

Text: 2 Cor 5:11-17

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Main Point

Motives of an Ambassador at Work

Introduction

Hook

Good morning, please turn to your bibles to 2 Cor 5. We are going to be looking at verses 11 to 16.

This morning, we are going to be talking about motivation.

It is amazing what someone will do with the right motivation.

I remember when I was a teenager we were visiting someone's farm, and the owner thought it would be fun to offer 20 dollars to whoever could hold on to his electric fence for at least 30 seconds. And sure enough, that was enough motivation for me to grab the fence and hold on.

I also have a friend who was happy to eat a live cockroach for 50 dollars.

Money, Fear, love, are all strong motivators. And we can do crazy, painful and embarrassing things when motivated by them.

Today I want to talk about motivation about something that can be crazy, painful and embarrassing too. Today we are going to be talking about motivation for evangelism.

Initial thoughts on evangelism

My conviction and personal experience is that we all need more motivation in our evangelism. Be it to combat fear, apathy, laziness or whatever is hindering us to evangelise. We need all the motivation we can get.

Let me just say some initial thoughts about evangelism before we begin though.

When I say evangelism, I simply mean teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade others. A simple definition, but one we will refer back to: Teaching the Gospel with the aim to persuade others.

And the purpose of this study is not to persuade you that evangelism is part of our role as Christians. I trust you all know we are all to be ambassadors for Christ.

But let me remind you here, from the beginning, that evangelism can happen everywhere. Sometimes we just think of evangelism as reduced to only sharing the gospel on the street or door knocking.

These things are good, but evangelism primarily occurs in other contexts. It can happen at home and around the dinner table, with parents teaching the gospel to their kids or sharing the gospel with people over for dinner. It can happen around the lunch table, or in the car as we talk to our colleagues.

We all know people who do not yet know Jesus. From our unsaved children, and unsaved family to our colleagues and neighbours. We are all on mission, we are all ambassadors.

And we need all the motivation we can get ***to teach the gospel with the aim to persuade others.***

So let us read the passage together, and begin this study of the motives of an ambassador at work.

[READ TEXT]

Background

Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthians, and in this section, Paul is defending his integrity as an apostle. False teachers had started to undermine the integrity of Paul which in turn was undermining the integrity of the Gospel that Paul had taught. So, in his defence Paul, explains his motives for sharing the Gospel, and so from this defence we can learn what a faithful ambassador is motivated by.

Outline

And so, as said before, that is the main idea of the sermon this morning: The **Motives of an ambassador at work** (as opposed to an ambassador at rest, at base camp or at home). When the ambassador is on the coal front, in the trenches, doing his work what must be his motivation?

we will see that he is

1. Motivated by right knowledge (v11-13)
2. Motivated by right conclusion (v14-15)
3. Motivated by right regard (v16)

Part 1 – Motivated by Right Knowledge (1100)

Exposition (600)

Fear of the Lord (v11a) - 200

So let us begin by seeing how the ambassador of Christ is to be motivated by right knowledge.

Have another look at the start of verse 11.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

Paul has a right knowledge of the fear of the Lord. And notice how vivid and forefront the fear of the Lord is to Paul. Paul is aware that every action, every thought, and every intention is seen by Jesus and will be judged. Will Jesus judge his actions, thoughts and intentions as good or as evil?

Just look up to verses 9 and 10 to see Paul's vivid knowledge of this impending judgement.

⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Now we all agree, that the good or evil here is not talking of being saved or condemned to Hell. Paul's good deeds don't save him but there is still a reward for doing good deeds. And Paul is intent on pleasing Him, knowing that he will be judged by him.

We humans have a tendency to work harder when our boss is watching. We all know that feeling. You start working just a little bit harder, or being extra polite with that customer, hoping they will notice your good work and maybe reward you for it, or at least not find any fault

But Jesus is constantly watching, recording, filing your works and he does not forget. He will one day give you the due reward for every single action.

Paul is living with this reality in his mind. This right knowledge is driving him to a healthy fear of the Lord and letting that motivate his actions.

Application - Do you have a healthy fear of the Lord?

So the question we need to ask yourselves is do you hold this reality in the forefront of your mind? Do you realize that Jesus knows your every action, every thought and every intention? And do you let that influence your choices? Do you let that become the driving force to the topics of conversation you initiate?

Do you have a healthy fear of the Lord?

How often do we forget that Jesus sees us? It is like if we needed signs saying “security camera operating” everywhere we go. How differently would you do your work as an ambassador if there was a journalist following you everywhere and recording the conversations you had or did not have? The opportunities you took and the opportunities you neglected?

Knowing Jesus sees all things is critical to our motivation as ambassadors.

Because at the end of the day, it comes down to a simple choice. Who do you want to please? Your friend or Jesus? Your colleague or Jesus? Your child or Jesus? We get immediate approval from those around us, but it is worthless if Jesus is not pleased. And you will quickly find that you can't please everyone – Simply not possible.

So, who will it be?

Not hypocrites/ above reproach by those who know him (v11b - 12)

But Paul also has the right knowledge of a clear conscience. Notice the second half of verse 11.

But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

It seems people who did not like Paul or his message and were accusing him. Accusing him of all sorts of things, but specifically that he was trying to glorify himself and that he was a hypocrite, not practicing what he preached.

But Paul has been proclaiming the Gospel from a possession of strength. Paul's conscience was clear. Before God, Paul had nothing to be ashamed about. And for the sake of protecting the Gospel he hopes the Corinthians will see that too. Paul had spent 18 Months with the Corinthians and knew that they knew he was not a hypocrite.

And then see verse 12

In explaining his motives for his work as an ambassador, he hopes to give ammunition to his friends so that they can defend him. And at the same time he puts the charge back on his opponents that they are the hypocrites, more concerned with appearances than what is in their heart.

¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.

Application – Responding to opposition

When we are witnesses, when we are ambassadors we will receive opposition. That is in the job description. Faithful Christians will receive opposition, but that opposition is water off a ducks back when you stand in God's approval.

When we teach the Gospel with the aim to persuade, people will easily judge our motives and intentions.

You may be accused of wanting to boost numbers in your church, or that you want their money, or that you want everyone to think in the same way you do. Or that you are a hypocrite just like all the other "Christians" who don't practice what they preach.

And in these scenarios, there is so much strength in being able to know that "*what we are is known to God*". Yes, accusations will fly, and we can try to correct some for the sake of protecting the message, but knowing that our conscience is clear before God is where the strength will come from. We don't need to be discouraged because people misread our motives and condemn us.

Draw strength from the fact that what you are is "known to God" not from the approval of men.

Right knowledge brought Zeal for the Glory of God and People

In a similar vein, verse 13 reminds us that appearing to be a fool, is actually ok.

Paul was so fanatical about the truth, so committed to the Word of God, so unswerving in his convictions that he was accused of being crazy. The he was imbalanced.

That he was mentally unwell. That he was beside himself.

Paul responds to this accusation by saying

¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

He says, “sure call me crazy if you want. But I am crazy for God. Yes! I will stand unswerving to the truths of the gospel. Yes! I will hold to the clear teaching of scripture.”

His desire for God’s truth to be proclaimed, believed and exalted made him passionate and zealous.

Paul was fanatical about Jesus, but not mentally ill.

Giving up his comfortable, respected life is crazy. Spending his money and energy so that he was constantly in need and in danger is crazy. Proclaiming a message that he knows people would stone him for is crazy. Returning to a city where people tried to kill him is crazy.

But if he is crazy it is for God.

Application - Ok for people to think you are a fool.

In a way, Paul embraced this accusation: You say I am beside myself? I cannot disagree. I am beside myself because I am for Jesus. Paul wears this as a badge really. Think of Romans 1: 16

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The world, the unbeliever will try to make you feel ashamed of the Gospel, to make you feel like a fool

because of the Gospel, but we should be more than ok with this, we can embrace this.

Our goal is not to be approved by men, but to persuade them of the saving realities of the gospel. Often these two are at opposites. At best they will think you are crazy and at worst they will hate you. But when motivated by the knowledge that the truth we are proclaiming is God's truth we can be ok with this and even embrace this.

Link

We have seen that Paul was, and we too must be, motivated by the knowledge of the fear of the lord, by the knowledge of a clear conscience, and also by the knowledge of truth.

Which brings us to the second part of our study, where we will see the ambassador motivated by Right conclusions.

Part 2 – Motivated by the Right Conclusion (v14-15)

Exposition

He died for all who believe in him

When we talk of motivations for being witnesses, they are not all equal. All are valid, all are true, but not all have the same weight and driving force.

In verse 14, Paul declares a conclusion, a conviction that motivates him head and shoulders above the rest. This is his main engine of motivation: He says:

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

Paul is saying, "I don't care what you think my motives are. Do you want to know what truly motivates me? The fact that Jesus died for me. It is that simple. The fact that Jesus gave his life in my place. I deserved to die but he died instead. That motivates me to live for him and proclaim this good news to all who would hear."

A correct conviction of Jesus's work of atonement on the cross is key to a right motivation to evangelise.

Paul understood keenly the love of Christ, he felt it in his soul because he knew what it meant to be guilty before a holy God. He knew what it felt like to deserve eternity in hell because of his sin. And he knew what it felt like for another to take that punishment in his place and be declared Righteous.

Had experienced the love of Christ.

Paul has been rescued and he wants others to be rescued too. The price which was paid for the rescue is too high for him to remain silent.

Application - Has Jesus died for you?

Have you experienced the love of Christ. Do you understand how Jesus loves you? And I am not talking about an emotion you may have felt or not felt. The love of Christ is much more concrete than that. And it all boils down to a simple question:

What is your conclusion about the death of Jesus.

Why did Christ die? And what does it matter for you?

Do you conclude like Paul that he died for your sins? That Jesus took the punishment you deserved and that he bore the wrath of God in your place?

If that is your conclusion, then you have experienced the love of Christ.

But if you do not accept Jesus as the one who paid for your sins, you have not experienced the love of Christ. You are still a condemned sinner and will pay the punishment for your own sins. If you do not trust in Jesus as your saviour, you will go to Hell when you die.

But further, if you have experience the love of Christ, how do you hold this fact? Do you simply know it to be true and it has no effect on your life? Do you hold it as you would the fact that you need at least 19.5 % of oxygen to stay alive? and that the force of gravity is 9.81 meters per second squared? These facts vital for life, but not things that you hold in the forefront of your mind.

Is this conviction, that Jesus died for you, rooted deep down in you, controlling your thoughts and actions?

Notice the impact this conviction has on Paul.

This love that Christ displays Controls Paul

Look at the start of verse 14.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us,

The love Jesus showed to Paul is the dominating truth that controls Paul. The love of Christ controls Paul.

We can think of this control in both a positive and negative sense. On one hand he is driven, pressed and pressured to take certain actions. He is drawn and pulled in a certain direction.

But on the other hand there is also a restraining control. He is hemmed, directed, confined to say NO to certain things because of the love of Christ. And this goes beyond saying no to sin. He is saying no to distractions, to weights, and to temporal things.

The love Christ is like the banks of a river. Controlling not only where he will go, but also where he will not go.

Live for Him

Simply put, the Love of Christ shows Paul he can no longer live for himself. Since Jesus died for him, he has no choice but to live for Christ. But more than that, Paul has no right to lead a self-serving life anymore. But he also has no desire to live a self-serving life. Continue reading in verse 15 the confronting, but simple truth.

*¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves **but for him** who for their sake died and was raised.*

Paul here is describing the fundamental principle of repentance. Christ died for me therefore I live for him.

Humans by nature live for themselves. By our nature we make decisions which maximize our happiness, amplify our self-esteem, protect our pride, and ensure our comfort. We go to great lengths to get what we want, to do what we want, to be what we want. This all stems from our sinful heart where we are the king of our little world.

But when you conclude that He has died for you, you cannot live for yourself any longer. In fact, we are told that we must put the self to death, that we must live

for Christ. We must remove Self as the king of our hearts and allow Christ to sit as king in our hearts.

- His will be done, not our own.
- His glory perused, not our own.
- His desires obeyed, not our own.

Application – don't live for yourself

Now this is fundamental to all areas of our life as Christians. This must be the guiding principle for everything that we do or say no to. Jesus is king, we are his subject. But the focus of this passage is on being his ambassadors. The focus is on sharing the gospel with the aim to persuade others.

The idea of looking like a fool, having an uncomfortable conversation, being marginalised, having our pride wounded, and labelled in negative light does not come naturally to us.

The Self hates this, but if the love of Christ controls us, who cares about these things? Here we see this battle of loyalties all too clearly. Obey the desires of self or the desires of Christ.

The sooner you realize that this life is not about you, nor about your happiness, or your comfort, or your little kingdom, the sooner you will feel free to take actions which glorify Christ and not yourselves. You don't need to defend yourself against every attack, you don't need to fear looking like a fool or missing out on happiness, because Jesus is king, not you.

Self-preservation is our natural tendency, but the love of Christ controls us to live for him.

This life is not about doing the minimum work in order to have the most fun. That is what the world believes

so dearly. And what Satan wants you to think. This life is about obeying Jesus and being his witnesses.

This is what underpins Paul's work as an ambassador, and this is what must underpin our work as ambassadors.

The love of Christ controls us.

Link

But let us move on from the Right conclusion to the Right Regard, which brings us to the third and final part of our study.

Part 3 – Motivated by the Right Regard (v16)

Exposition

Overview

Flowing on from the right conclusion about the death of Christ, comes motivation from a right regard for people and a right regard for Jesus.

Look at verse 16 again.

*¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we **regard** no one according to the flesh. Even though we once **regarded** Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.*

Other people not according to the flesh

To regard people according to the flesh would be to look to outward appearance, to worldly standard of success or poverty. To accept the facade that "everything is fine", or the assessment that "that

person is too far gone". To regard people according to the flesh is to believe that a person is nothing more than molecules which happened by chance with no purpose or intrinsic value.

But to regard people, not according to the flesh, but according to the Truth could be summarized with two ideas. They have Inherent value and inherent sinfulness.

On the one side a right regard of people has a high view of people. People have value simply because of who they are. Humans are made in the image of God. They have intrinsic dignity and esteem. What more humans have been made for a high purpose. People have been made to worship and glorify the God of God and the king of kings. People are image bearers with the purpose of reflecting God's glory

But on the other side a right regard of people has correct view of the sinfulness of people. Since the fall, people by nature is are rebels against God. Criminal in the sight of God. Idolators in heart and action.

And so of course a right regard for people is a great motivation to evangelise. Without the message of the gospel, people will die without a saviour, and pay the punishment for their sin. Without believing in Jesus, people will go to Hell for eternity. People are on the path to eternal torment and we have the truth to save them from that torment. We hold the map of escape. We know the way to the rescue boats.

Application - How do you see others?

And so in our work as ambassadors, we must hold a right regard for people.

Sometimes it feels like life is a play. To often we believe the mask and the costume with no regard to the person underneath or the realities of life once the play is over.

We know that things are not right, they know things are not right and it is tragic when, both parties are all too happy to pretend everything is fine.

We must remember the value of people, and we must remember the seriousness of sin. Death is imminent. Let them hear the gospel of salvation before it is too late. Let that motivate us to share the gospel with the aim to persuade them. They reject it to their peril, but let us plea with them because we know the value they have and the punishment a sinner must face.

Christ not according to the flesh

But the motivation from a right regard for people is compounded by the right regard for Christ.

Paul, like all of us, once regarded Jesus according to the flesh.

For Paul, Jesus was not only simply a man, He was a heretic, He was a blasphemer and a false teacher. He was popular with the masses and disrupted the temple and synagogues. In Paul's original view, the teachings was influencing too many people and it had to be stopped.

But he regards Jesus according to the flesh no longer. As Paul is writing this, he regards Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. He regards Jesus for who He is as saviour and Lord. He regards Jesus as the way the truth and the life, the light of the world and the good shepherd.

Jesus is the one who has crushed the head of the serpent and defeated sin and death. Jesus is Prophet, Priest and King.

Jesus is Lord.

Application - How do you regard Christ now?

How often do we regard Christ according to the flesh? And what a hindrance that is to our efforts of evangelism.

We tend to use our own lenses or the lenses of the world to regard Christ. Some regard Christ as merely a good moral teacher. Some regard Christ as a social liberator. Some regard Christ as merely an example for us to follow.

But we must not regard Christ according to the flesh. We cannot use our agendas, or our flesh to form our regard of Christ.

The Bible tells us how to regard Christ. There is much to learn to attain a truly right regard of Christ, but as we study the Bible and put to death our flesh, we will grow in our regard of Who Jesus is. And as our knowledge of Christ becomes close to the truth, our motivation for evangelism will grow.

For example when we understand that He is priest, we realize that He has secured our salvation and is interceding for us. And so we want this work of salvation and intercession to be true to others as well.

Or think of his office of King. He rules with all authority and one day he will return to establish his Kingdom. He will gather his people to himself and all his enemies will receive their just punishment. But in the meantime, he wants as many of these enemies to

join his people so that they may be saved. We have a part to play before our King returns.

So as you can see, a correct regard of Christ is monumental to our work as ambassadors. He is who we are representing after all. We had better have a right regard in our won mind so that we can representing him right.

Right Regard for People and for Jesus brings hope

The right regard of people and of Jesus brings real hope. Sinful humans can be made into new creations.

Look at verse 17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Those who accept Jesus as their lord and saviour will be made into new creations. They will be transformed and continue to be transformed.

Evangelism has a glorious goal in sight: to see fallen humans transformed into new creations, saved from Hell, and reconciled to God.

Conclusion

As we bring this study to a close, I don't want us to forget God's grace in the midst of our evangelism. Despite these striking motivations, we know evangelism is hard. We know we face fears, discouragement and apathy.

And it is hard because it is part of killing the flesh, part of killing the Self, part of our sanctification.

And so, when you realize you have missed an opportunity, or you find yourself remaining silent, or you are overwhelmed by fear and self-preservation, remember His grace.

When you walk away feeling like you have failed once again, when you feel discouraged and disheartened, and you wonder how you could be so weak, remind yourself of God's grace.

Remind yourself that He is doing a work in you. Turn to him for strength, turn to him for the words and turn to him for the motivation. He is working on you and through you.

Turn to His word and to a passage such as this one where we are shown the motivations for the ambassador at work.

Turn to His word and remind yourself to be motivated by the Right Knowledge.

1. Motivated by Knowing that Jesus is watching and He will one day give you the due reward for every single action.
2. Motivated by Knowing that your conscience is clear before the holy God.
3. And motivated by knowing that you hold the very word of God in your hands and heart which is able to save

Turn to His word and remind yourself to be motivated by the Right conclusion

1. The right conclusion about the death of Christ: That he died for you.
2. That his death, and the meaning of his death, would become the controlling factor in your life. That the love of Christ would control you.

3. And that you would no longer live for yourself, But for him in all things.

And finally turn to his word and remind yourself to be motivated by the right Regard

1. The right regard for people, who have intrinsic value, but who, in their natural state, are destined to eternal punishment in hell.
2. And finally, the right regard for Jesus, not seeing him according to the flesh, but seeing him as the Bible portrays him. As Priest, Prophet, King, as great shepherd, as head of the church, as Lord as Saviour, as God and as much more.

There is no question that we are weak in our work as ambassadors. But in our weakness we are strong in Him. And our human frailty means that all the glory goes to Him when His Gospel is proclaimed and people respond positively.

Let us pray,