

Our Motives Will Determine Our Methods

1 Thessalonians 2:4-8

1Th 2:1 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

1Th 2:2 But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

1Th 2:3 For our exhortation *was* not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

1Th 2:4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

1Th 2:5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God *is* witness:

1Th 2:6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor *yet* of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

1Th 2:7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

1Th 2:8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

1Th 2:9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

1Th 2:10 Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

1Th 2:11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children,

1Th 2:12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

A man was out fishing in a south Florida swamp and noticed a stump sticking up out of the water with an acorn on it. He thought that was quite unusual, wondering how the acorn got there. But then he saw a squirrel on the dry land, eyeing the acorn. The man thought perhaps the squirrel had put it out there or thrown it out there, but now he became interested in watching what the squirrel was going to do about it. Finally, the squirrel backed up about twenty feet and began to run at full speed. He leaped across the water, hit the side of the stump, grabbed on to it, and gradually pulled himself up on top of the stump. Then the fisherman watched as he devoured the acorn.

But now the squirrel had a problem. How could he get back to the land? On the land he had twenty feet to get his speed up. Here he had only about twenty-four inches. The squirrel decided to give it a try. He jumped as hard as he could but didn't make it. When he hit the water, an alligator surfaced, opened his mouth and devoured the squirrel who had devoured the acorn. The fisherman was greatly bothered but there was nothing he could do so he turned his attention back to his fishing.

But then he heard a splashing in the water near the stump and watched in amazement as the alligator surfaced again, lifted his head up to the top of the stump and put another acorn up there!

That story reflects the truth Paul declared in our text concerning the relationship between motives and methods.

Listen to the way he put it.

1Th 2:4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

1Th 2:5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

1Th 2:6 Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor *yet* of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

1Th 2:7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

Or in other words:

“We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed-- God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.”

Questions are being raised today about the things we do and why we do them, about our methods and our motives. Paul reminds us in our text that our motives will determine our methods.

This is true of our *business*. Our ultimate motive—

- whether it be to make a lot of money
- or to beat our competitor
- or to gain a name for ourselves
- or to honor God with our work

--will determine our methods.

This is true of our *homes*. Our ultimate motive,

- whether it be to fulfill our own needs
- or to fulfill the needs of our spouse,

--will determine our methods.

It is also true of our *relationships*. If our motive in life is to use our relationships to satisfy ourselves, then we will follow one set of methods. But if our motive in life is to use our relationships to serve others, then we will follow another set of methods.

In every case, our motive will determine our methods.

So the first question we need to ask about our lives, whether it be our relationships or our home or our job is not *how* we are to do something but *why* we want to do it. Motive is the key.

What is our motive in life?

What would we like to do with our lives?

Here was Paul's response in verse 4:

1Th 2:4 ... even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

“We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”

That was his motive. But I want you to notice how his motive shaped his methods.

Honesty

First, his motive, to please God and not people, led to honesty. Paul said, “We never used flattery.”

1Th 2:5 For neither at any time used we flattering words,

Flattery lives on two different levels, and both levels are reflected in the definitions of the word given in the dictionary. Flattery can be done *for the benefit of the person to whom it is given*. As Webster puts it, to flatter means “to make seem more attractive than is so.”

The motive of flattery in this case is to benefit the other person.

- A mother says to a son after his less than luster performance in the school play, “You were great!”

- A husband says to a wife who is in the final stages of cancer, “You look better today.”

That’s flattery done for the benefit of the other person.

But flattery can also be done *for the benefit of the person who gives it*. As Webster puts it, to flatter in this case means “to get the favor of, as by praise.”

- A young man says to his date, “You are the most beautiful girl I’ve ever dated,” in order to entice her into a sexual favor.
- A student says to his teacher, “I’ve never admired a teacher as much as I do you,” in order to obtain a better grade.

That’s flattery done for the benefit of the person who gives it.

It is this last meaning which comes to play in our text. The phrase Paul used means flattery, not simply as an effort to give pleasure, but with motives of self-interest.

Paul said, “I don’t do that. I don’t flatter people falsely. I don’t feed them lies.” Why? Because he spoke not to please people but to please God.

His motive determined his method.

Unselfishness

Second, his motive to please God and not people led to unselfishness. Paul did not “put on a mask to cover up greed.”

1Th 2:5 ...nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

The Greek word translated “greed” in our text literally means a desire to have more.

Greed—

sometimes called covetousness,

sometimes called avarice—

is one of the seven deadly sins so designated by Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century.

It was demonstrated in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, not satisfied with what God had given them, wanted more.

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said,

Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Gen 3:2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

Gen 3:3 But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Gen 3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

Gen 3:5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Gen 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

It was present in the days of the prophets when Jeremiah wrote: “From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain”.

Jer 6:13 For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one *is* given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

And it is the driving force in America today.

This “desire to have more” affects those around us. But even more tragic is what greed does to the one who is controlled by it.

Greed, which is the desire to have more, eventually causes a person to have less for it draws in the boundaries of one’s life until, you are confined to the neighborhood of who you are. You live in your own little bubble, the center of your own little universe, utilizing everyone and everything revolving around you, to further your own selfish desires.

H. G. Wells made this statement about the conqueror Napoleon: “He stood at last for nothing but himself.”

The world is filled with people like that

- people who use others,
- people who are always looking out for number one,
- people who will do anything and say anything

as long as they get what they want.

Paul said, “I don’t do that. I don’t come to you with a pretext for greed.” Why? Because he spoke not to please people but to please God.

His motive determined his method.

Gentleness

Third, his motive, to please God and not people, led to gentleness.

1Th 2:7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

1Th 2:8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

Paul said, “We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.”

The world is filled with angry, vicious people today, and many of them march under the Christian banner. They claim to be Christians, but they are disrespectful of other people’s feelings and property. They are vicious in attacking their opponent’s character and reputation. They judge and condemn anyone who disagrees with them.

A. W. Tozer, author of the Christian classic, *The Pursuit of God*, once wrote about these kind of people.

“Plain speech is to be admired,” Tozer wrote, “but a lot that passes for plain is simply rude. The trouble with the man who boasts that he calls a spade a spade is that he often ends by calling everything a spade.”

Paul said, “I don’t do that. I don’t come with a desire to destroy and condemn but with a gentleness, like that of a nursing mother who cares for her little baby.” Why? Because he spoke not to please people but to please God.

His motive determined his method.

Conclusion

Look at your life today. What are your methods in relating to the world?

Are your actions characterized by gentleness, or are you angry and condemning?

Are your actions characterized by unselfishness or does greed permeate your activities?

Are your actions characterized by honesty, or do you say whatever you have to say to get what you want?

If there is

- anger,

- greed and
- dishonesty in your life,

then you need to deal with it. And you need to deal with it before it consumes you.

But let me remind you of the truth of our text. The key to dealing with these methods of our lives is not to turn over a new leaf and try to adopt new methods. We need to go deeper than that and examine our motives.

Why do we do what we do?

What is our motive?

If we will come to the place in our lives where we decide that we will not

speak, act, or live to please people but to please God—that is, if we get our motive right—then we will discover that our methods will begin to change.

For our motive will determine our methods.