



Faith Pulpit

Motivation for Service in the Local Church

One of the key questions facing the leadership of a local church is: How does one motivate the believers for service in the church?

At the outset, church leaders face problems. They recognize that only fifteen to twenty percent of the believers in a local church are actually serving the Lord in productive ways. It is futile to place the blame on the believers without first analyzing why these believers do not serve, and second, providing creative ways for them to do so.

For example, the average Christian is unclear about two strategic areas: he is not alert concerning his role in the church and he is not sure why the church exists. For that matter, he is not aware of the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life or of any gifts the Spirit has given him for service. In a word, the believer has not been sufficiently disciplined nor has he been sufficiently challenged. Part of the problem is that too many leaders have not understood the problems or the solutions, or if they have, they have felt threatened by any thought of sharing responsibility and authority.

Many of the minority who are working in the church tend to become overloaded with responsibilities and carry much more of a burden than they should, or they simply tire and cease work altogether due to the burden. In some cases, a few involved workers have even assumed an inflated sense of importance and become self-appointed leaders in the church.

In attempting to answer some of these complex questions, the leaders need to distinguish between proper and improper motivations. Because the church is a spiritual organism and not identical to the neighborhood business, it presupposes that the answers are not human but spiritual. It is relatively easy to build a “successful” organization simply by adapting successful methodology adopted from the world. This is not to suggest that what the world has to offer is all bad; it simply argues that a spiritual ministry must have a distinctly spiritual focus.

As a matter of fact, Scripture suggests at least three spiritual motivations that should guide the work of the local church. First, the believers should serve the Lord for the altruistic purpose of God's glory. Second, the believer should serve the Lord in order to receive rewards at the bema seat of Christ. Third, the believer should serve the Lord because of His any-moment return.

The Glory of God

The theme of the glory of God in Scripture rises like the morning sun in its full blaze of light and hovers over all of God's work for eternity. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 says, “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought [literally, “have been bought”] with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” That is, we are His purchased possession; he has a right to us, and we have a need to serve Him for His glory. The same author amplifies this when he says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

This theme of God's glory is repeated constantly in Scripture in terms of human motivation. For example, Paul rejoices about our standing in Christ when he reflects on our predestination and says that it is to the praise of His glory. What has been accomplished in us is to bring God glory (Ephesians 1:5,6). In that same context, Paul concludes that since Christ has done so much for us, we should be to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:12).

Paul relates this theme to his own life and ministry when he reminded the Thessalonians that he performed his service not to be seen or recognized of men (1 Thessalonians 2:6). The faithful steward must live to please God not man. It is easy to compromise the message and the method to win friends, but God cannot bless a steward whose message and ministry are not according to His divine pattern. Paul claims that his message was not of deceit or error. It was the Word of God. His motive was pure and not of uncleanness, and his method was honest and not in guile. He did not resort to flattery, that insincere complimenting of people for personal gain.

The sum of the theme of the glory of God appears in 1 Thessalonians 2:12: “That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

The Judgment Seat of Christ

The second great motivating factor for the believer is the judgment seat (bema) of Christ. Every believer is to appear at this reward seat to receive rewards for what he has done as a believer according to whether it has been good or good for nothing. The question at issue is not our sins (note Hebrews 8:12) but whether we are deserving of rewards at this inspection time.

The Coming of the Lord

The coming of the Lord serves as the third great motivating factor for service in the local church. The primary hope of first-century Christians was not the current earthly hopes or the passing expedients of temporal goals. It was the hope of the soon return of Jesus Christ. This attitude of expectation was the common attitude of the entire church for at least three hundred years.

The New Testament Scriptures are full of promises and exhortations concerning the hope of the believer. John 14:3 states: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.” Paul rejoices in Romans 8:23 that he was waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body. He urges every believer to look for that blessed hope. This imminent coming demands a careful walk, a consistent witness, and a consecrated will. Christians who believe and practice the Bible are often labeled “visionary” and “impractical.” But the hope of the believer is a working hope, not simply a waiting one. Quite often, true Christians are lulled into a state of sleep by becoming satisfied with their present attainment. The Apostle Paul did not relax because of past achievements. He said in Philippians 3:13–14: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

The believer is exhorted to watch and to be sober minded. To watch means to have an attitude of vigilance and expectancy as contrasted to laxity and indifference. In observing I Thessalonians, the saint observes that watchfulness is directly related to every area of the believer’s life, and that it has its anchor in the purifying hope of the church, the return of our Lord.

The imminency of Christ’s return is a constant incentive to that watchfulness that will quench evil desires, overcome wicked thoughts, and keep the eye of faith on Christ. This is the same watchfulness that will cause the believer to look for occasions when he can most effectively serve God.

What value has all of this in the life and ministry of a local church? Apart from the study of the Word necessary to an accurate interpretation of prophecy, the certainty of the Lord’s return provides a personal incentive to be comforted in trouble, to live a holy life, to do God’s will, to manifest an inward quiet and an outward industriousness, to be disciplined and to pray much, to evangelize the lost with the time remaining, and, above all, to rejoice that we are objects of His grace.

It is easy for a local assembly to dispense truth without living it. It is easy to fall into a comfortable routine largely unaware of needs in people’s lives both in the church and in the world.

It is obvious that if a local church is to perform a spiritual ministry, and enjoy spiritual results, that ministry must be accomplished by spiritual means and spiritual motivations. Then the believers can more adequately focus on the implementation and the realization of service through the assembly.

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