

INTRODUCTION

One Spring when I was a kid, my dad brought home two young live turkeys for us to keep and fatten up to be eaten on the following Thanksgiving and Christmas. So we built a turkey pen and started feeding them. My older sister named them Ike and Tina Turkey. Every morning we were awakened by their warbling gobble. Of course, by the time Thanksgiving rolled around they had become such pets, we couldn’t even *think* about eating them—so Ike and Tina were set free.

Back in those days, Ike and Tina Turner were a musical duo, but Tina left Ike because she said he was addicted to drugs and abusive. In 1993, Tina Turner (whose real name is Anna Mae Bullock) recorded a #1 hit that asked the question, “What’s love got to do with it? What’s love but a second-hand emotion? Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?” That’s pretty harsh, but you’ve got to remember she alleged that life with Ike wasn’t a bed of roses. At first Ike denied any abuse, but in his 2001 autobiography Ike admitted, “Sure, I’ve slapped Tina...There have been times when I punched her to the ground without thinking. But I never beat her.” Hmmm. Ike must have had a strange definition of abuse! But as many of you know, just this past week Ike Turner died and went on to his reward...or lack thereof.

So, I can’t blame Tina for being a little jaded about love, but let’s answer her question: “What’s love got to do with it?” First, we’ve got to know what “it” is. In our context, “it” is living the Christian life—following Jesus, serving Jesus, and sharing Jesus with others. I hope by the end of this message you can answer that by saying, “Love has EVERYTHING to do with it.”

If I could condense this message into a sentence it would be this: Why do you do what you do for the Lord? Instead of focusing on WHAT you do for God, I want you to think about WHY you do it. WHY did you get up and come to church this morning? WHY did you give an offering to the Lord? WHY did you sing songs of praise? WHY are many of you teaching children, youth, or adults? In other words, what motivates you to serve God? Do you do it out of a sense of obligation, or out of a sense of love?

In this passage of scripture we see what motivated Paul to serve the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:9-15: “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ [*bema*], that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are you an opportunity to take pride in us, that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart. If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 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 for but him who died for them and was raised again.”

So, what are your true motives for what you do for the Lord? You might as well be honest with yourself, because I can’t see your motives, and you can’t see mine. You see me standing up here

with a Bible in my hand, but you can’t truly know WHY I’m doing it. Only the Lord and I know what my true motives are. As we talk about wrong motives and right motives, if you discover that your motives are not the best, then you can simply change your motives—you can ask God to purify your motives. As we talk about this, I just want to answer three questions:

1. WHAT IS LIFE’S GREATEST GOAL?

What’s the greatest goal in your life? Do you even have a life goal? Any targets you’re shooting for? Or are you like the fellow who shot bullet holes in the side of his barn and then drew bulls eyes around each hole—and called them his targets? If I handed you a card and a pen and said, “Write down in one sentence your purpose for living,” what would you write? A few years ago I wrote out a purpose statement for my life: I exist to share as much of the Word of God with as much of the world of God as possible.

What was Paul’s goal in life? We don’t have to wonder, because he stated it in verse 9 when he wrote, “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.” I believe the best answer to this question is simply: To please the Lord.

What about you? Do you exist to simply go to school and graduate, work, retire, and then live in a retirement home until you die? I challenge you to consider making your goal in life to please God. You please God by worshiping Him, serving Him, obeying Him, and sharing His word.

But remember, this text is all about WHY—it’s about motives. To God, why you do something for Him is more important than what you do for Him. It’s important that we remove any impure motives that we may have. The Bible says, “The appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives...we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

Are you a people-pleaser or a God-pleaser? You can’t be both. But I’ve discovered that as long as you please God, it doesn’t matter whom you displease in this life. But if you displease God, it doesn’t matter whom you please in this life. When Jesus was baptized the Father said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” We should make it our goal to please God as well.

2. WHAT ARE THE WRONG MOTIVES FOR TRYING TO PLEASE GOD?

Sometimes people do the right thing but with the wrong motive. Did you hear about the two women talking? One of them was showing off her engagement ring and talking about her upcoming marriage. Her friend asked her, “Do you really love him?” The engaged girl said, “Oh, I worship the very ground his daddy discovered oil on!” Since we’re talking about motives, let me share with you some weak motives for trying to please God. I’ll mention three, but there are many more.

(1) Fear of punishment

Some people still envision God as a wicked taskmaster who is just waiting to crack the whip when we get out of line. I remember hearing a preacher when I was in college who was a

“yeller.” When he preached he sounded mad—because he was. He was the kind of preacher who started loud, and got louder! I don’t remember much about the content of his messages other than his favorite phrase was, “God is gonna’ getcha’ for that!” He would point his bony finger in my direction and spit and shout, “God is gonna’ getcha’ for that!” I was never quite sure what it was that God was gonna’ get me for, but it sure scared me enough to make me want to walk on the straight and narrow—at least for a few hours.

Fear of punishment may be a good deterrent to decrease crime, but it is a poor motivation for trying to please God. People who act out of fear of punishment usually don’t think they ever please God, so they just have to keep trying harder and harder. What a miserable way to live!

(2) Guilt over past failures

Many Christians are on one long guilt-trip where they’re determined to work hard to pay God back for all their sins and mistakes. It’s not a pleasure trip, for sure. This is the payback-mentality I addressed a few weeks ago when I spoke on future grace. The line from the old hymn that says, “Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be,” may drive you toward the wrong motivation for serving God. God’s grace is a free gift with no strings attached—and you can’t pay Him back. During this season, if you’re “exchanging gifts” with someone, it’s really not a gift—it’s a trade! A true gift is one you give with no desire or expectation for anything in return.

Legalism is the erroneous belief that you can make God love you more by working harder for Him. That’s why some Christians work so hard they finally burn out. It may be time for you to end your guilt-trip and move from Legalism Lane onto Grace Avenue. It’s the greatest move you’ll ever make!

(3) Desire for personal recognition

We’re all born with a desire to be recognized and rewarded. As children, when we perform, we say, “look at me! See what I’m doing!” From the time we learn to ride a bike, we want our parents to watch us. That’s why we yell, “Look, ma, no hands!” When we’re on stage, or on the athletic field, we’re aware our parents and others are there watching us. We grow up loving the spotlight.

The desire for personal recognition is really a sign of spiritual immaturity. Jesus chided the Pharisees because they loved to blow a trumpet when they gave their money, “Hey everybody look at me!” They loved to pray loud, public prayers to be seen of men, “Hey, everybody look at me.” But Jesus said the best prayer is when we shut ourselves up in a closet and pray to God. The best good deeds are when we give and our right hand doesn’t even know what our left hand is doing. In other words, a mark of spiritual maturity is when we are constantly turning the spotlight away from us and what we do, and we turn the spotlight on God and what He is doing.

3. WHAT ARE THE RIGHT MOTIVES FOR WANTING TO PLEASE GOD?

When I was growing up in South Alabama, my family only received one catalogue in the mail:

the Sears and Roebuck Christmas Catalogue. We called it a “wish book” and my brother, sister, and I would fight over who got to thumb through the pages first. In those days, the Sears catalogue was the mall or the internet of today. Even as a child I noticed Sears used an interesting marketing strategy. They would offer different levels of quality for the same item. For instance, they would offer a basic lawnmower labeled “good” which was the cheapest. But beside it would be another lawnmower with the caption “better.” It had a few more features, and cost a little more. And there would be another lawnmower described as “best.” It was the top-of-the-line with all the bells and whistles, and it cost the most. When it comes to the right motives for serving and obeying God, I think there is a good motive, a better motive, and the best motive.

(1) A good motive: The reward of Heaven

For the Apostle Paul, heaven wasn’t just a future destination, it was a present motivation. In verse 10 we read: “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ (*bema*), that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” One reason we should be serving, worshiping, giving, obeying, and witnessing to others is because one day we will stand before the *bema* to receive our reward. Remember, it won’t be like a courtroom, a *bema* was the public platform where awards and recognitions were handed out. Part of our reward will be the crowns we receive—like the garland crowns given to those who competed in the Greek Olympics. But we won’t wear these crowns for long because we’ll fall at the feet of Jesus and cast our crowns before Him. As I said in the last message, I want to have a dump-trunk full of crowns to honor the Lord. But the greatest reward of heaven won’t be the crowns, it will be hearing Jesus simply say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The reward of heaven is a good motivation to want to please God.

(2) A better motive: The fear of the Lord

The Bible says in verse 11, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” Like Paul, I’m continually trying to persuade people to turn from their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ. Why do I do it? One reason is because I know what it is to fear the Lord. Reading the Bible is like real estate. What are the three most important factors that determine the value of real estate? Location, location, location. The same is true for understanding the Bible—location, location, location, which is context. WHERE is this verse about fearing the Lord found? Immediately after the verse about appearing before Jesus at the *bema*! When you understand the *bema*, you’ll want to persuade men and women to come to Christ.

You need to know what it is to fear the Lord because the Bible says in Psalm 111:10 that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Not only that, Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” So if you want both wisdom and knowledge, you must start with fearing the Lord. “Fearing the Lord” is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the Bible. Does anybody here fear snakes? That’s NOT what it means to fear God. Does anybody here fear spiders? That’s NOT what it is to fear God. It’s not some phobia like speaking in public or fear of heights. To fear the Lord doesn’t mean that you cringe in terror before Him.

The best definition I’ve found for fearing the Lord comes from Brennan Manning. If there was ever a definition I suggest you memorize, this is it. Brennan Manning wrote: “The biblical

meaning of the 'Fear of the Lord' is silent wonder, radical amazement and affectionate awe at the goodness of God." Memorize those three adjectives and three nouns: "silent wonder"; "radical amazement"; "affectionate awe." THAT'S what it means to fear the Lord.

The reason Paul was a fanatic, traveling all over the known world preaching Jesus Christ, persuading people to trust Him was because of his absolute awe and respect for God. If you're into acrostics, here's one that might help you remember what it means to fear the Lord. Let the four letters FEAR represent: our **F**ather has **E**arned **A**we and **R**espect.

When you fear the Lord it doesn't cause you to turn and run from Him like you would a snake, it causes you to fall on your face before Him in respect and awe. If you casually talk about "the good lord" or the "man upstairs," you don't know what it is to fear the Lord. If you claim to have your ticket punched to heaven, but you never give, you never serve, you never share your faith, you truly don't know what it is to fear the Lord.

When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord and heard the angels calling back and forth, "Holy, holy, holy," he fell on his face and said, "Woe is me, I'm as good as dead." But then God said, "Who can I send to deliver my message?" Isaiah was like a first grader who knows the answer to the teacher's question, he was frantically waving his hand saying, "Send me! Send me!"

That's why we persuade men, women, boys and girls to turn to Jesus, because we know what it is to fear the Lord. That's a powerful motivation to please God, but as good as it is, I think there is a better motivation.

(3) The best motive: The love of Christ

Paul was so energetic about sharing Christ that people often thought he had lost his mind. In Acts 26:24 Festus said, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane." We read in 2 Corinthians 5:13, "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us..." The word translated "compels" means to "drive, to motivate." It's the word *sunecho*, from which our word "echo" is derived. Everywhere Paul turned he was confronted with this echoing thought which continually reverberated in his heart and mind: "the love of Christ, the love of Christ, the love of Christ."

You may wonder, "Is this referring to Christ's love for me, or my love for Christ?" Yes. It's both. The Bible says "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Why do we serve the Lord so diligently and faithfully? It's not to earn salvation, but because we love the One who first loved us. I often quote a little poem that says, "I cannot work my soul to save; that work my Lord has done; but I will work like any slave; for the love of God's dear Son!"

So, what's love got to do with it? Everything! Love should be the primary motive for wanting to please God. In John 14:23 Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." It's important to understand what Jesus *didn't* say in this verse. He didn't say, "If you keep my commandments, you'll love me." Obedience doesn't produce love; it's the other way around. Love always produces obedience.

Let me illustrate that. A few months ago, I was driving West on Rieck Road toward Hollytree Drive. I was on my way to conduct a funeral at Stewart Funeral Home, and I was running just a little late, so as I started down the hill on Rieck where the speed limit is 30, I was going about 45 mph. (I've often said the last part of my body to be sanctified is my right foot!) Well, I didn't see the motorcycle policeman at the bottom of the hill, but he saw me. He pulled behind me with his lights on and I pulled over. I knew I was guilty, and that I deserved a ticket. Just so you'll know, this isn't an illustration about grace or mercy—it's about justice. He did his job and wrote me a speeding ticket that cost me about \$80. But now, when I drive down that hill, I am careful to keep my speed at 30. But I've got to admit there's not much love in my obedience. Obeying that speed limit hasn't made me love the police officer who gave me the ticket! Nor do I even love the 30 mph law itself—if it was up to me I'd change it to 40 there. So WHY do I obey the law? Not out of love, but simply because getting somewhere 60 seconds earlier just isn't worth \$80 to me. Obedience doesn't produce love, but Jesus said that love produces obedience.

Are you one of those miserable, legalistic believers who maintains a long list of rules and regulations, ticking them off meticulously out of a sense of duty or moral obligation? And then you wonder why your faith is so dead and lifeless—there's no love driving it.

Let's go back to the best analogy Jesus gave to describe our relationship with God. He is our Father and we are His children. All of us who are parents know our children obey us for many different reasons. My kids obeyed me sometimes because I knew they wanted something—and that was okay. They obeyed me sometimes because I had threatened to use the trouble stick if they didn't obey—that forced obedience wasn't very pleasant for them or me. Sometimes they obeyed me without question because they simply respected my position as their Father—and that was okay, too. But, as every parent knows, there is simply no better feeling than when our kids did the right thing simply because they love us.

There is a huge difference between obligation and love. Duty may write a letter, but love tucks in a joke, or a picture, or a gift card. Duty may keep a clean house, but love keeps a happy home. Duty gets offended if a gift isn't acknowledged, but love laughs at the sheer joy of giving the gift. Duty can pour a glass of milk, but love will add a little chocolate. Duty makes you do something well, but love makes you do something beautiful. Duty does the right thing, but love does the thing right.

It's the love of Christ that compels families to sell all their possessions and plant their lives in a part of the world where people don't know Jesus Christ. Some people would call that crazy, but love makes you do crazy things. It's the love of Christ that compelled the Amish community to forgive the man who entered their school and shot their children. Some people call that crazy, but love makes you do crazy things.

During this Christmas season, people do a lot of nice things—they act a little crazy in a good way. You may have provided one of the backpacks we sent to Mexico—why did you do that? You may have taken a star from the Angel Tree—why? You may be part of so many of our classes who provide Christmas for a needy family. You may make an extravagant offering to our World Mission Offering. That's great, but check your motives. Why are you doing it? Is it

primarily because you love Jesus? If there's another motive, you have the power to readjust your motive. Right now, why don't you say, "Jesus, this good deed is simply because I love You. I don't want any credit, any recognition, or even any reward. I just do this because I love You!"

CONCLUSION

There isn't a price love isn't willing to pay. One of the greatest examples of unselfish love was demonstrated by Princess Alice of Hesse. In announcing her death in 1878, British Prime Minister William Gladstone reported to Parliament the touching story of how Princess Alice died. The children of the Princess were seriously ill with diphtheria, a highly contagious disease. The doctors warned the Princess not to get too close to her children because she would endanger her own life. One day her young daughter, Alix, was struggling for breath. Princess Alice took the child in her arms to comfort her. Gasping for air, and unaware of the danger, little Alix begged her mother, "Kiss me, mother, please kiss me." Without thinking about her own safety, Princess Alice tenderly kissed her daughter. As a result, Princess Alice contracted diphtheria and died a few days later. When Gladstone shared this story, the members of the House of Commons stood in silent honor of that kind of sacrifice. Alix, later known as Alexandra Feodorovna survived and later married the last Russian Czar, Nicholas II. Real love forgets self, and real love never considers the cost.

What a picture of the depth of God's love for us! God loves us so much that He sent His only Son into this world to become one of us. And Jesus tenderly kissed us in our sin-sick condition and took our sin and sickness upon Himself at the cross. He died so we can live. As verse 15 says, "Jesus died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves for but him who died for them and was raised again."

Check your motives, and then may the love of Christ compel you to do crazy things for the glory of God!

OUTLINE

1. WHAT IS LIFE'S GREATEST GOAL?

Answer: To please the Lord

"The appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives...we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts." *1 Thessalonians 2:3-4*

2. WHAT ARE THE WRONG MOTIVES FOR TRYING TO PLEASE GOD?

- (1) Fear of punishment
- (2) Guilt over past failures
- (3) Desire for personal recognition

3. WHAT ARE THE RIGHT MOTIVES FOR WANTING TO PLEASE GOD?

- (1) Good: The reward of Heaven
- (2) Better: The fear of the Lord

Our
Father has
Earned
Awe and
Respect

- (3) Best: The love of Christ

Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." *John 14:23*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes