of time with this, and I have no time to go on this morning, but I want to press it home because it is the missing link in so many of our lives. How very tragic that so many people have not let this sobering truth work its purifying effect into their lives, so that in the secret chambers of their mind they entertain thoughts and images that would cause them the uttermost shame if they were shown on a large screen in public company.

People read books. Christians read books and look at films. They would shudder.

They would hide their faces if a God-fearing man entered the room and saw what they were doing, because they do not live in the presence of a God whom they know is holy and just, and they know nothing of this awe and reverence for the Holy One. I heard the other day of a minister that I have been speaking of is not confined to Christians in the pew. I heard of a minister who had read in the paper that a very famous actor would be performing in a local theater.

What he was doing on the stage was not altogether wholesome, but the minister felt he ought to try and see what this man was doing, and he wrote him a letter, and he asked him, and I am quoting, Are there any side doors to the theater? I would like to hear you, but I do not want my people to see me there. And the actor sent a little curt reply on a card. My dear sir, the theater where I am performing has no doors that God does not see.

Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. My good friend, has the reality of the holiness of God ever got under your skin? That you are afraid to sin? Now, I cannot go on with my second point this morning. Your listening is very gracious.

I just want to refer it to you before you in order for you to see that the Bible is always complete and balanced. It is not all the fear of God. It says, Paul, the other main spring to Christian action is this.

The love of Christ constrains me. It hedges me in. Well, Paul, how on earth do you move from the one thought to the other in this way, of course? Naturally, as sinners, we have a dread of God.

The dread of God is transformed into a wholesome fear of God only through the cross of Christ. Christ died for our sins. He took our death that we should take his righteousness and life.

And so, says Paul, this being so, this being so, the love of Christ in dying for me and in bringing me to life through his resurrection, the love of Christ, it hedges me in. It compels me. It constrains me.

I can do no other. Can you see these two motives? The one coming from the one side and the other from the other side. And in the middle here is a man who comes under the influence of the things of God that his character is molded and his service is determined.

And he becomes an influence for the spreading of the gospel of the grace of God and the honor of his name. I don't know what you think, but I know what I think. Oh, I'd like to approximate this image.

How far are we really influenced either by the fear of God or the love of Christ? Enough to make us cross the street, open our lips, support those who do, pray for the evangelization of the world, and give until it costs. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Love so amazing, so divine, demands.

Of course it does. The logic of Calvary is this, that no man should live to himself for whom Christ died. No man for whom Christ died should live for himself, but his whole experience should be decentralized and he lives not for himself but for the Christ who died and is risen again.

May the Spirit of God bring us there today. There may be a crisis in some of our lives. You may not have expected a crisis on a morning like this, a lovely summer's morning.

Perhaps you're sorry you came to Knox. Something has disturbed you. Before you go, my friend, I'm going to ask you to do something.

Do something. Acknowledge the fact that God's holiness has had such little impact upon you. Acknowledge the fact that the love of Christ has hardly begun to influence you.

Will you do that? Say the truth, of course. Don't exaggerate. If the love of Christ is the compelling force along with the fear of God, then say so.

Thank God for his grace. But if not, acknowledge your sins. From this day and from this morning, say to the Lord, your God and your Father, say to your Savior who bled for you, I want to be what you meant me to be.

By your grace, I will now begin. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, your word is a strange word.

Many people think it's a dead letter. Evidently, they haven't come under its power. But we thank you that the Spirit who gave us the word does, according to his own sovereign will and purpose, take that same word and clothe himself with it so that it becomes a shaft from the throne to shatter our complacency and to reform our lives.

Spirit of God, we ask that you do in me and in us, do for me and for all of us, do through me and through all of us. What do you want to do? Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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