

Motivation – 14/08/2016

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1.Cor.13:1-3)

Beloved in the Lord,

Tuesday night was Census night. From time to time the Government holds a census, in order to get a snapshot of the population. The census tells them things like ethnic groupings, ages, income, religious affiliation, and other useful information. This information is used by the government for future planning.

The concept of a census is nothing new. We find a number of occasions in the Bible when a census was conducted. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, because Joseph and Mary had to travel there in order to be counted in the census that was conducted at that time. There are also a number of occasions where a census is recorded in the Old Testament as well. The main reason for a census in the Old Testament was to determine how many able bodied men there were, fit for war.

There was an occasion, when towards the end of his rule, David conducted a census that brought God's wrath upon him. There had been previous occasions where God had told leaders to take a census, but on this occasion it was not of God. On some occasions a census was a good thing, but however on this occasion it was not. The reason God's wrath came upon David was that his motivation for conducting the census was wrong. David had become proud and was relying upon the strength of his army and not God.

This shows us that things can at times be good, be neutral, or bad depending on the motivation. A census in itself is not bad if done for the right reason. It all comes down to motivation.

God always looks at motivation. He knows what motivates us to do what we do. If our motivation is a godly one, one that brings Him glory, if our motivation is love for Him, then it always brings a blessing.

In our readings today we heard Jesus tell of two men who came to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. Both came to the Temple and prayed but only one received a blessing. What was the decisive factor? Motivation.

The Pharisee came into the Temple to promote himself. He had not come to praise and glorify God, no he had come to remind God how good a person he was. He came to remind God what good things he was doing and how religious he was. Listen to his prayer:

“God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” (Lk.18:11-12)

You see, he is standing by the altar, he has puffed out his chest and he is saying – “God look how wonderful I am.” In case God hadn’t noticed he reminds him what he is doing. It is not hard to understand why Jesus came down so heavily upon the Pharisees. Jesus hated their hypocrisy. Jesus knew their motivation. In His sermon on the mount Jesus said:

“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” (Mt.6:5-6)

and also

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” (Mt.6:16-18)

You see Jesus is teaching about motivation. Two people can pray and one is blessed and the other isn’t. Jesus repeatedly says that The Father sees in secret. The Father sees and knows the secrets of the heart. He knows the motivation that lies behind the prayer. The Pharisees were hypocrites. They served God not to glorify and honour Him, but to receive the praise of men. They wanted people to look at them and say “*Look how righteous and good they are.*” Jesus said that that is their reward. A pretty poor reward in my view compared to the reward Jesus will give in Heaven for those who glorify Him.

We return to our two men in the temple. The other man is a tax collector. He approaches God in a very different way with a different attitude. He has not come to remind God how good a person he is; on the contrary; he is coming to seek God’s forgiveness, mercy and favour. He has come to draw near to God, by confessing and repenting of his sin. He prays: “*God be merciful to me a sinner*” and God is. He goes home justified and blessed.

This parable taught by Jesus is a good one for us to use to measure our motivation and approach to God. How are we? What is our motivation? What drives us? If I am serving God, then to what end? Am I serving Him or myself? It is important to assess yourself with this

line of questioning. It is important to take stock of ourselves and make sure we are not drifting into pride. We can so easily become like the Pharisee and thank God that we are better than others and to really start to think that we are. We must always remember that we are who we are by God's grace alone. Nothing will separate us/ distance us from God quicker than pride.

Our foundation text today is a familiar one. It is the beginning of Paul's discourse on love. We should never allow it to become so familiar that we simply skip over it without meditating upon the truth therein. We must absorb it and allow it to transform our heart.

In this passage Paul is clearly reminding us that if love is not our motivation in all that we do, then our doing is futile. There will be no blessing or fruit.

The foundation for our life and service must be love. Love needs to be front and centre of all we do. Our life should be permeated with God's love. The Christian only has one commandment that has two parts:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Mt.22:37-40)

As I often say: Christianity is not a religious observance, but a relationship with God. This relationship is founded in love. God has loved us so very much that He sacrificed His Son on the cross, shed His innocent Blood, in order to redeem us from sin and death. Jesus so loved us that He shed His blood, so that believing on Him, we could become children of God.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (Jn.1:12-13)

If God has so loved us, we ought to respond by loving Him. That is God's desire for us. He is not interested in empty ritual and service, but in a heart that loves Him.

Let us humble ourselves before Him and pray with David:

***"Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
²⁴ And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way." (Ps.139:23-24)***

Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.***