

We have arrived at 2 Corinthians 5:11-19 in our series *Beautifully Broken: Lessons in Second Corinthians*. This is a passage of scripture where the apostle Paul talks about motives. We all know beneath the surface of every outward action is an inward motive. The dictionary says a motive is “a reason for doing something, especially one that’s hidden or not obvious.” Interestingly, the word motive comes from the same root word as motor. Like a motor, motives cause us to move forward.

Sometimes our motives are good and sometimes not so good. Sometimes our motives are healthy and sometimes not so healthy. The actor, Hugh Jackman, who played lead roles in *X-Men* and *Les Misérables*, describes some of the deep wounds from childhood that still define his motives years later. When he was eight, his mother abandoned him, his father, and his four siblings. When he finally realized his mother was gone for good, he was too scared to enter his house alone. His father compensated for his own pain by working long hours as an accountant. In a 2013 interview, Jackman said, “My father could only come to one [school sports] game a year because he had five kids, and on Saturday he had to shop. If my father was there, it would be 50 percent greater.” And then he said something so telling: “Having his approval is something that still drives me.” Indeed, one of the deepest motives driving many of us is the need for approval, and sometimes we’re not even aware of it.

Motives play an important part in our lives. And we know even though our motives might not be entirely clear to us or others, God knows our motives. Proverbs 21:2 says, “*A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart.*” We can fool others, we can even fool ourselves, but we can’t fool the Lord when it comes to our motives.

What motivates you to do what you do? As followers of Christ, what should motivate us? It’s these questions Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 5:11-19. He was accused by some in Corinth of having impure motives in his ministry. They said he was in it for himself. Some judged Paul purely on externals. He wasn’t as impressive to them as they thought an apostle should be, and they judged his motives based on that. So Paul needed to explain what really drove him to do what he did. In doing so, he revealed two powerful motives for every follower of Christ.

### **We are Motivated by the Fear of the Lord**

**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. vv. 11-13**

The first thing that should motivate us might surprise you—the fear of the Lord. He says, “*Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord...*” Remember Paul has just finished saying in verse 10 that we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and so we need to read this in light of that. Part of what it means to fear the Lord is to understand the day will come when everything is brought to light, and our lives are an open book before him.

But it’s not that we fear his punishment. Here’s where we often misunderstand what the fear of the Lord means. You might have grown up in a religious environment where that’s all you ever heard. You were taught to fear God, or else! Fear was more like terror. You were taught to relate to God like a cowering dog ready to get a beating from his angry owner. That kind of fear doesn’t motivate us; it paralyzes us. It’s a fear devoid of trust. In the end, it doesn’t draw us near to God but causes us to resent him.

I had a football coach in high school like that. He was stern and demanding, even unpredictable. I felt I could rarely please him. I had nightmares of him humiliating me and benching me. We had a drill called “the perfection drill” where he made us run the same play over and over again until we got it absolutely perfect, right down to our socks being pulled up properly! Some of us view God that way—stern, demanding, and unpredictable. The Christian life has become for us a perfection drill where we never feel like we can please him.

But that’s not what the scripture means when it encourages us to fear the Lord. What it really means is to have a deep reverence for God as One who’s not only holy but also good and loving. It’s a fear which is able to trust. Maybe you grew up in a home where your father was a man who loved you, a man you could trust. But he also held you accountable because he wanted the best for you. You feared him, but you also wanted to please him. That’s what Paul means by the fear of the Lord. It’s a fear coupled with faith. Faith in his goodness, his sovereignty, his love, and his grace is what governs your life.

Paul even tells us what the fear of the Lord motivates us to do. Three things: First, this fear moves us to persuade others. Far from paralyzing us, the fear of the Lord drives us to persuade others to see that Jesus is a Savior who came to offer them forgiveness and hope. When you try to persuade someone, you do it because you know something big is at stake. It's so important you're even willing for the conversation to become uncomfortable. There's the possibility you'll be ridiculed or rejected. Let me ask you, is there anyone at all in your life you're trying to persuade? In our postmodern culture, it's not cool to try to persuade people of the truth. Why? Because our culture says truth is whatever you make it, and everyone is entitled to their own truth. But we believe Jesus is the truth. And so we try to persuade people.

Second, the fear of the Lord causes us to live as an open book before God. That's why he says, *"What we are is plain to God..."* It's like he's saying, "Listen, I know God sees right through me to the very core of who I am. That drives all I do." It's funny, in a kind of tragic way, how we think we can hide things from God. We keep these little secrets with ourselves, and we think we're safe. We can even have a small group and accountability partners, yet we hide and lie to them. But God sees right through us, and a healthy dose of the fear of the Lord reminds us of that.

Third, the fear of the Lord causes us not to live in fear of others. He says, *"What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience."* Then he says he's not trying to commend himself to them, but he wants them to be able to answer his critics. His critics judged Paul as a loser. Instead of looking at his heart, they looked at his outward appearance, which wasn't very impressive, and wrote him off. In fact, some even said he was out of his mind. So he says, *"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 was in good company here. That word he uses for "out of our mind" is used only one other time in Scripture. In Mark's gospel, Jesus' own family accused him of being "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). That's exactly what some were saying about Paul. But Paul didn't live in fear of man. So he says, "If you all think we're a bit off our rocker, we do it for God. But if we're in our right mind, we do it for you." In other words, whether you think we're acting irrationally or rationally, we do what we do out of love for you and love for God." The fear of the Lord brings that kind of fearlessness. When we fear the Lord, we won't fear people. We care about people, we love people, but we're not controlled by their judgments and opinions of us.

So let me summarize: As followers of Christ, we're motivated by the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord motivates us to persuade people, live as an open book before God, and not live in fear of others. I love the way Oswald Chambers put it: "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear

everything else." Do you have a healthy fear of God? Are you letting your fear of God dispel all other fears?

## **We're Motivated by the Love of Christ**

But there's something else we're motivated by. I'd say this is an even higher motivation than the fear of the Lord. Look what Paul says next.

**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. vv. 14-15**

The second thing that motivates us is Christ's love for us. Isn't that interesting? When we really understand the fear of the Lord, we'll also know the love of the Lord. Fear and love can go together. This is not talking about our love for Christ but his love for us. This is the greatest and most fundamental truth in the Bible.

On April 23, 1962, Karl Barth, considered by many the top theologian of the 20th century, spoke at Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago. During the Q & A time, a student asked Barth if he could summarize his theology in one sentence. Barth responded, "In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

When I became a Christian in 1974, the first thing that flooded my heart was God's love for me. I'd never read the Bible, but somehow, I knew he loved me and would never leave me. Paul describes this in Romans 5:5, where he says, *"God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."* And then in Ephesians 3, he prays we'd actually grow in our capacity to understand his love. He prays that we

**...being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...17b-19a**

The Christian life begins with God pouring his love into our hearts through the Spirit, and it continues as we grow in our grasp of the magnificent dimensions of that love. All our discipleship and service must come from the knowledge of his love. Otherwise, our service and discipleship is a futile attempt to earn his love, which we can never do.

Paul says the love of Christ "compels us." Another translation says it "constrains us." The word means to be shut in or hemmed in. It's like we're held captive by his love with no option but to respond. Calvin wrote, "Everyone who truly considers that wonderful love becomes as it were bound to him, and constrained by the closest tie, and devotes himself wholly to his service."

It takes effort to keep that sense of his love alive in our hearts and minds. I wish I could say it comes naturally to me, but it

doesn't. I have to work at it, to cultivate it. When I read the Bible devotionally, I look for signs of his love. I underline those verses. When I pray, I try to get in touch again with his love for me. Maybe that's what Jude meant when he wrote, "*Keep yourselves in God's love...*" (Jude 1:21a).

Paul had to work at this as well. Look again at what he says, "*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all...*" When he says, "we are convinced," he uses a word that means he pondered this long and hard and came to a rational conclusion. And the thing that convinced him most of the love of Christ is that he died for us. It's that simple. How do I know he loves me? Because he died for me, and not just me but all of us. Jesus himself said, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (John 15:13).

I heard a story about a boy named Johnny, whose sister Mary needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained to him that his sister had the same disease Johnny had recovered from two years earlier. His sister's only chance of recovery was a transfusion from someone who'd already recovered from the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

So the doctor asked him, "Are you willing to give your blood to Mary?"

Johnny hesitated. His lower lip began to tremble. But then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister."

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital. Neither of them spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny just smiled. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched his blood flow through the tube.

When the ordeal was almost over, he broke the silence with a trembling voice, "Doctor," he said, "When do I die?" Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated in the first place—he thought giving his blood meant giving his life. In that brief moment, he'd made the decision to die for his sister. Of course, he didn't have to die for his sister.

Each one of us has a disease far more serious than Mary's. It's called sin. And Jesus did have to die for us to live. And he did so willingly. That's how we know he loves us. We're celebrating Thanksgiving this week, and we're doing that in 2020, which has been perhaps the hardest year of our lives. So many losses, so much pain, and strife. But we can still give thanks because we know he loves us and he died for us.

And this love changes us. It reorients our whole existence. That's why he says, "One died for all, and therefore all died." Jesus didn't just die for us; we died with him! Our old life is dead and gone. When Augustine returned home after becoming a Christian, his former mistress called out to him, "Augustine, Augustine, it is I!"

He turned to her and said, "Yes, but it is not I." When Christ died, our old way of life does as well.

And look at how that changes our motives as well. He 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." Christ's love motivates us to live, not for ourselves but for him. That's our new mission—not to live for ourselves, but for him who died for us and was raised again. We no longer make decisions based on what's in it for us. We no longer look at our relationships in terms of what we get out of it. We no longer think about our careers in terms of money, power, and status. We no longer spend our money according to what will best serve our purposes and make us happy. We no longer conduct our love life according to what brings immediate gratification. Instead, we are always asking the question, "What does God want me to do?"

That's why a Christian might give up a promising career in medicine to go on the mission field. Or a single woman in her forties might refuse a marriage proposal. Or a high school student might choose to stay home on a Friday night rather than party with his friends. Why? Because "we no longer live for ourselves but for him who died for us and was raised again." And, trust me, if you live like that, there'll be people who think you're pretty weird. That's just not how the world operates. The world says you're in charge of your life; you call the shots. So Christ's love will motivate you to live for him rather than for yourself. But that's not all. It will also change the way we look at other people. Paul goes on and says,

**So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! vv. 16-17**

If Christ's love is such that he died for all, how can we go on viewing people according to worldly, human, and fleshly standards? If Jesus is in the business of making a new creation, how can we go on looking at the old things? Things like, how much money do you make? What kind of clothes do you wear? What school did you go to? What kind of car do you drive? Those things no longer define us.

Paul uses Jesus as exhibit A. He says, "*Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*" There was a time we saw Christ from a worldly point of view. What does that mean? He didn't come from an important family. He was considered the illegitimate son of a faithless woman, born in a dingy stable, raised in nowhereville by a couple of peasants. He had no formal education. He had no money, having to be supported by a few women. He never owned a home. He died as a common criminal and was buried in a borrowed tomb. That's what Jesus

was from a worldly point of view. But this man, who the world judged a loser, is the King of kings and Lord of lords!

One of the gifts God has given our church is diversity. Rich and poor; old and young; blue collar and white collar; Asian, black, white, and brown. And diversity thrives only when we no longer judge one another from a worldly point of view. Instead, we see each other as a new creation in Christ, or as the NIV puts it, as part of the new creation God will bring to fulfillment in his Kingdom. The love of Christ frees us to do that. There's one more thing Christ's love motivates us to do.

**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. vv. 18-19**

The love of Christ compels us and motivates us to have a ministry of reconciliation. God reconciled us to himself through Christ. He did it, not us. He made a way for this broken relationship to be mended. He did it through Christ, who died so our sins wouldn't be counted against us. In fact, they were counted against him!

And with that, he's given us the message of reconciliation. This is a message and a ministry given to all of us. You don't have to get permission from the staff or elders here at CPC to have this ministry. That is your responsibility before God. He put you in your neighborhood; he ordained where you work. He intends for you to reach out to those around you with this message of reconciliation.

Notice our job isn't to go around and tell people how mad God is at the way they've been living their lives. A lot of Christians think their job is to scare people about hell and judgment, so they'll become Christians. But that isn't our message.

If you're reading this and you're not a follower of Jesus, our message is:

**God loves you; he's reaching out to you. He's removed everything that's kept you separated from him. He sent his Son to die so your sins no longer need be counted against you. We share that with you not as if we're above you but as those who've received this wonderful gift of reconciliation with our Creator.**

When you think about all of this, it's quite clear that the Christian life is different. I mean, we seek to persuade people with a very exclusive but universal truth; we live to please a God we can't

even see; we're willing to be called "out of our mind" in doing so; we no longer evaluate people by standards everyone else deems important.

The question is, how can we sustain that kind of life? How can we keep swimming upstream? How can we stay faithful to those unseen realities when it appears that they get us nowhere in this life? There's only one way we can do that—by being so grounded in the twin pillars of the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ that they motivate and drive everything we do. Fear and love are almost like the two opposite scales of a balance; when one rises, the other sinks, but we need both.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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