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Motivation in Paul's Life

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Motivation in Paul's Epistles

By M. H. GRUMM

There is no pastor worthy of the name who does not keep the perennial question of motivation at least simmering at the back of the stove. A problem not only of pastors but of teachers, parents, psychiatrists, salesmen, advertising men, and politicians is this: How do you move people? move them not only to do something but to want to do something? The pastor, of course, is concerned with more than a job by which he earns his bread and butter and with more than a specific job for a specific aim, for this office covers the whole range of life every hour of the day.

Much of the pastor's work is done as a preacher. In the sermon the ends are proclaimed, and the means are brought into action. Or it can also be said that the means are proclaimed that the ends may come to fruition. Obviously only segments of the whole truth can be presented in one sermon. In doing so he seeks to maintain the proper relationship between Law and Gospel, between justification and sanctification, between doctrine and life. It is especially in the matter of motivation that the preacher expounding a part of Scripture needs the background and balance of the whole of Biblical theology. There is probably no other area in preaching in which there is such a wide room for improvement as in this. It is the purpose of this paper to seek light on this subject from the corpus of Paul's congregational epistles.

I

When we hear of motivation we think almost instinctively of words like "should," "ought," "must," which reproduce the

Greek word *δεῖ*. It is found 25 times in all of Paul's writings, less than half of these occurring in contexts involving motivation. He uses the term in connection with:

1. His own work, Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:4
2. Standards for pastors, 1 Tim. 3:2, 7, 15; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:7
3. His own conduct as a standard for new Christians, 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:7

Then there is another term which also has the meaning of obligation, duty, debt: *ὀφείλειν, ὀφειλέτης*. This concept is found 18 times in Paul:

1. Concerning his own work: I am debtor, Rom. 1:4
2. For his own obligation to give thanks, 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13
3. "We who are strong" ought to help the weak, Rom. 15:1
4. For "natural" standards of conduct, 1 Cor. 11:7, 10; 2 Cor. 12:14; Eph. 5:28
5. Obligation to government; the only proper debt is to love, Rom. 13:7, 8
6. Gentile Christians are debtors to the Jewish Christians, Rom. 15:27. But note that when Paul appeals directly to these Gentile Christians in 2 Cor. 8 and 9, this kind of language is not used.
7. Language of the Law, Gal. 5:3. Note Rom. 8:12, where Paul starts to speak about debtors, using this word in a negative way, but does not continue the sentence as a positive statement.

A still stronger word, ἀνάγκη, "necessity, compulsion," is used several times by Paul:

1. He himself feels it, necessity is laid on him, 1 Cor. 9:16
2. It is necessary to be subject to government, Rom. 13:5
3. But he rejects compulsion as motivation, 2 Cor. 9:7, Philem. 14.

To sum up so far: There is a significant absence of words of obligation in contexts of motivation in Paul's epistles. That the Christian is under a tremendous obligation is a fact to Paul. He feels it strongly. But he does not preach it to motivate to action.

Then let us have a look at "gratitude," which is on a higher level than obligation and which figures so prominently in many sermons: "Out of gratitude, then, let us . . ." εὐχαριστεῖν is found 24 times, εὐχαριστία 12 times, and the adjective εὐχάριστος once. (χάρις too is several times used in the expression "Thanks be to God," and twice in the RSV it is translated by "thankfulness": 1 Cor. 10:30; Col. 3:16.)

Nine times we find Paul offering prayers of thanks to God in his epistles for God's grace evident in the lives of the readers. Once he uses the word as due to men, to Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:4). In all instances he uses the words in the sense of *giving* thanks, the act of thanksgiving to God (Rom. 14:6; 2 Cor. 4:15; 9:11; Eph. 5:4, 20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 1:12; 2:7; 3:17). The more abstract "feeling" of thankfulness or gratitude emerges as a possibility only in the use of the adjective in Col. 3:15 and in the two verses mentioned above in which χάριτι and ἐν τῇ χάριτι have been translated "with thankfulness." But in the context the meaning is certainly that of expressing thanksgiving to God.

In other words, there is little or no evidence that Paul had in his vocabulary, or at least made use of, the abstract concept that would be the equivalent of our word "gratitude." He has in mind the "concrete" expression of thanks to God, a thanksgiving that is a fruit of God's grace. It is not used by Paul as the root of Christian life. He does not appeal to the human response of gratitude as the source for Christian action. It is a fruit, not a root.

By a process of elimination we have established that Paul does not make use of the ordinary human bases of motivation, a sense of obligation or a feeling of gratitude, much less of the motivation of self-interest. What then is left? Is there anything higher in human response than evangelical obligation or gratitude for grace? There is not. And yet Paul will have none of it, not even the best. For him it is not enough. More, it is irrelevant. He is not interested in a *quid pro quo* human response at all. He has something different, something far better and higher.

II

What Paul is after, what he has to offer, can perhaps best be summed up simply in the relation between *Christus pro nobis* and *Christus in nobis*.

Paul is the exponent par excellence of the divine objective basis of Christianity in the historical act of God in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and of the objective, universal, forensic significance of that act of God for men. The "alien righteousness" that Luther stressed comes straight out of Paul. And yet Paul does not treat this as a separate self-contained theological truth. God's act in Christ is, so to say, not in-

transitive but transitive. It is always ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. The purpose is integral to the essence. To say "Jesus Christ" is to say "for man." Man is involved and is in the picture from the beginning. Paul, the bulwark of the forensic significance of this objective fact, most patently and thoroughly carries it through to its subjective conclusion of purpose. The story of the progressive process can be told in prepositions in Paul's Letter to the Romans.

In the classic chapter which sets forth the ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, the fifth, there is another prepositional phrase that expresses the same truth from the obverse side: διὰ χριστοῦ. *Through* Christ we have peace with God (v. 1); we have obtained access to grace (v. 2); we were reconciled to God (v. 10); we rejoice in God, we have now received our reconciliation (v. 11); reign in life (v. 17); that grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life. (V. 21)

How this reconciliation through Christ becomes effectively implemented in man is seen in ch. 6, where we meet several different prepositions. In v. 3 Paul speaks of those who are baptized εἰς χριστόν as being baptized into His death. Then in vv. 4-8 we have a series of σύν- compounds: συνετάφημεν, σύμφυτοι, συνεσταυρώθη, ἀπεθάναμεν σὺν χριστῷ, συζήσομεν: crucified, buried, died, and raised, living *with* him. It is a radical death-and-life identification with the Christ who died and rose again ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

The result of this is evident in the next preposition, ἐν χριστῷ, in v. 11: "Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God *in* Christ Jesus." Our baptism into Christ, that act of God, carries us through our identification with Him in His atoning death and triumphant resurrection to in-

corporation in the sin-and-death-conquering living-to-God Christ. The "in Christ" comes again in v. 23: "eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." Chapter 8 begins with the magnificent flat statement: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The reason: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." The phrase deserves a separate special study, for it occurs over 150 times in Paul's writings, and it is one of his key concepts; so much so that as someone has said, if you understand this, you understand Christianity.

This new status can be expressed in various ways. In vv. 9-11 the same thing is said in five different phrases: You are in the Spirit, the Spirit of God dwells in you, to have the Spirit of Christ, belong to Christ, Christ in you. Incidentally, this section also shows the involvement of all three Persons of the Trinity in this work.

This identification with Christ and incorporation in Christ results in a new relationship with God. In Christ we become something: sons of God (v. 14); children of God (v. 16); heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ (v. 17). This latter title, *συνκληρονόμοι χριστοῦ*, echoes back to ch. 6, and the provisional clause with the two new εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ σὺνδοξασθῶμεν, shows that this new being and relationship depends on the extension and continuation of the basic identification with Christ brought about once and for all by Baptism.

The purpose and result of this new status and relationship is expressed in ch. 7:4: "You have died to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another (ch. 8,9), to Him who has been

raised from the dead *in order that we may bear fruit for God.*"

Our incorporation in Christ brings us into a new relationship not only with God but also, in Christ, with our fellowmen (ch. 12:5): "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."¹ This interrelatedness in Christ with our fellow members expresses itself and flows out in a profusion of channels as indicated by Paul in the remainder of the chapter. It issues in fruit bearing.

So here in this short study of a golden thread running through Romans we see the beginning and the end: ch. 5:8: "God shows His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"; ch. 12:10: "Love one another," together with a long row of guideposts to Christian life. But we have also seen what is in between, what leads from beginning to end, what binds all into one indivisible whole: Christ. It is all *through* Christ, and it is brought about by a dying-and-living identification *with* Him that incorporates us *in* Him as members of His body in new life. From that new life, from the continuing dying of the old self with Him (6:6) and rising with Him to newness of life (6:4), from Christ in us with His righteousness (8:10), flows forth the life of sanctification in

Christ (12:5 ff.), fruit bearing for God. (7:4)

Note carefully the progression of this complete and indivisible process of salvation. In our preaching and our pastoral work we often take shortcuts, we bypass "Christ in us" by shortcutting from 5:8 to 12:10; we jump from a declarative sentence about Christ's deeds for us to an imperative sentence about our deeds for Christ. A common basic sermon outline is an example of this:

- I. What Christ has done for us;
- II. To what this should move us.

Christian life does not flow merely out of knowledge but out of faith. Saving faith is not only the acceptance of truths about Christ, but the acceptance of Christ, the Christ who acted for me as the Christ who acts in me; the Christ who conquered all sin for me as the Christ who conquers in me; the Christ who earned righteousness for me as the Christ who works His righteousness in me. It is personal identification with Christ in His death, resurrection, and life. It involves a radical change, a constant dying to self and rising with Christ to newness of life. It incorporates us into Christ, it replaces our life with the life of Christ in us (Gal. 2:20). In Christ we become something, we are something new. Out of this new being flows new doing. That is why Paul is concerned with character before deeds, with the imprint of the Christ-character, with recreation in His image. From this new creature will flow the deeds of Christ: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

The Letter to the Ephesians is not as

¹ The dynamic reality and power in this concept is short-circuited by treating it as a mere illustration or metaphor. That is more evident from a comparison of Rom. 6:3: baptized εἰς χριστόν, and 1 Cor. 12:13: baptized εἰς ἓν σῶμα; also of Eph. 1:23 and Col. 1:24, where the copulative connecting ἐκκλησία and σῶμα in reversed positions becomes an "equals" sign. That this essential oneness in Christ is an integral part of Paul's motivation is evident from the key position he gives it in other epistles also: 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 4:1-16 (also 2:13-16); Phil. 2:1-5; Col. 2:19; 3:9-15).

neatly systematic from a theological point of view as the Letter to the Romans, but the same ingredients are there.

Through Christ: Through His blood (1:7); in the blood of Christ (2:13); to reconcile us to God through the cross (2:16); through Him we have access to the Father (8:18); Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. (5:2 and 26)

With Christ: In ch.2:5,6 Paul almost stumbles over himself in the intensity of giving full expression to God's action of identifying us with Christ: "But God . . . even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (συνεζωοποίησεν [Paul had to coin a new word for this tremendous truth]), and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (A parallel to both this passage and Rom.6:4-8 is in Col.2:12,13, which is in the middle of a short, powerful presentation [9-15] of through-with-in in reverse order.)

In Christ: Ephesians, together with Colossians, is the classic locus for setting forth the fact and significance of ἐν χριστῷ. In Eph. 1:3-14, where the phrase occurs 10 times, note:

1. The basic use of the expression in sentences in which God is subject. He plans, wills, purposes, acts, accomplishes; in a sweep from "before the foundation of the world" to "the fullness of time." All this is in Christ.

2. All of this is with "us," and "you" as object. We are bound up inextricably in Christ with God's eternal plan and work of salvation.

3. In Christ we have something: In Him we have redemption through His blood,

the forgiveness of our trespasses (v.7). Furthermore, life (2:5); peace (2:14,15); boldness and confidence of access. (3:12)

In Christ we become, we are, something: He has destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ (v.5). Further: we are His workmanship (2:10); fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God . . . a holy temple in the Lord . . . a dwelling place of God (2:19-22); fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus (3:6); light in the Lord. (5:8)

The purpose of this being in Christ: He destined us to be His sons . . . to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (1:5,6); in Him . . . we have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory (v.12). Further: that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (2:7); that through the church the manifest wisdom of God might now be made known (3:10); we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ; from whom the whole body . . . makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (4:15,16)

Not an imperative verb here; in fact none is found until later in chapter 4.² But this is not merely the "doctrinal" section preparing for the "practical" section

² Similarly there are no imperative verbs in the first 11 chapters of Romans except a grouping of five of them in the middle of ch. 6: "So consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign. . . . Do not yield your members to sin . . . but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life." Consider then the tremendous load carried by the οὖν in 12:1.

at the end. This is *it*. If we are not already well on the move by ch. 4, no amount of pressing, appealing imperatives is going to help. For here from the very first we are involved in Christ. The dynamic call and purpose, the grace and power of God in Christ, is so pressingly carried home to us that either we are caught up into this dynamic ongoing movement, or else we are still dead, beyond the reach of even strong imperatives. And here it should be emphasized that the call of God in Christ is not a mere invitation, but it is creative, it contains within itself the enabling power to realize its stated aim. This is what you have and are in Christ. To this you are called and destined by God in Christ. The imperative is implicit in the indicative: Be what you are.

Note how Paul further "pulls up" the saints³ (that is what they are, in Christ, and nothing less) by his prayers in Eph. 1:15-23 and 3:14-21. His prayers of intercession are always for the full realization of the potentialities already present in their being in Christ. And note too the same holding before their eyes of the onward, upward call in Christ in 4:11-16: God's gift of workers of the Word to build up the saints for the work of ministry by which the body grows to full maturity. The movement is "into Christ, from whom the whole body . . . makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."

Then when the imperatives do start, they come not as prods to move people,

³ Is our hesitancy in using this N. T. term today perhaps an indication of the predominance of a "realistic," pragmatic human point of view? Cf. Phillips' rendering of Col. 1:9: "We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from His point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding."

but as signposts to people who are already on the march. They are directives for the properly applied implementation of urges already present, instructions for the self-expression of the new man in Christ. Note two things about the imperatives beginning at 5:25:

1. In line with what Paul has said in vv. 23, 24, there is never a negative imperative without the opposite positive, just as in Luther's explanations to the Ten Commandments.

2. There is never an imperative far from an indicative. Interspersed are shorthand reminders of what they have, what they are, in Christ: "for we are members one of another"; "the Holy Spirit, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"; "as God in Christ forgave you"; "as beloved children"; "as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us"; "as is fitting among saints"; "now you are light in the Lord." And then comes that marvelous indicative of the mystery of Christ and the church in which husband and wife are caught up for the practical advice to love each other in their everyday life.

Again it is driven home to us that our problem goes much deeper than merely moving people to do something, or even to want to do something. If that were all, then we could emulate the advertising agencies and set aside a part of our budget for "motivational research" to find gimmicks for influencing people. The totalitarian regimes of this world have shown that they realize the problem is much more fundamental. Their deeply ominous experiments in brainwashing are evidence that they want not just deeds from a man, but they want the man, body and soul, personality, character, and will. If the or-

ganism is properly conditioned, then the reflexes are determinable and assured. It is a bone-chilling perversion, but they know in fact what some Christians seem to know only in theory, that as the tree is, so is the fruit.

III

No doubt much of our trouble in this matter of motivation comes from starting at the wrong place. We are confronted with a situation. Funds have to be raised. We look to the Stewardship Department for some mission stories and Gospel motivation to accomplish our purpose. Or our people are not giving enough of their time and talent for our church program. We seek ways to motivate them — by the Gospel of course — to make their proper contribution.

The question we should really be asking is not, "What is Paul's method of motivation?" but rather, "What is Paul's aim for his members?" He tells the Philippians (4:17): "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit." And to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2): "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband." And (12:14): "I seek not what is yours but you." And this latter he says to a congregation in which he is making a special collection for the saints at Jerusalem. He gets at them very effectively in chapters 8 and 9. But look carefully at the motivation. This is not merely a contribution that he wants to extract for the sake of Christ and the fellowship. It is a χάρις, the grace of God. The word occurs six times. It is for their growth in χάρις. The immediate aim is conditioned by and subordinate to

and involved in the ever-present ultimate aim.

For it is quite evident that Paul seeks not something *from* his people but always something *for* them. He strives for those at Colossae "that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2,3). For those at Philippi he prays "that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:10,11). And for the Ephesians "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith . . . that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17,19). So the question with which we began this study invariably leads us on to a much more searching and basic question, What is Paul's purpose?

Only a church that is weak in Pauline Christology has to resort to basically legalistic imperatives. But it can be any church or any pastor, no matter how pure the theological formulation of doctrine, that fails in the Pauline aim in the measure that in practice the Gospel is used as a law; that preaches Christ's cross and then expects a human response of obligation or gratitude as the root of action; that preaches *Christus pro nobis* and goes directly to *nos pro Christo*,⁴ bypassing *Christus in nobis*.

⁴ Even with proper motivation this term is really not in Paul's vocabulary. He nowhere uses the phrase ζῆν ὑπὲρ χριστοῦ. He once speaks of πάσχειν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ (Phil. 1:29), where the meaning is obviously "for the sake of." What he does use is the prepositionless

When we fail in this matter, is it not perhaps because we think and move too much on the practical human level of cause and effect, *quid pro quo*, the laws of thermodynamics? We make plans for a church program. We set up goals. We want results, action. We figure that we have to put in an amount of Gospel motivation proportional to the results expected. This may be oversimplified and exaggerated, but let a man so examine himself. Jesus speaks of His disciples not as those who produce fruit, but as branches that bear fruit as they are an organic part of the Vine: "He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." We are but channels through which the sap from the vine flows to produce fruit. Or, in someone else's metaphor, we are like cups under a faucet, overflowing not with what we produce but with what we receive.

Paul's corrective to all aberrations, whether of aim or method, is contained in three words: "to make the Word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to His saints . . . which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory (Col. 1:25-27). This contains both cause and effect, God's cause and effect and God's aim and method. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." For "Christ is All, and in all" (Col. 3:11). That is why Paul "decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," the "Power of God and the Wis-

dom of God." "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ" (τέλειον ἐν χριστῷ, Col. 1:28). He is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. We do not use Christ to fulfill our aims and accomplish our programs, but our programs have validity and effectiveness only insofar as they are in Christ. The means of grace remain God's means of grace, and He uses them in order to impart Christ, Christ in us. For He is our Righteousness and Redemption (1 Cor. 1:30); He is our Life (Col. 3:4); He is our Peace (Eph. 2:14). "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?" The means of grace incorporate us *into* Christ, *from* whom flows forth the life of Christ in His active, interacting, growing body, "until we all attain . . . to the mature man (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Note the same word as in Col. 1:28, there for each individual, here also singular, but for οἱ πάντες.

Any goal that stops anywhere short of the fullness of Christ is shortsighted and stultifying, and the inadequacy of the goal will inevitably affect adversely the means, method, and motivation. Only in the fullness of the Christ-begun, Christ-ended, and Christ-centered purpose and striving of Paul can we hope to find adequacy of aim, effectiveness of motivation, and consequent satisfaction in our work.

We err grievously if we underestimate the toughness, stubbornness, and pervasiveness of the archheresy, varying manifestations of which Paul was dealing with in Galatians and Colossians; if we do not

realize the layer-upon-layer nature of man's natural religion, that *I* must do something. In this matter we find in Paul deep understanding and evangelical patience (Rom. 14), but never any compromise (Galatians). He may make a statement as in Phil. 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." But he could no more let a statement like that stand alone than he could stop drawing a breath after exhaling: "For it is God. . . ."

IV

It is an endless task, endless but constantly challenging. It needs more than theological and homiletical training. It demands not merely eloquent pronouncements about *sola gratia* and *sola fide* but the vital impingement of the living, liberating Christ on the hearers. Not merely a theology whose purpose is descriptive, telling us about Christ; but the living Word of God, whose purpose is functional, bringing Christ in us. And Paul not only preaches, but he strives for them (Col. 1: 29; 2:1), he identifies himself with them (2 Cor. 11:28, 29); he suffers for them (2 Cor. 1:6, 7; Col. 1:24); he spends and is spent (2 Cor. 12:15); he shares himself

(1 Thess. 2:8); he is their father-example in Christ (1 Cor. 4:15, 16); he is again in travail until Christ is formed in them. (Gal. 4:19)

It sounds formidable and forbidding. But it is the same mystery that Paul preaches for others (Christ in you) that he proclaims as having come to pass in him: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The same source in which the hearers are enriched in all things (1 Cor. 1:5) is also the source of the preacher's power: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). It is the same God of whom Paul says in Phil. 2:13: ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλει καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν, and of whom Paul speaks at the end of the first chapter of Colossians: κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἡμοῖς ἐν δυνάμει: "Him we proclaim . . . that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which He mightily inspires within me."

Pernambut, India