

## The Motives of Ministry (2 Corinthians 5:11–21)

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### Introduction

Paul discussed the motives that kept him laboring for Christ in spite of difficulties, hardships, and discouragements. Paul saw himself as a servant of Christ given a stewardship to fulfill. He understood that he would stand before Christ to give account for this stewardship; indeed, all will “*appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (5:10).

The principle of *stewardship* underlaid his ministry—a servant acting on the behalf of Christ in advancing the kingdom of God on earth. By contrast, Israel failed in her stewardship of the old covenant, the ministry of *condemnation*. Although the people enthusiastically embraced it, they had no ability to keep it (Exodus 19:8). Reminding them of this incident, Moses recalled the Lord’s response: “*Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments*” (Deuteronomy 5:29; 32:28, 29). What is the latter end?

### I. Background

#### 1. God’s rejection of the Jewish elders as unfaithful stewards of the kingdom

Paul understood that he, too, was a steward in God’s household. Unlike the Jewish elders who worked for their own ends, Paul desired to please the Lord only in His service representing Christ. In the parable of the wicked tenants (Luke 20:9–18), Jesus responded to the elders of the Jews who challenged His authority, informing them of their “*latter end*” (Luke 20:16). Jesus cited their own Scriptures (Psalm 118:22) and concluded their judgment was coming and it would not go well (v. 18). These were unfaithful servants and the Lord was taking the kingdom from them and giving it to truly *faithful* stewards (Malachi 4:1–5).

The old covenant had no means to enable those under it to obey it. It could only condemn them in their failure, particularly failure in covenant stewardship. Jesus illustrated this failure in the parable of the unfaithful steward (Luke 12:35ff). Thus, the old covenant would be brought to an end by the introduction of a new covenant to be served by faithful stewards enabled by the Spirit (v. 42).

#### 2. Paul’s defense as a faithful steward of the new covenant

As a steward of the new covenant, Paul was confident, understanding his service would be both effectual and lasting. His was a “*ministry of righteousness*” as contrasted to Moses’ “*ministry of condemnation*” (3:9). The new covenant ministry would be successful because it was enabled by the Spirit, giving Paul true freedom—freedom from failure as experienced by the Jews. Even though his ministry was tried by many hardships, he never lost heart. He had “*the same spirit of faith*” that motivated David, as recorded in Psalm 116:10. This should encourage all believers in the service to Christ and His kingdom.

Two things motivated Paul’s service; (1) *the fear of God*, by which he sought to *persuade* his hearers, and (2) *the love of Christ*, by which he sought to *relate* to his hearers. Paul abandoned his earthly citizenship for an ambassadorship from heaven with its ministry of reconciliation.

### II. Paul’s Motivation

1. Verse 11 begins with *therefore*, referring to the fact that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10).
  - a. The anticipation of appearing before the Judge of all will cause one to fear the Lord.

What does the *therefore* point to as the motive to fear the Lord (Ecclesiastes 3:14)? The fear of the Lord means to live to please the Lord. Paul views the Lord as a loving father intent on His children becoming what He desired for them (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

Paul understood that he was to give account to God for the stewardship God had entrusted to him. God has entrusted all His people with responsibility clearly outlined in Scripture. All are faithfully to obey His will for all must answer to God for what is done or not done. We do not want to disappoint Him through sin or foolishness. One day we will stand before the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, see Him in all His majesty, and give a full account of how we spent his gifts of grace in our service for Him.

- b. The fear of God drove him to say, “*We persuade others*,” by which he meant to convince his readers not to fail to live to the glory of God.

God is glorified as His people do His will and advance the kingdom. Jesus was very clear (Matthew 7:21; 1 John 2:15–17).

Paul adds, “*But what we are is known to God*, (v. 11b). Paul was fully conscious that there was nothing in his life that was hidden from God. He knows all. Understanding this should also produce caution against offending or failing to obey fully His directives in one’s life and service.

- c. This consciousness causes a *sincerity* observable to those to whom one ministers.

Yes, what we are is fully known to God, *and*, Paul added, “*I hope it is known also to your conscience*” (v. 11b). Genuine sincerity speaks for itself. The sincere servant needs no letters of commendation, no character references and such, but rather his sincerity ought to cause him to “*boast*” (v. 12).

Did this make Paul seem like he was crazy or foolish—out of his senses? Perhaps to some, but Paul reminded them that if he did so, *it was for God*. On the other hand, if they saw him as in a “right mind,” it was for the benefit of the church. Nothing was to be seen as benefiting Paul himself.

2. Paul was also motivated in his serve by *the love of Christ*.

Some teach Paul’s citing the “love of Christ” to mean either His love for His own or their love for Him. This observation misses Paul meaning entirely. The love of Christ controlled him in his ministry focus to both Jews and Gentiles equally. Rather than having a prejudice against or thinking himself superior to the Gentiles, which characterized his critics. He saw Christ as loving equally *all* for whom He died.

This understanding is plainly stated in verse 16. It also agrees with what Paul wrote in Romans 3:9. In other words, God’s redemptive purpose involves all sinners, both Jew and Gentile sinners alike. Paul is not arguing here for universal redemption—that Christ died for all men.

## Conclusion

Paul shows how Christ has reconciled both believing Jews and believing Gentiles into one entity, Christians. “*Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all*” (Colossians 3:11; Ephesians 2:13–17).