

2 Corinthians 5 • True Motives for Ministry

Introduction

This chapter is really a continuation of the discussion Paul began in the previous chapter concerning his ministry and the accusations made against him by his enemies. His main points are that his ministry is serious, not careless, and that he proceeds from honest motives, not fleshly desires. In the course of providing four further motives governing his life and ministry, Paul is providing a kind of checklist by which we can measure the sincerity and quality of our own motives for ministry, to see how we measure up personally.

¹For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, ³inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. ⁴For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

⁶Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight— ⁸we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

[Read v.1-8]

Q: What is the “house” Paul is talking about? Is this the home Christ is preparing for all Believers?

A: Paul is specifically talking about the glorified body that will be ours when Christ returns.

Q: How could the word “tent” also be translated? Of what is it speaking?

A: It could also be translated as “tabernacle”. It describes the fact that our earthly tent (or tabernacle), although it is temporarily indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will one day be taken down or done away with in favor of a permanent residence and presence. There are many parallels to the tabernacle with Israel in the Old Testament.

Q: Is our desire merely supposed to be for death so that we can exchange the temporal for the eternal?

A: Paul shows there’s something greater in his statement that “we groan, longing to be clothed” and not wanting to “be found naked”. (v.3) Throughout Scripture, to be clothed by God’s standards is represented by clean, pure clothing representing a life of righteousness. We don’t merely want to get into heaven, but to be accompanied by our good deeds and obedient works from living faithfully in this life according to His Word and ways.

Q: According to v.5, how is this more than just wishful thinking on our part?

A: God’s intention wasn’t merely to transform us for heaven, but to be so clothed – it’s the “very purpose of God”.

Q: How would this be affirmed by His giving us “the Spirit as a pledge”?

A: The role of the Holy Spirit is to shape and change us into the image and character of Christ. It’s a kind of “down payment” in this life assuring that what He began will be fully completed in the next.

Q: How does Paul summarize this overall attitude in v.7?

A: To live in the full knowledge that we are only temporarily living in a shell that will give way to a glorious eternal house is to “walk by faith, not by sight”. Our life, thoughts, and behavior are guided by what we know God has called us to become rather than limited to what we see and feel in this present life.

Q: What should be our overall viewpoint according to v.8?

A: We should be attached to the *next* life, looking forward more to eternity with Christ than being attached to this present life. This was Paul’s own example as stated to the Philippians...

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Philippians 1:21-24

Point: *Paul's first motive for true ministry is his confidence of heaven.*

[Read v.9-13]

⁹Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

¹²We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

Q: How is it that Paul just doesn't leave everything up to the future?

A: In v.9 he adds the condition that whether in this body or the next, the greater concern is "to be pleasing to Him".

Q: How does being "recompensed for his deeds" hearken back to the previous section?

A: It speaks of the fact that we're not merely to be physically transformed from the temporal to the eternal, but "clothed" according to our deeds.

Q: What exactly does it mean to "appear" before Christ? What is involved?

A: It means more than to just "stand" or "show up". It carries with it the idea of being revealed. You could translate what is going to happen as "for we shall all be shown as we are".

Point: *There will be no pretending at judgment. Our character and works will be revealed for precisely what they are and suitable rewards given.*

Q: Why do you suppose Paul characterizes the knowledge we will one day be judged as "knowing the fear of the Lord"?

A: Knowing that his works would some day be revealed and tested, Paul wants to live the kind of life that pleases and honors Christ. Therefore he has a healthy "fear of the Lord".

Q: Is all of this to remain hidden until the next life? How might it be revealed in the course of this life?

A: According to v.11, the true servant of God is careful in the present to live an open life that is visibly evident – "made manifest" – both to God and man. Others should be able to see Christ in us by our changed behavior and deeds.

Q: What is of greater concern than mere outward appearances?

A: The motives of the heart. (v.12)

Point: *Paul's second motive for true ministry is his concern to please Christ.*

[Read v.14-17]

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

¹⁶Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this

Q: When Paul says "the love of Christ", is he speaking of one's personal love for Christ?

A: Although that's certainly there, what he is speaking to is the love Christ has for us. This didn't begin with anything on our part, but was initiated exclusively by Christ on His part out of His love for us.

Q: And why did Christ die?

A: That we would no longer live for ourselves, but for Him. (v.15)

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way no longer. ¹⁷Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

1 John 4:9

who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:10

and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

2 Corinthians 5:15

Point: *There can be no selfishness in the heart of the Christian who understands the love of Christ. They will no longer live unto themselves, but exchange the world's ways to become the image and character of Christ as a visible witness not just to themselves, but to God and all others as well.*

Q: What was the problem in Corinth Paul references in v.16?

A: They were judging after the flesh, whether it was claiming to follow a specific apostle, or taking each other into civil court to settle disputes. They were forgetting that the Christian life is a new creation with new values and morals.

Point: *If we are firmly established in the Truth that we are a new creation and therefore no longer living according to "the old things", then the greater work of the love of Christ which brought all these things about will shine through everything else.*

Point: *Paul's third motive for true ministry is his constraint of love.*

¹⁸Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

[Read v.18-21]

Q: So how would you characterize Paul's fourth motive for true ministry?

A: His commission from God.

Q: What does it mean to be an ambassador?

1. **Ambassadors are chosen.** Paul did not represent himself, but Christ. It was not Paul's message, but the Gospel Christ entrusted to Him. It was not Paul's tasks, but the assignments Christ gave him.
2. **Ambassadors are protected.** They must be citizens of the nation they represent, and Paul was a citizen of heaven, not earth. The nation supplies their ambassadors' every need and stands ready to protect them, just as Christ stood by Paul through every crisis.
3. **Ambassadors are held accountable.** They represent their country and say only what they're directed to say because they know they will eventually be recalled home and held accountable for their work.
4. **Ambassadors are called home before war is declared.** There is a coming day of wrath (1 Thess. 1:10) to judge the wicked, but Christians will be called home before that day comes (1 Thess. 5:1-10).
5. Others?

Q: And what is the primary message to be carried by those commissioned by God?

A: Reconciliation. In other words, that God in Christ on the cross has reconciled the world to Himself and is willing to save all who trust in His Son.

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Point: We are supposed to be the visible representation of Christ as we invite the lost to receive Him and the bearers of the true Gospel message.

Q: How do we know that this commission applies to us and isn't something exclusive and unique just to Paul?

A: By Jesus own words, "as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."
(John 20:21)

Q: How do we know that this calling is not limited to just transforming us from this life to the next?

A: The purpose as stated in v.21 is "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him". This speaks to the fact that we should make sure our message, methods, and motives are right so that our work might be lasting and stand the test when fully revealed before Him.

Overall Application

How well is your life and ministry governed by the same motives expressed by Paul:

- *Your confidence in heaven. (v. 1-8)*
- *Your concern to please Christ. (v.9-13)*
- *Your constraint of love. (v. 14-17)*
- *Your commission from God. (v. 18-21)*

How do these things help take your eyes off the things of this world and live by faith for the things of the Kingdom?