

2 Cor 5:11-15 Motivations for Ministry, part 1

Listen to a recent statement from a famous Hollywood celebrity:

“For so long, I did what made other people happy. And I think in the last two years I decided, I’m going to make myself happy ... And that feels really good. ... I think it’s important to be honest with yourself about what really makes you happy ... I’ve chosen myself. I think it’s OK to choose [yourself].”

“My 40s are about being Team Me. I’m going to eat well. I’m going to work out. I’m going to have more fun, spend more time with my kids and the people who make me happy,” she said.¹

If you are a pagan or an atheist, that’s a perfectly reasonable position to take. Look out for number one; make yourself happy; make sure “Team Me” wins.

What motivates that kind of an attitude? Selfishness, self-love, narcissism. Self-centeredness motivates people like her to put themselves first, to pursue their own happiness, to choose self above all else. Their highest motivation is self. Their ultimate goal is pleasure—hedonism.

Biblical Christianity teaches the exact opposite attitude. Instead of self-centeredness, we should be God-centered. Instead of pursuing our own interests, we should consider the interests of others. Our highest motivation is not the love of ourselves, but the love of God. Because Christ died for us and rose again, we should be motivated to live for him. J-O-Y.

2 Cor 5:11-15 is all about Paul’s motivation for ministry. He faced a good bit of criticism from the people at Corinth, and in this section of the book, Paul is describing what motivated him to continue to serve God in spite of opposition and criticism.

If you are engaged in ministry, you know that it can be difficult to keep on serving. The temptation always exists to just quit, especially when you encounter opposition or criticism. In order to keep on serving in spite of the obstacles, we need to be highly motivated. We need to keep in mind why we are serving. That’s what Paul is talking about here—motivations for ministry.

¹ Kim Kardashian, interview in Vogue magazine, Feb 22. “I’ve Chosen Myself”: Inside Kim Kardashian’s New World, by Jen Wang.

Before getting into the text, we should recognize that this is one of the more difficult parts of the letter. Paul's meaning in some of his statements here is a bit obscure, rather difficult to discern. His original readers no doubt understood him a bit better than we do.

We should not be surprised that some of the material in Paul's letters is difficult. Remember what Peter said about Paul's letters--2Pe 3:16 *as also in all [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they do] also the rest of the Scriptures.*

This passage contains some of those "hard to understand" things. But I think it's clear that Paul is talking about motivations for the ministry. These are the things that motivated Paul, and we should be motivated by them as well.

What are some motivations for the ministry?

I. .11 The fear of the Lord motivates us.

A. Fear is reverential awe.

1. "Terror" here (KJV) is just the normal biblical word for "fear" (φόβος).
2. Of course, there are many varieties of fear. E.g., the fear you have of a threatening criminal is different than your fear of heights or of spiders or the fear of being late for work.
3. Given vs. 10, this fear is the reverential awe Paul had for Christ as his divine [inspector] and future judge.² The prospect of standing before Christ for assessment of his service was an awe-inspiring thought. He feared being displeasing to Christ. He no doubt feared that his service for Christ was not what it could have been.

² Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 350.

Quote: Fear refers to a religious consciousness, a reverential awe of God, that directs the way one lives. Paul does not live in unhealthy dread of God’s judgment because he knows the love of Christ who gave himself for him. But his extraordinary experience of God’s love and forgiveness does not deaden his consciousness that God remains a holy and righteous God.³

4. It’s a fearful thing to know that we’ll be held accountable for if and how well we serve God. An awareness of our responsibility and our accountability before Christ should motivate us to higher levels of service and sanctification.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

5. It’s also a fearful thing to think about the fact that unbelievers will stand before God in judgment.

Heb 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The word “terror” (KJV) is probably the right one when applied to unbelievers and the fear of God that they should have.

Sadly, our world today does not fear the Lord. Unbelievers today tend to be very irreverent and even blasphemous. Even those who claim to believe in God often picture him as a tolerant, indulgent grandfather who overlooks our faults and loves us no matter what we do.

The proper attitude to have toward God is reverent awe, the kind of fear that causes us to pursue holiness and service.

- B. The fear of God motivates us to “persuade men.”
 1. “Persuade” here (πείθω) simply means “to convince, the bring about a change of mind.”
 2. He does not say here specifically what he’s trying to persuade people about. But given the context, there are only two reasonable options.

³ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 269–270.

- a) First, he's trying to persuade his readers to accept his authority, integrity, and sincerity. Nearly the whole book of 2 Cor is an explanation and defense of his ministry, so he's trying to persuade his readers to accept his apostolic authority in spite of false reports and accusations against him.
- b) But in a more general sense, Paul is seeking to persuade people of the truth of the Gospel. That summarizes Paul's ministry—proclaiming the truth and persuading people to accept it. That's why he risked his life travelling all over the Roman Empire.

How do we convince people to accept the Gospel? How do we persuade people?

- (1) We can use logical facts and arguments. We can try to convince people intellectually by appealing to the foundational facts of Christianity.

I.e., we give reasons to believe in God, facts supporting the historicity of Jesus and his resurrection; facts supporting the truth of the Bible.

I think using logical arguments can be helpful; God can use logic and facts to move people toward accepting the Gospel. Many people find this information persuasive. We have access to many great resources in this regard.

- (2) The other method is simply to proclaim the Gospel without trying to prove it. Rom 1:16—the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We “persuade men” by proclaiming the Gospel message. God uses people like us to communicate the Gospel to the unsaved.

Cf. 5:20 (read) – we beseech/implore others to be reconciled to God. We proclaim the word of the cross (1 Cor 1:18) and fervently urge people to respond to that message.

We can't persuade anybody if we don't say anything. Persuasion comes through words. Our actions hopefully back up and give force to our words, but actions/lifestyle does not persuade anyone. We have to say something.

1 Peter 3:15 ... *always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;*

How should we *not* persuade people?

- (1) We can't force anyone to believe. Faith has to be voluntary. One of the big mistakes in the history of the church was using force to convert people to Christ.
- (2) We can't trick anyone into believing. We should not use methods that would manipulate anyone into accepting the Gospel. I.e., emotional manipulation usually leads to false professions of faith.

However we persuade others, ultimately, the HSp has to do the convincing/convicting. We cannot force anyone to believe. We must not manipulate or coerce anyone into the faith. All we can do is proclaim the truth, urge people to accept it, and pray that they will. The rest is up to the HSp and the individual.

Trans: Like Paul, we should find the prospects of future judgment motivating. We must maintain a reverential respect for God; the fear of God should compel us to urge people to accept the biblical message.

II. .11b The desire to be understood motivates us.

Nearly this whole book reflects Paul's desire that the people in Corinth understand what he's been trying to do. Most of the book is a defense and explanation of his ministry. So he wants his readers to understand him and even appreciate his efforts.

- A. .11b We trust that God understands us.
1. Paul is seeking to persuade men, but he does not need to persuade God about anything. God knows Paul's heart; he knows that Paul is sincere and faithful.
 2. The sense of this statement is something like, "What we are is plain to God; we are well-known to God." Cf. vs. 10 the JSOX.
App: God knows our motivations and purposes. God knows why we are doing what we're doing. Other people might not understand us, but God does. That will all be revealed at the JSOX.

- B. .11end We hope that others understand us.
1. Paul wants the people at Corinth to understand what he's been doing and why he's been doing it. That's what much of this book are all about—Paul is explaining and justifying his ministry.
 2. In spite of what others are saying about him, in spite of the complaints and criticisms against him, Paul is hopeful that the people in Corinth realize that he is genuine and sincere. He hopes that they can see that his motives were pure and his intents were sincere.

App: Anytime we engage in ministry, we run the risk of offending others. It could be that those we are trying to serve don't understand our motives, or they don't agree with our methods. Sometimes we have to explain ourselves, like Paul is doing here.

III. .12-13 Ministry to others motivates us.

Paul's purpose in writing was not to boast about what he'd accomplished, but to explain himself to the church in Corinth.

- A. .12 Some people are already supportive.
1. Supporters don't need any self-commendation from Paul.
Back in chapter 3, Paul mentions this same idea. He's not talking about commending himself in the sense of bragging about what he's accomplished.
 2. To "commend" oneself was to present letters of recommendation. The key word here is "again." He does not need to prove to them that he's a genuine apostle. They already know that and they accept him as such.

B. .12b Some people need an explanation.

That's exactly what Paul is doing here—explaining himself, defending himself against his opponents. He wants to help his supporters defend his apostleship. He wants his supporters to be his defenders.

1. .12b The word “boast” (καύχημα) means “a cause of rejoicing, glorying, or boasting.” The text says, literally, “we are giving to you an occasion for boasting/glorying/rejoicing for us.”
2. The word “occasion” (ἀφορμή) as used here probably means something like “a basis, an opportunity, a starting point.”
3. Remember that Paul was facing significant opposition in the church, people who were slandering him and questioning his apostolic authority. They were trying to turn the church against Paul and substitute themselves as the authorities. Some in the church were listening to these false teachers.
4. He's giving his readers reasons to be supportive, reasons to defend him against his critics. He wants his supporters in Corinth to have something positive to say about him to his opponents. He wants his supporters to stand strongly against the false teachers who had invaded the church. The people there knew what Paul had done for the church, and they should be able to silence this opposition against him.
5. So Paul is giving them an “occasion” or a starting point for them to reply to these false teachers and opponents. He wants his supporters to stand up for him and defend him against his critics.

App: In some churches, a disgruntled, vocal minority criticizes the pastor, and the other people in the church don't do anything to stop it. It's a shame when no one or few stand up to defend the pastor and remind everyone about what he's done for that church. A vocal minority can sometimes turn the entire church against a good pastor, especially when no one stands up to defend the pastor.

C. .12end Some people need to be exposed for their hypocrisy.

Paul mentions two main errors or problems he sees in some people:

1. They focus on externals. They “boast in appearance.”

- a) The word “appearance” here (προσώπω) is literally “face.” It refers to external appearances, what catches the eye, what was outwardly showy.
- b) These people value what is superficial and momentary instead of what is eternal and profound. They put on a bold appearance, but it’s all a pretense, a façade; it’s all for their own advantage. I.e., it’s all hypocrisy because it’s all external.
- c) They were like good looking apples with a rotten core. They appeared to be super-spiritual, but in reality, they were in the process of destroying the church. These men were imposters and slanderers, even though they looked fine externally.

Illus.: This reminds me of the Mormon church. The Mormon looks good externally—they have beautiful churches and cathedrals and choirs—but they are a God-forsaken cult. They look good externally to our society, but on the inside, the Mormon church is morally and historically bankrupt.

App: We need to be careful not to put too much stock in appearances or credentials. Churches sometimes put people into leadership who have great external appearances and the right credentials, but they lack a servant’s heart. They have the “face” but not the heart.

I hope all of us strive to value things that are eternal and profound rather than things that are flashy, superficial, and shallow. Christians have historically promoted things that are good, beautiful, and true. Our culture values just the opposite—things that are wicked, ugly, and false. We should love what God loves and hate what God hates.

Quote: When humans make judgments on the basis of appearances and normal expectations, they are likely to make false judgments. The visible realm is incomplete, illusive, and subject to the ravages of decay. ... The eternal realm provides the only definitive and lasting values from which to make sound spiritual judgments.⁴

We should not judge on appearances; we should judge on the basis of eternal, biblical values.

2. .12end They neglect matters of inner character; they lack sincerity of “heart.”

Paul’s critics were more concerned with how he was doing things than they were with the fact that people were being saved.

⁴ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 273–274.