**Motivation for ministry** 12/12/21 dkm

Read: Acts 26:12-32, 2Corinthians 5

Text: 2Corinthians 5:11-15

Psalms: 147:1-7, 50:1-7, 142, 134a

Why does a child obey their father? Is it out of love or out of fear of being punished? Debate rages! Father’s love their children but do children automatically love their father to the extent that they obey them implicitly? No one can compel anyone to love them, even a father. Modern day ‘experts’ in child rearing reject any form of punishment saying it harms the child, but the Bible tells that, out of love, a father disciplines his child (Heb 12:7-9). Respect, with a healthy dose of fear, should be accorded human fathers, and also the Lord. At the same time, love is at the centre of our relationship with our father, our human father and our heavenly Father.

The apostle Paul was the first to preach the gospel in the city of Corinth. In the eighteen months he stayed there he saw many believe in Jesus Christ, and a church was established, despite opposition from some Jews. After he left, Apollos came, and Peter came also. As members of the church started aligning themselves with different leaders, divisions arose. Sexual immorality entered the church and was tolerated. When Paul told them to deal with a certain offender, some turned against him and started questioning his credentials and his motives as a preacher of the gospel. When false teachers came to this church they joined this party opposing Paul.

While writing this letter, Paul received news that ‘the majority’ had finally dealt with this incestuous man (2:6). But the false teachers were still making trouble in this church, having their focus on the Law of Moses and outward matters of religion. They came with letters of commendation (3:1), so the people started asking Paul where his letters of commendation were. These men were good speakers, able to gather a crowd and impress people with emotional but deceitful preaching (4:2). They went so far as to question Paul’s motives in preaching the gospel; why did he not accept a fee for his preaching and why was he collecting for the poor (11:7).

Discrediting Paul would discredit the message he preached, so Paul had to defend himself against these false accusations. He would not change his message or his ways, but he would appeal to the Christians in Corinth not to turn away from the gospel of grace. He wrote to assure them that what they were being told about their apostle was not true. Paul would defend his integrity and sincerity, as a man called by the risen Christ to preach the gospel.

Paul had suffered greatly as a preacher, unlike his opponents now in Corinth, but he would not ‘lose heart’ or give up (4:1, 16). He loved these Christians in Corinth, and was ready to suffer even more for their sakes. Paul was not focussed on personal popularity or comforts; ‘death is working is us but life in you’ (4:12). He was called by Christ and was answerable to Christ for everything he said and did. ‘We walk by faith not by sight’, ‘making it our aim to please the Lord’ (5:7, 9). ‘For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ’ (5:10).

It is with this truth in mind that Paul writes, ‘Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men’ (5:11). Verse 11 could be taken as the conclusion of the previous verse, as our NKJV indicates, or it could be taken as the beginning of the following passage, as we are doing. Paul shares his motives for preaching the gospel in the verses before us today. They are very different motives to those of the false teachers, and not the motives they were imputing to him. His first motive for preaching the gospel was, ‘the fear of the Lord’ and his second, ‘the compelling love of Christ’.

**1. The fear of the Lord**

Just as children obey their fathers out of respect, and a fear of feeling their father’s displeasure, so Paul obeyed the call of Christ to preach the gospel. He has just explained his desire, ‘to be well pleasing to Him [the Lord]’ (5:9), which was partly based on the prospect of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ on the last day. In his first letter he said, ‘Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!’ (1Cor 9:16).

Paul knew Jesus was risen from the dead and was seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He was not like many today whose knowledge of Jesus stops with his birth, or many who picture Jesus still on the cross. I sometimes wonder why Christians do not make the empty tomb an icon for their churches or homes. Paul went further and saw Jesus on the throne in heaven, ready to return in judgment. The judgment seat of Christ, as we learned previously, is what awaits us as Christians.

One day ‘each of us shall give account of ourselves to God’ (Rom 14:12). At the end of the day, or end of the week, your human father checked on the list of chores that he gave you to do, and your reward was based upon what you, as his beloved child, had done. If this is the case with our human father, why are we surprised that Jesus, who loves us so much that he died for us, should require a similar accounting from his children?

‘Knowing the fear of the Lord’, Paul set out to ‘persuade men’, to persuade them of the truth about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. He told the truth about heaven and hell, and of the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus Christ by which we must be saved. Gospel preaching is not about stirring emotions but about moving a person’s heart to believe. Paul did not try to hide anything from God because he knew that God knows and judges our hearts (1Sam 16:7, Heb 4:12, 13).

Paul wrote to assure the Christians in Corinth that he was revealing his heart to them also. He appealed to them to look beyond outward things, to look on their own hearts or consciences, as Paul revealed his heart to them. While his opponents came with letters of commendation and liked to boast in appearances and abilities, Paul came with no letters of commendation and was reluctant to boast about himself. But he did want the believers to ‘boast on our behalf’, or to stick up for him and defend him on the floor of their church. Paul had an answer to all the accusations being thrown at him, and he wanted the believers in Corinth to ‘have an answer for those who boast in appearances and not in heart’ (5:12).

What is the apostle saying in verse 13? Why should anyone think that he was ‘out of his mind’ or mad? Paul probably told about his vision on the Damascus road, and other visions and revelations given him by the Lord, but he did not use these to authenticate the gospel- they were matters between him and God (12:1f). Some think he is referring to speaking in tongues, which he did, but again this was a matter between him and God (1Cor 14:18).

Paul’s ministry was not based on visions and revelations, which was probably a contrast to his opponents in Corinth. Be careful of preachers who claim to have received ‘a word from the Lord’, especially if this word contradicts Scripture. Paul presented the gospel as historical and rational. The resurrection was of course, beyond the normal, but it was the only explanation of the facts. If people saw him to be of sound mind, as he trusted they would, it was for them (5:13). Speaking in tongues or having a vision are not essential to belief in Jesus Christ; often they are a distraction from the gospel. Belief in the resurrection is of course, essential.

**2. The compelling love of Christ**

Ministry based on a fear of the Lord alone will not be a joyous ministry. A ministry based on personal gain, like the ministry of his opponents, or of some preachers today, will not be a joyous ministry either. Paul knew the fear of the Lord but he also knew the love of Christ, and it was the love of Christ that compelled him to preach the gospel. In writing to the Romans, Paul said, ‘I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to the Lord’ (Rom 12:1 NIV). The motivation he urged upon his readers was the motivation that he had as a minister of the gospel, namely, the love of Christ.

Paul called himself the chief of sinners, ‘the least of the apostles and not worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church (1Cor 15:9). What he now was, as a man of God, was because of the grace of God. He could never repay the Lord for the grace by which he was saved, and neither can you. I hope that you never think that by good works you can pay, or repay, Jesus for your salvation. Jesus loved you more than you can ever measure (Eph 3:19). All you can do is thank him, worship him, obey him, and serve him with all your heart and all your being. Does the love of Christ compel you in this way?

Mentioning the love of Christ reminded Paul of the central message of the gospel. He asserted or ‘judged’ that if one died for all, then all died. Is this the briefest outline of the gospel in Scripture? The one who died is of course, Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. He died on the cross as a sacrifice for all, for all who believe. He died as our representative and as our substitute. This sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for all, but efficient or effective only for those who believe in him (John 3:16). There is no universalism, no teaching that everyone will be saved in the end, here or anywhere in the Bible.

Christ’s death in the cross was effectively our death, the death of the old man or the old self to sin. ‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:20). Paul also writes of being raised with Christ to become a new man or new creation in Christ (5:17, Rom 6:5, 6). He writes of putting off the old man and putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24). This death and new life is symbolised in baptism.

Paul was indebted to Jesus for the life he now lived, a life free of the penalty and the power of sin. I trust you are similarly indebted to Jesus, and feel compelled by the love of Christ to walk in newness of life. Jesus himself said, ‘What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul’ (Mat 16:26). Jesus died and rose again that you may have life, abundant life (John 10:10). The false teachers in Corinth, and false teachers still today, need to pay heed to these words; indeed, we all need to pay heed to these words. Because Christ died for all, and specifically died for me, I should no longer life for myself, ‘but for Him who died for me and rose again’ (5:15).

If your life did not change when you became a Christian, or if your life is no different from the unbelievers among whom you live, you need to reconsider your claim to be a Christian. If you think you can go on living for yourself, living to satisfy the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, you need to think again. Jesus said no one can serve two masters, and he meant what he said. If you call Jesus your Saviour and Lord, make sure he is your Lord.

Remember Paul’s fear of the Lord because he must one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Remember the love of Christ, who died for you, and make sure he is Lord of your life- in reality and not just words. Are you at this moment living for Christ - or for yourself?