

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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We Persuade Others 2 Corinthians 5:11

In an age where people are obsessed with themselves, speaking voluminously about their accomplishments, both believer and unbeliever alike, it bodes well for us to consider the necessity of self-abnegation and self-denial. A simple cursory examination of any good dictionary in the section on “self” will soon convince us of the incredible array of things that describe ourselves. The attempt to persuade others of anything (let alone the truth) loses all its force when we promote ourselves. This was the awful trouble and difficulty that the Apostle Paul was faced with in 2 Corinthians. He had to go to great lengths to defend his apostolic ministry as a genuine call from God over and over again, and it was something he loathed doing. Paul would rather speak thousands of words about Christ than one about himself. In fact, the less said of himself (cf. esp. 2 Cor. 11:1, 16 – 31), the better off he was. The temptation to all of us is to promote ourselves and our work before others. Paul only desired to boast of others and what God had accomplished for them. This is the correct approach.

The way to avoid self-aggrandizement and self-admiration is to be overcome with the fear of God. The fear of God, both in its reverential and judicial aspects is stimulation enough to help us on the right path. Both of these aspects are brought to our minds when we consider 2 Cor. 5:11. We fear God because we love God – we have a reverential holy awe of God because we know who He is and what He can do. This fear of God has been changed for us from the fear of being afraid of God in the sense that He is the Lawful Judge. We know as believers that we have been reconciled to God (see 2 Cor. 5:20). We are at peace with God, yet we know that when we sin against God, another motivation strikes us, namely; that God hates sin and must judge sin, and we should be motivated to turn to Him who is reconciled to us by Jesus’ atoning work because we are afraid of God’s wrath. Some Christians speak lightly of this attitude. If we sin we confidently assert that all is still alright between us and God, yet this is never true. Sin must be confessed and forsaken always. So we recognize both aspects to the fear of God. The unbeliever does not recognize either fear though he is aware of God, but he suppresses the truth (Rom. 1:18 – 21). When an unbeliever comes under conviction of sin, then the fear of God as Judge is highly prevalent.

In this verse before us, Paul has another motivating factor related to the fear of God. In the light of the fact that we as believers must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (which is a very serious affair) he urges us as believers to seek to persuade others (vs. 9). What does he mean and more importantly, who is he referring to? In Romans 14:12, Paul speaks of each of us giving an account to God of ourselves. Such a statement should have a salutary effect upon us. The Judgment Seat of Christ is no light occasion. It is the occasion when the deeds we have done will be examined. This is clear from 2 Cor. 5:10. It is not a judgment respecting our salvation.

Is Paul’s persuasion of others relating to them as believers or unbelievers? If I know the fear of the Lord in the sense that I reverence God for who He is, then my persuasion of others would be directly related to this view. I would be busy persuading others of the seriousness of the impending judgment of our deeds done in the body whether good or evil, and that we should be concerned about what we do and have done. If Paul is speaking of the fear of God in the sense that God is a Judge of salvation-issues, then my motivation should be to share the Gospel. Now in my opinion, both views are not wrong – they are correct as related to either of my views of the fear of God.

It seems in the passage that the verses that come after verse 11 point to Paul's desire that all men be reconciled to Christ culminating in verse 20, but at the same time he speaks of already being reconciled to God (vs. 17, 18). Reverential fear stirs Paul up to do his duty in verse 11, but in verse 14, the measureless love of Jesus motivates him.

The purpose of Christ's death is readily apparent – it is to render us dead since He died for us. We have died with him, and since this is true we are to live for Him and not for ourselves (vs. 15). Christ has reconciled us to God (vs. 18). God does not count our trespasses against us (vs. 19). He has entrusted to us a message of reconciliation making us His ambassadors (vv. 19, 20). Paul implores these Corinthian believers to be reconciled because he recognizes the ongoing effects that sin has upon us and in us. Reconciliation is an ongoing work. We need to continually remind ourselves that for our sakes, God made Christ to be sin for us in order that His righteousness might be ours (vs. 21). Paul is speaking to believers in this passage.

I believe his persuasion of others in verse 11 is motivated and prompted by the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul's view of that judgment reveals his reverent fear of God in the light of that coming judgment, and this is the reason he wants to persuade others to have the same fear as he does. I think this is the primary purpose of the verse 11. I think it is right and valid to recognize a secondary application of the verse.

What is this secondary application? It is simply that in view of God's judgment at the Great White Throne in Revelation 20:11 – 15 where the dead are raised to face their judgment, that we should be motivated by the future eternal state of unbelievers. The fear of God in this connection has to do with God as Judge. Those whose names are not written on the Book of Life are cast into the Lake of Fire – this is the second death (Rev. 20:15). There is perhaps no more somber and serious verse in all of Scripture.

This verse must surely be a motivation to seek the lost in the light of God's great judgment. We must be motivated by the love of Christ. We must love our neighbors. We must seek their good, and to them we must always do well. We must implore all men and women to be reconciled to Christ. It is because we have experienced that grace of God ourselves that we desire others to know the same. It is this attitude which removes any self-promotion and self-talk.

If we must speak of ourselves, then let us speak of what Christ has done in saving dirty wretches like us, granting to us in mercy, grace and love, the righteousness of God. Let us boast of our utter unworthiness before we speak of our accomplishments. In this way we place our hands over our mouths (Job 21:5).

The KJV of this verse speaks of the "terror" of the Lord – which lays a deeper stress on what God is like. He is an awesome and terrifying God (Job 6:4; Ps. 76:7; 88:15; Matt. 10:28; Heb. 10:31). He is a consuming fire. He changes not. It is Jesus that we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ (Col. 1:28).

Persuasion implies not only a duty and responsibility, but urgency. How urgent is it to us to persuade others? The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the sanctification of Christ in our hearts motivates us to impose upon others the truth of being daily reconciled to God, in the light of His soon coming judgment – of which some will pass into life and others shall pass into condemnation. Why speak of ourselves at a time like this – let us speak of Christ alone. If we magnified Jesus the way we can magnify ourselves (seemingly so effortlessly) we would make such an impact in the lives of others as the Apostle did. If we must glory, then let it be in Christ and His cross, by which we are crucified (dead) to the world and the world is crucified (dead) to us.

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