

# MOTIVATION

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At one time or another, everyone needs to be motivated. Ideally, we should be self-motivated. Unfortunately, that does not always work. So, every parent and every boss knows that at one time or another, they need to motivate those around them and those under them. The question is, “How is that done?” As one man said, “How do you like a fire under people without burning them up?”

A number of years ago, I took some time off to study the subject of motivation. Some of the material I read suggested there are two kinds of motivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is external. It comes from the environment. Intrinsic motivation comes from within you. Extrinsic motivation includes such things as goal-setting, recognition, approval, financial incentives, etc. Intrinsic motivation meets needs or desires. It involves basic needs such as to love or be loved. It includes other needs that one might have, such as a need for knowledge or a social need for relationships.

I want to know what motivations are in the Bible. What motivations does God use to get us moving, so to speak, in a relationship with Him? At that point, I had an unusual opportunity. Some men in the country were also thinking about the subject and they decided to have a conference, a small conference I called a think tank. They were theologians and professors, but one of them knew that I was interested in the subject. So, I was invited to join them for a week to discuss biblical motivation.

One of the men, actually the leader of the group, had done extensive study on the subject of rewards in the Bible. He presented that material and the rest of us chewed it up and spit it out, which was what he wanted us to do. We had a great time. I was so impressed with the way he outlined the subject of motivation that I decided to share it with you.

## The Fear of Judgment

*Judgment Now* The first motivation is the fear of judgment. I forgot what passage they used at the think tank, but let’s look at 1 Corinthians 11. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat the bread and drink the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemn with the world” (1 Cor. 11:28-32). In this passage, the saints were gathered together to observe the Lord’s Table. In the New Testament, the purpose of the church assembling together was to observe the Lord’s Table (Acts 20:7). In the case of Corinth, they were abusing the privilege. The Lord’s Supper was an ordinary meal, during which they paused and partook of Communion. In the case of Corinthians, however, some were hungry and some were actually getting drunk—at the Lord’s Table! Paul accuses them of not discerning the Lord’s body and, as a result, they were being judged. The judgment was some were weak, some were sick, and many had prematurely died.

For better than a dozen years, I traveled around the country, speaking in two or three churches a month. I was amazed at how often the number one concern was some physical

issue, sickness, or weakness. I have often wondered how much of this is from natural causes and how much of this is from sin. I do not believe that all sickness is due to sin, but I do believe that sin can cause sickness. That's very clear in the Scripture and 1 Corinthians 11 is such a case. Drunkenness can cause cirrhosis of the liver. Samson lost his strength because of sin. The Bible also talks about a sin unto death.

One of the motivations God uses is judgment on sin. One preacher said when God wants to child train, He has two methods; He either takes them to the woodshed or the cemetery. This motivation does not work for everyone. It's like a doctor saying, "If you do this, you'll stay healthy, but not everyone follows the doctor's advice.

*Judgment Later* Believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of how they lived their lives. This has nothing to do with going to heaven. Going to heaven is a gift (Rom. 6:23). The Judgment Seat of Christ is about rewards. There are degrees of reward. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of great reward (Mt. 5:12). That means some get a small reward, some may get a medium-sized reward, and others will receive a great reward.

There will also be shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus said we will give an account of every idle word (Mt. 12:36). How would you feel if everybody in this room knew everything you had ever done? Imagine that a terrorist with an AK-47 walked in the back door, lining all of us against the wall and saying, "Take off all your clothes." We would *feel* embarrassed, which is a small sample of what some will feel like at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews says, "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account" (Heb. 4:13).

John says, "And now, little children, abide in Him that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 Jn. 2:28). In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul said all we have done will be tried by fire and it will either be gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:12-15). When we watch what we don't go up in smoke, we will be ashamed.

The point is God uses the fear of judgment to motivate us. Imagine driving down the freeway beyond the speed limit when you see a patrol car. The fear that grips your foot is a small sample of the fear we should have standing before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

In the think tank, the leader suggested that God uses all of these motivations all the time, even with mature believers. Interesting concept. God wants all of us, all the time, to fear stepping out of line because of the consequences here and the consequences at the Judgment Seat of Christ of losing reward and being embarrassed.

## **The Hope of Reward**

*Crowns* The second motivation that God uses is the hope of reward. As has been pointed out, the Judgment Seat of Christ is about rewards. Paul wrote, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Bodily exercise is profitable. I have been going through a lot of that lately and all the trainers and physical therapists tell me whether one has an injury or not, those who exercise live longer. Paul says the physical benefit of exercise is small compared to the spiritual benefits of exercising yourself to godliness. It will take effort (exercise). It is obeying the Lord by depending on His grace and power but

is greatly profitable. What does it mean to be godly? A common answer is that godliness is having the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, etc.

What is the reward? An incorruptible crown is given for self-control (1 Cor. 9:25). A crown of life is gained for enduring in trials (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10). A crown of righteousness is obtained for steadfastness in service (2 Tim. 4:8). A crown of rejoicing is achieved for soul-winning (1 Thess. 2:19). A crown of glory is granted for shepherding (1 Pet. 5:4). Three of the five have to do with service. Two of them have to do with us personally, self-control, and enduring trials of life.

*Other Rewards* There are other rewards. To make the point, Jesus told a parable in which He taught that one day He would say to some, “Well done, good servant, because you have been faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities” (Lk. 19:17). He goes on to say some will rule over five cities and some will rule over none. Some will be mayors of cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, and others will be ditch diggers. In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable in which the good and faithful servants were told, “I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Mt. 25:24). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:20). In this case, He is talking about something material that is unmistakable from the context where He is talking about food and clothing.

From the earliest days of my Christian experience, I have been aware of the biblical teaching concerning rewards. What was new to me at the think tank I attended was the way they put it all together. The rewards consist of pleasure (the joy of the Lord), power (ruling over cities), and possessions (treasure in heaven). Believers do not have to become missionaries to receive these rewards. In Colossians 3, Paul said that if slaves do what they have to do heartily as unto the Lord and not men, they will receive from the Lord a reward (Col. 3:23-24).

So, rewards are pleasure, power, and possessions. What is interesting is these are the things for which people in this country give their lives. People are motivated by pleasure, which comes in all sizes and shapes. Politicians are motivated by power. Consumers are motivated by possessions. There is not necessarily anything wrong with having pleasure, power, or possessions, but when that becomes the main goal of your life, it is a problem. On the other hand, if you sacrifice those things now to serve Jesus Christ, you will be abundantly rewarded with those things in the life to come. So, as Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt. 6:33). Seek first the kingdom of God here and you will receive eternal pleasure, power, and possessions in the kingdom.

The leader of the think tank I attended, the one who had done the detailed study of the subject, then went through the passages on temptation. Eve was tempted with possessions (good for food), pleasure (pleasant to the eyes), and power (to make one wise). Wisdom is intellectual power, one of the most interesting powers in America today. It is not just political power that is powerful; professors also have power. Jesus was tempted with pleasure (turn stones into bread), power (angels will deliver You), and (possessions (the kingdoms of this world). The apostle John said, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [pleasure], the lust of the eye [possessions], and the pride of life [position, power]—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 Jn. 2:15-16). The issue

is what motivates you. Are you motivated by seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Or are you motivated by pleasure, possessions, or power?

The objection to the biblical teaching of rewards is that some say it is selfish. In other words, you are living here for what you will get there. If you think this concept is selfish, you have totally misunderstood what the Scripture is about because the Scripture from beginning to end is about serving the Lord and loving people. At the think tank, we spent a lot of time kicking around this objection and concluded that there is a difference between selfishness and self-interest. Deciding not to walk across the street in the middle of traffic is not selfish; it self interest. So, it's not selfish to love the Lord and serve people to obtain a reward. That's legitimate. Actually, Jesus settled this issue when he commanded: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." That is good enough for me.

## The Love of a Relationship

The third motivation God uses is the love of a relationship. Paul wrote, "For the love of Christ constrains us because we judge thus: if one died for all, then all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). This is His love for us. He died for us and that ought to motivate us. I have a confession to make. While I have been aware of some of these other things a long time, this is the issue that has motivated me more than all of the others put together. All the others are legitimate, but I do not recall having done anything because I thought I would be rewarded for it in heaven, although Jesus said I should think like that.

At any rate, remember, Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him" (Jn. 14:23). So, the question is, do we love the Lord. That was the question the Lord asked Peter—three times! (Jn. 21:15-18).

"I love you, mother," said little John and forgot his work  
His cap went on and he was off to the garden swing,  
leaving his mother the wood to bring  
I love you, mother, said little Nell  
I love you, mother, more than tongue can tell  
Then she teased and pouted half the day  
until mother rejoiced when she went to play.  
I love you, mother, said little Fran  
Today, I'll help you all I can  
To the cradle, she did softly creep and rocked the baby until it fell asleep,  
then stepping softly she took the broom  
and swept the floor and dusted the room  
busy happy all the day she was  
helpful and cheerful as she could be.  
I love you, mother, again, they said as all three little children went to bed.  
How do you think the mother guessed  
which of them loved her best.  
The one who picked up the broom

**Summary:** People are motivated by fear, hope, and love, the fear of punishment, the hope of reward, and the love of a relationship.

Everybody is motivated by something. A mother went to a counselor, I know, complaining that her teenage son was not motivated. All he did was sit on the couch, eat, and watch television. He was not motivated to do anything. The counselor told the mother, “Oh, he’s motivated.” She was shocked. The counselor explained, “He’s motivated all right; he’s motivated to sit on the couch, eat snacks, and watch television. Everybody is motivated. There is no question about that. The issue is *what* motivates you.

The Lord told Israel, “When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself” (Deut. 17:14-17). In other words, the king was not to be motivated by pleasure (wives), possessions (gold and silver), or power (which is what the horses represent). The reason was so his heart would not be turned away from the Lord.

Then the Lord said, “Also, it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel” (Deut. 17:18-20).

Keep your nose in the book. Read it all the days of your life to be reminded that you should be motivated by the right things. It’s the Word of God that tells us how to exercise these motivations so that they will be profitable for eternal reward.