



Sermon

Paul's Motivation

2 Corinthians 5:6-17

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Do you ever get tired? Do you wonder about the end of this life? Many do especially as age starts to weary us. Now don't get alarmed, I am only had a cold – nothing serious!

But I was struck by this passage in 2nd Corinthians where Paul addresses this very state of mind. We need some context. He himself had been through considerable physical trauma. He lists a staggering set of persecutions and hardships in chapter 11: flogged eight times, stoned once, shipwrecked three times. He cited danger from rivers, bandits, fellow Jews and false brothers, in the city, in the countryside, at sea. He had laboured, toiled, often gone without sleep, been hunger, thirsty, cold and naked. In particular, in Chapter 1 he wrote:

... we suffered [hardships] in the province of Asia [modern day Turkey]. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril. [NLT]¹

So Paul knew what it was to suffer - arguably more than any of us. In the Chapter 4, preceding our reading there is that reference you probably remember: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels."² Paul was writing about our carrying the treasure of the revelation of Christ, in our frail bodies subject to sickness, suffering and death. Yet he continued, that he does not lose heart [v16]. The body may be wearing down, but the inner life is renewed day by day. The sufferings we endure work to produce a great weight of eternal glory.

In the early verses of Chapter 5, he compares this life to the life to come. Do you remember what Paul's profession was? He was a leatherworker who made tents. So here we find Paul using the analogy of a tent for the human body. Just as we may live in a tent, so our spirits live in our bodies. Let's read it in the NLT:

¹ 2 Cor 1:8-10

² 2 Cor 4:7

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. ³

Who would rather live in a tent than a house? No, we prefer the house. So he likens the eternal spiritual body we shall have to a house and that is preferably to this life.

Paul then says we get weary of our mortal bodies with their restraints, weaknesses, sicknesses and decline – how we may long to have the ‘super bodies’ of the resurrection.

We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. ⁴

He wrote in a similar vein in Philippians 1:21 “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

So if we are struggling with life’s difficulties, Paul says yes the next life is better but there is purpose and obedience in living out the life God gives us here.

In our reading, we are given a list of motivating passions for Paul’s life. There may be suffering; he may long to be with Christ in glory, but while he lives here, he is motivated by seven things. We too should find some or all of them valuable in our lives.

1. The Holy Spirit gives life and vitality to our mortal bodies. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a promise of future glory to us. Paul uses in verse 5 the term deposit and guarantee – commercial references to the proof of the quality of the goods to be supplied. Friends, we need to stir up the presence of the Holy Spirit within ourselves by opening our lives to him, inviting him in, worshiping God. As we do, we are daily renewed in our inner selves.

2. Faith. We live by faith not by sight. (v7) Our focus is not on the current difficulties but on God’s call on our lives. Living by sight means depending on those things you can see, touch, measure. Living by faith means depending on the promises and leading of God in your life. Sight is valuable but does not take us all the way. Faith takes the extra step which is reasonable but depends on God for support rather than on things you can see.

When we die, we enter a walk with God by sight where we are in close personal fellowship with Christ. Then we will know even as we are known.⁵

3. The confidence we have new bodies waiting for us in heaven. When we die we enter into a new life with Christ and we have the certainty of a future possession of a spiritual body. I haven’t time to explore this idea in depth, but remember that in 1 Corinthians 15, he explained this resurrection body is being far superior to these mortal bodies. He explained the difference by comparing a fully grown plant to the seed from which it came. As the plant is more glorious than the seed, so the resurrection bodies will be more glorious than these mortal bodies.

³ 2 Cor 5:1 [NLT]

⁴ 2 Cor 5:2-5 [NLT]

⁵ 1 Cor 13:12

4. The passion to please the Lord. [v9] Whether we live or die, we are in His presence. Because the future state is to walk with Christ, Paul says his desire is to please Him. That is a motivation for how we live. There are at least three reasons to want to please the Lord in our living:

Because he is the Lord God Almighty. He is our creator. He is the source of all life, morality and purpose. Whom else should we desire to please?

- Because he is our Saviour who has given himself to rescue us.
- Because he loves us and he loved us when we were rebellious enemies.

5. Paul warns that there is a judgement to come [v10-11a].

For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body. Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. [NLT]

This is not a salvation judgement. The New Testament teaches of a judgement of Christians which is not for salvation – that is already decided – but of rewards for our works. This is separate from the General Judgement of unbelievers for salvation.

We are not saved by our good deeds, rather our saving faith causes good deeds to flow from us. These are evidence of the faith within us. So the Judgement Seat of Christ referred to here is the occasion when all Christians will give an account of themselves before Christ which Paul also mentions in Romans 14:12 and 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. Nevertheless, the knowledge that we are accountable to the Lord is a powerful motivation for how we live our lives.

6. The holy awe of God. This is connected to the knowledge of a judgement. He says in verse 11, “Since we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” The fear of the Lord can be a servile avoidance of punishment. It can also be the filial respect which springs from love and takes care not to offend God but rather to please him. When we are in awe of God we want to obey and satisfy him because of who he is. It could be called practical piety or the fruit of a godly character. It is the Holy Spirit who produces it in our souls and it brings great blessing. There are ten references to the “fear of the Lord” in Proverbs which display these blessings:

- It is the beginning of knowledge... 1:7, 2:5
- It is the beginning of wisdom ... 9:10, 15:33
- It is the fountain of life; it leads to life; it adds length to life. 14:27; 19:23; 10:27
- Through it, a man avoids evil. 16:6
- With humility it brings wealth, honour and life. 22:4
- Be zealous for the fear of the Lord. 23:17

Isaiah said the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord would be on the Messiah: “the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD - and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.”⁶

So Jesus was imbued with the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. He had no judgement to fear but he delighted in the fear of the Lord! It is not something to be avoided.

7. Finally, the Love of Christ compels us [14]. The love of Christ is supremely shown by his dying for us. So Paul writes

⁶ Isaiah 11:2-3

Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. [NLT] ⁷

Our lives are not our own – we are twice owned by God. He owns us as creator. When we went astray and became enslaved by sin he redeemed us back to himself as saviour. Therefore we should live for him not for ourselves.

We have gone through these seven empowering motivations Paul gave us for living our lives for Christ.

1. the Holy Spirit,
2. faith,
3. the joyful confidence that we have new bodies waiting for us in heaven,
4. our life's passion to live for Christ,
5. the knowledge of our appointment to stand before Christ,
6. our holy awe of God,
7. Christ's endless love for us.

All of them are relevant; all of them are valid. I wonder though if it would help you to choose one or two to focus on. Maybe there is one which registers with you in some way. Maybe you are made curious or excited by one of these empowering ideas. It would be good to dwell on that. Spend some time thinking about it. Do some Bible study on it. Get it well grounded into your thinking and into your inner being. Allow it to bring you life, motivation and empowerment.

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⁷ 2 Cor 5:14-15