

## MOTIVES

**Y**ou can not read much of the Bible before you get the idea that God is more interested in your motives than your actions. Often your motive can turn an otherwise good deed into sin. You may give a big sum of money, and that is good. But if you give it to be seen of men, it becomes pride and that is sin. Consider the fate of Ananias and Sapphira in the fifth chapter of Acts. This couple did a very generous thing. They sold some property and gave a lot of the proceeds to the church. Their only problem was their attitude. Peter said, ***"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*** Acts 5:3-4

It wasn't the fact that they didn't give all of the money to the church. It was that they said they gave all of it to the church. Their motive was not pure. They were concerned about other people's perception of them so they lied about what they did. If God judged us in the same way today, how many of us would still be alive? I can tell you with certainty that you would not be reading this book because I wouldn't be here to write it.

The wrong motive can also hinder God's power. In I Corinthians 1:17 we read, ***"For Christ, the Messiah, sent me out not to baptize but (to evangelize by) preaching the glad tidings (the Gospel); and that not with verbal eloquence, lest the cross of Christ should be deprived of force and emptied of its power and rendered vain - fruitless, void of value and of no effect."*** (AMPLIFIED BIBLE) Please note that Paul says that if he had preached using clever speech, it would have made the cross of Christ void. He then goes on to say that the word of the cross is the power of God. When we consider what we hear from the pulpits today it is no wonder that there is no power in our churches. If a pastor preaches with the motive of showing how knowledgeable he is, or if he wants to bring guilt or shame by way of the message, there will be no power to accomplish his goals. Meaningful change in the hearts and lives of

people can only be accomplished by the power of God. So why do we hear so much psychology from the pulpit? It has no power to change a life. It only has the power to make us feel miserable because it points out our failures. It is like the Law. It can not justify, it can only condemn. But if we preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, it sets people free. In the Amplified Bible we read in I Corinthians 2:1-5 "***As for myself, brethren, when I came to you [I] did not come proclaiming to you the testimony and evidence or mystery or secret of God [concerning what He has done through Christ for the salvation of men] in lofty words of eloquence or human philosophy and wisdom; For I resolved to know nothing- to be acquainted with [nothing], and to be conscious of [nothing] - among you except Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and Him crucified. And I (passed into a state of) weakness and was in fear (dread) and great trembling [after I had come] among you. And my language and my message were not set forth in persuasive (enticing and plausible) words of wisdom, but they were in demonstration of the (Holy) Spirit and power [that is, a proof by the Spirit and power of God, operating on me and stirring in the minds of my hearers the most holy emotions and thus persuading them], So that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men (human philosophy), but in the power of God.***"

The Church is dying! Not because we have too little planning, or too few heart wrenching stories, or non professional singing, or non-padded pews, or because we are not seeker friendly, or because we have too few programs, or too few staff, or the wrong song books, or not enough money. Our churches are dying because Jesus Christ is not at the center of every decision we make, every song we sing, every sermon that is preached, every prayer that is prayed, and every program that is started. If the exaltation of Jesus Christ is not at the center of every plan we make, we plan in vain because there will be no power to bring the results that we had planned. There has been a whole industry built upon "church growth". There are seminars, books, videos, and programs. Has anyone stopped to think about the suppositions we must make if we think that church growth can be programmed and packaged? In the second chapter of Acts we are told in verse 41 that there were about three thousand souls added to the church after Peter preached. Now that is church growth but how do we fit that into a program? If you will read the sermon that Peter preached, you will see that he took the people where they were

and pointed them toward Christ. You or I could memorize that sermon and preach it in a thousand churches and still not see three thousand people come to Christ. Why? Because the Holy Spirit gave that sermon to Peter for that time and he was under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit convicted those people of their sins and drew them to Him. In the fifth chapter of Acts, after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, we are told that fear fell upon the church and in verse 14 we see that multitudes were added to the church. Is this part of any church growth program that you have seen? Jesus said, in John 6:44 , ***"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;..."*** How do we program that into a church growth strategy? Besides, why do we want to grow as a church, and what does church growth mean? If a church stays the same size and the people grow deeper in the love and knowledge of Christ, is that church growth? If we go door to door and lead 100 people to Christ and they all start attending another church, is that church growth? And why do we want church growth? Is it not so that we can brag about it? If you are a pastor, is it not because it would make you look good and maybe you could get a better church? The answer to the question, "Why do we want church growth?" is crucial because it exposes our motives about so many things. I believe that church growth is a by-product and not a product. Maybe I can illustrate what I mean. I used to own a saw mill. A saw mill produces three things; lumber, slabs, and sawdust. Lumber is the product and sawdust and slabs are by-products. If I would start concentrating on the sawdust instead of the lumber, I would be in big trouble. Suppose a man brought a nice walnut log for me to saw. If I started to look at the beautiful sawdust and cut the whole log into sawdust, the owner would be disappointed. My job was to concentrate on the lumber and the sawdust would take care of itself. I believe that we need to concentrate on Jesus Christ and make Him the center of all that we do, and growth and all of these other things will take care of themselves. Christianity is not a do it yourself religion. It is a dependency on The Son of God for everything. Four times in the book of revelation, Jesus says ***"I am alpha and omega"***, He said "I am the way the truth and the life", He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" He Said, I am the Lord that healeth thee", He said, "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.", He said, "I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.", He said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the Vine, so neither can

you, unless you abide in Me." I could go on and on but I hope that you get the idea. The power of God is released when Jesus Christ is preached and there is no power in the preaching of psychology, Christian principles, helpful hints, politics, human relations, or railing against the world. In the centrality of Christ it is important that we are talking about the same Christ that the Bible talks about. There are many Christ's in the world today and we must be careful that we know what we are talking about. The Christ that the Bible talks about is loving but He is also Holy and just. He is a God of forgiveness but He is also a God of wrath who will judge sin within the church as well as outside of it. The way is narrow; if we go too far to the right we can get into legalism. If we go too far to the left we can get into the notion that He will wink at our sins and that He is not serious about purity. After all, this is the nineties. Sin is still sin and must be judged! A Christian's attitude toward sin is very important. Sin has no business being a part of a Christian's life.

Wrong motives also deprives us of rewards in heaven. In Matthew 6:1-2 we read, ***"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward in full."*** You see, we can either have our rewards here or in heaven, but not both. Even if we don't get the rewards here that we seek, the fact that they were our motive precludes us from receiving any rewards in heaven. Jesus continues to carry this theme in chapter six through verse 18.

We need to continually ask the Holy Spirit to reveal our true motives to us and to purify our motives. The heart is evil and desperately wicked and we are capable of deceiving ourselves. Even in the writing of this book, I need to keep a guard on my motives so that the power of God needed to be an agent of change in the lives of those who read it is not diminished. Even Christ denied Himself. We read, ***" And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ' My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So , you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? .... He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My***

*Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.*" (Matthew 26: 39,40,42) It seems clear to me that Christ didn't want to go to the cross, but He loved us so much , and He loved the Father so much, that He was obedient to the death on the cross. Motive was not the problem that Jesus faced, but we face it all the time. We must be sure that our motives are pure.

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