

#6 “Check Your Motives”

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It's not merely what's on the outside that counts, but what is on the inside that leads to what we do on the outside. Proper motivation is important to God, and improper motivation may well be idolatry as we worship self, religious performance, or the approval of others. Some people go through the right religious motions, but there is no joy or life present. Others do the right things to impress others or to make themselves look good. God wants our hearts to be free from chasing our own glory and performing dead works. He wants us to be controlled by His love and motivated by His glory and name.

Ephesians 6:5-8 says,

“Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

This passage gives us God's criteria for right motives. First, we are to respect those who are authorities in our lives as if we are respecting God because God has put them there. We don't worship them as god, of course, and we certainly don't do what they say if they tell us to disobey God. But the point is that we honor authority because God has ordained it. Secondly, we remember that when we honor earthly authorities, we are really doing an act of worship to God, honoring Christ by our obedience. Thus, all we do is to be for the glory of God and for His name's sake. In all of our earthly service, we are to serve God in it and by it. Thirdly, we are not to be merely good talkers, putting on an act in front of the boss, but we are to be genuinely obedient and submissive. We are not to try to get others to like us by joining the bandwagon of slacking, laziness, procrastination, and disrespect, but we are to live as those who are slaves of God. The fourth characteristic is the most difficult and most important. We are to act from the heart and with good will. This means that we must have pure motives. This is only possible if Christ is ruling our hearts, giving us the desires of the Lord. This means true surrender, sacrifice, and taking up our crosses daily. It is one thing to clock in and clock out, putting in our time, and it is another thing altogether to rejoice always and never complain, seeking God's glory all the while. This is to be the goal, and it is something we must regularly evaluate ourselves upon. The good news is that, if we act with good motives, we will receive a reward. We may get ridiculed by our peers, but at the end of our stay on earth we can expect a reward from God.

We are not to seek the approval, applause, and recognition of men. If it happens, fine, as long as we direct the glory to God. But we should not count on it. Ultimately, the only rewards that last forever are from God, so those are what we should pursue. And we will only receive those rewards if we learn to obey with sincere motives and willing hearts. *Thus, the best and most God-honoring response to His commands is to do things outwardly that reflect what we are believing and thinking inwardly.* This is what it means to serve God from the heart. *When we get to the point that we want to do what God says and we don't want to do what the world says, we can expect eternal rewards for our obedience.* Paul says of his call to preach the gospel in 1 Corinthians 9:17, "For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me." Paul understood that just doing the right things because we have to or because we are supposed to without a willing, humble, and contrite heart is not sufficient to gain a reward, though it is better than not doing it at all (James 4:17). God sees through self-righteous motives and unwilling hearts. God's desire is that we enjoy His glory by joyous and eager obedience so that we, like Paul when he preached willingly, will get a reward from the Lord. God seeks those who willingly, eagerly, and readily seek His glory in all that they do and say.

If we find ourselves in a place where we have lost our joy and are going through the motions against our will, we must not stop doing right and good. Even if we find ourselves battling self-righteousness, we must keep serving the Lord. We still have a stewardship that we are responsible for. We aren't to go and sit on the sidelines of the fight of faith until our motives change. We need to keep striving for righteousness and the advancement of the kingdom of God, praying all the while for the Lord to change our hearts. As we do this, God will show us how and where we need to repent if we humble ourselves before Him and ask Him to lead us into all truth. He will show us where we are seeking our own glory rather than His, but let us not stop pressing on toward the prize and the upward call in Christ.

When it comes to living the Christian life, it is not acceptable to say that our hearts are not in it. May God enable us to serve because we want to, may we serve faithfully, may we serve Him in all things, may we earn many heavenly rewards, and may we want God to get the glory, always, only, and forever. What's motivating you?