

## Motivations Matter

The reason why a person does something is often as important as what they are doing. This doesn't mean that evil things done for good reasons should be excused, but it does mean that sometimes good things are done for the wrong reasons. In the past week I have had this conversation twice in different settings, so maybe it will benefit others as well.

Imagine a wife who gets up in the morning and cooks a great breakfast, cleans the house impeccably and ensures the kids stay quiet while her husband is sleeping so that he can rest and get his sleep until he is ready to come and eat. On first glance, this looks wonderful, who could possibly find fault? The one who knows her motivations might. There are a number of possible motivations, of which I will present two at opposite ends of the spectrum. One woman may do these things in order to avoid being beaten by her alcoholic and controlling husband. The other does them as a display of love to her children and husband. I am not belittling or condemning the woman in an abusive relationship. She has found a way to survive a terrible situation which no woman should ever be expected to endure. But the reasons for her 'good deeds' are not love of others, but love of self and desire for self-preservation and probably fear. The right things done for the wrong reasons.

Similarly, a man may bring his wife flowers, buy her nice clothes and treat her well in public; but the motivation isn't from love of her, but out of a desire to be thought well of by others. His good actions don't flow from love of another but love of himself and so they are tainted. I present these scenarios to ask a simple question related to our faith and its practice: Do your actions flow from a love of God or from some other love? Do you love others and treat them well because it is a response to having experienced God's love? Or do you act like you love others because you are trying to earn God's love or look good to others or make a good name for yourself? Do you engage the word of God and pray to earn God's approval or because you already have God's approval and want to know him better? Our motivations matter. God looks upon the heart as well as the hand. He looks upon our deeds but also the reasons why we are doing them.

It will never suffice to say to God – "I did the right things." For salvation is "by grace through faith and this not of ourselves it is the gift of God so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Likewise, it is not enough to say, "My heart was pure, even if my actions were wrong." For the "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9) Furthermore, it is out of the heart that all the actions of life spring (Prov. 4:23).

So, as you engage in the actions of the coming month, take some time and reflect upon the motivations of your heart. Ask yourself – why you are doing this or that and be honest with yourself. If you find that some of your motivations are wrong, then confess and ask God to work in you to both will and to do what is right (Phil. 2:13) so that your life and the lives of those around you may be pleasing in every way and representative of the new life that God brings to his children – new hearts as well as new hands.