

“Come, Follow Me, Or Else!”

What takes real motivation? Picture one soldier who goes out against his will to spend hard days and weeks in the army. Picture another soldier who throws himself into the line of fire to save his comrades. There are probably two different motivators behind their actions. Fear can motivate. But the motivation that comes from love can be far greater.

When it comes down to what motivates us there's essentially only fear and love. The teachings behind these motivators in the Bible can be called law and gospel. God threatens the sinner and warns of their destruction. The law causes fear. It can even motivate someone into action. Someone who is about to die because of their sin will certainly think twice about how they view that sin. By itself the law is a harsh thing to face. It will leave us feeling in despair and in a constant struggle against the guilt that plagues us. But it still can move us into action.

But the Bible has another teaching. The gospel is very different from the law. It motivates someone into action without using fear. It drives a person to act through an outpouring of love. When the sinner realizes the forgiveness and goodness of God the gospel motivates them to a new life of faith. In thanksgiving, without fear, the believer can serve God. There is no threat to fear, but it still moves us into action. Often far more than the law ever could.

Both teachings are needed. The law will cut the sinful heart. It can wake up the person who is sinking into spiritual slumber and falling away from faith. It can guide the believer into a life of thanksgiving. The gospel will overcome the sting of the law and strengthen the new self. It will bring healing and comfort where the law brought guilt and fear.

Parents, teachers, and others in positions of authority can use the law to motivate others. But only the Christian properly can understand the motivation of the gospel. Jesus has given us the love of God in the most amazing way. We know the pardon of God for the guilty. We know the power of a love which seeks no payment in return. We know the love of God that comes completely undeserved for the sinner. We know of an amazing love of sacrifice and faithfulness for the faithless. We call it God's grace. That love of our Jesus changes our hearts and motivates us in a way the unbeliever can never fully understand.

Saul was driven by the Spirit to move the people into action. They were in spiritual slumber and needed the threat of the law. But when the chance came to bring out swift retribution on those who failed, he lets the gospel shine. Saul forgives the dissenters, allows healing, and wisely lets a new motivation begin to reign in the people who once hated him. God has done this for us. We now can do the same.

Discuss and Apply

- 1) Read 1 Samuel 11. What does Saul's occupation at the start of this account reveal about his new kingship? What did it take to arouse him into action? What did he use to move Israel into action?
- 2) List some other times when those appointed or called to serve God delayed or hesitated in carrying out their calling. What reasons might there be for such a delay?
- 3) What causes each of us to hesitate in our own life of sanctification?

- 4) List some other times when God used a crisis or injustice to bring his people into action. How might he do this in your life?
- 5) Evaluate Saul's call to action. When might we need to use this type of motivation?
- 6) Jesus' call to follow him is far different in nature. List all the things the King of kings has done that we might "came out together as one" and follow him through all things?

Watch Where your Heart is Headed

You might know the feeling of getting your first car. It didn't matter if it had an odd smell or if it was brand new. It was yours. And it didn't matter if it was a rusty twenty-year-old Oldsmobile or a shiny new Jeep. You got to drive it where you wanted.

Can you picture someone going out for their first ride and taking their first ride in their newly obtained vehicle and looking for trouble? They see a sign that says, "rough road ahead" and they turn down it. They travel from clean asphalt onto dusty and bumpy roads that leave the covered in dirt. They are warned about the possible dangers as their vehicle shakes on the road and nearly blows a tire with every pothole they hit. Can you picture the driver getting excited about ruining their vehicle or getting it stuck somewhere right off the bat?

Unfortunately, that is our sad state due to the fall into sin. Our hearts cause a foolish blindness to everything that ruins. God warns, "Watch out where you are headed." But heedlessly we go on and harm our bodies, harm our marriages, harm our souls with so many countless foolish actions. What does it take to cause us to see the path we are headed down?

Like the driver hitting an occasional pothole we may not think of the severity of it all. But sin is often far more serious than we realize. It only takes one pothole to blow a tire. It only takes one slippery slope to cause us to roll off the edge into the canyon. Sin not only causes damage and harms us. It kills body and soul.

The people of Israel were warned about their sinful desire for a king. They had no idea what road they were now headed on. Samuel gives them a final warning from the Lord. And he points out the severity of their sinful desire.

With every sinful desire we need to see the road we are headed down. And when the harm, the guilt, and the destruction come near, we can turn back and see the one who never turned aside from his faithful love. Samuel told the people that their request for a king was evil. The people only began to see that truth when lightning and hail came down from heaven. But when they turned to the Lord, they heard the reply, "For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own."

We may not always choose the right path, but the Lord has chosen us in mercy. Watch now where your heart is headed. Keep your eyes on him.

Discuss and Apply

Read 1 Samuel 12. How often have you experienced anyone repenting of an evil desire only after they were forced to realize the severity of their sin? Samuel gives a final warning as he steps down from being ruler over Israel. To confirm it rain and thunder come during the usually hot and dry harvest season. They now realized what evil path they were headed down.

- 1) Identify what Samuel's main message is to the people on this occasion. Evaluate the people's response.
- 2) The people of Israel simply did not realize how evil their request for a king had been. What other sins could someone slip into without even realizing the severity?

- 3) What is lesson taught in this section regarding repentance and forgiveness?
- 4) Discuss: "It is never too late to realize your sin and to repent."
- 5) What gospel do you find in this section? Apply that to your life.

Pretend Piety

Saul was supposed to be the example of faith. He was supposed to lead the Israelites in following the Lord. Instead he gave a grand display of “taking matters into his own hands.” His actions not only dishonored the Lord’s prophet, but made it seem like a mere transaction and sacrifice to the Lord would assure victory in battle. He turned the Lord’s provision into a transaction, faith into fearful action. Somehow, he tried to make fear-driven carelessness with God’s direction seem godly and good.

There will be countless times that you will be tempted to take the practical road instead of the high road of faith. The teacher spends countless hours at school preparing. “it’s for the good of the kingdom” he says because he’s at a Christian school. Never mind the fact that he is ignoring his own family so that he can receive more praise from his peers at the next faculty meeting and parents at the next PTO meeting. “He works so hard.” It’s a false piety that dropped the ball and didn’t guide his own family in the Word. The foolish pastor thinks “I can just avoid a lot of trouble if I just do it my way” as he spends hours on a sermon slideshow to impress instead of impressing the text of the Bible on his heart. People are impressed, but God is not. “He works so hard on his messages” everyone reasons. It’s a false piety. The foolish father makes a pietistic front: “God will understand why I am just doing a family Bible reading this Sunday and skipping church. It’s just as good, right? I’m doing what he wants.” He sets an example that dishonors his God, but makes it look godly. It’s pretend piety.

Many believers have taken the hard road. In faith they have tossed aside “what I had to do in that circumstance” in favor of “what God called me to do in that circumstance.” This has meant loss of money, loss of respect from peers, loss of comfort. Some have even lost their freedom or their lives for the sake of the kingdom when they could have taken an easier route. But none of them ever regretted it in the end.

Jesus has promised that much. “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Mark 8:34–35.

Forget fear driven carelessness with God’s direction. It might look reasonable and good on the surface. You might even try to make it look godly. But you’ll never regret following Christ in faith, even down the hardest of paths.

Discuss and Apply

What is “false piety”? Read 1 Samuel 13. Appraise Saul’s actions at Gilgal.

- 1) In what ways might we or leaders today in God’s kingdom be tempted to deviate from his plan for our mission?
- 2) How can reasoning “*it’s the best in the situation I’m given*” lead us to deviate from God’s will and into false piety?
- 3) In your group come up with three or more common situations in which believers end up deviating from God’s plan. Include some of the excuses they give for their actions.

i.

ii.

iii.

- 4) Can you identify the false piety in the situations above?
- 5) Give several reasons why the harder road of faith is always the best course of action in your examples listed above.