

Watch Out, Your Motivation Is Showing!

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God"
(Acts 5:1-4).

This lesson deals with motives. Webster's defines "motive" as "the sense of need, desire, fear, etc. that prompts an individual to act."

No church is perfect. The early church was no different. In the beginning of this lesson we will look at the first recorded sin in the church's history. It began when the believers agreed that their belongings were not their own but common property. Owners of land, houses and properties sold them and placed the proceeds at the apostles' feet. The selling of possessions was strictly voluntary. Profits were distributed to those with needs. As a result, everyone's needs were met.

Surely, a Little Lie Won't Matter

Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give all the proceeds from the sale of their property. No one had said that they had to give everything. They kept back some of the profits for themselves. Their sin was deception. Not only did they lie to God's

people, they lied to God. They were hypocrites.

Today the story is slightly different. Hypocrites do not necessarily withhold properties; they hold back part of themselves. Yet, they say that they have surrendered all. God truly knows since He looks on the heart.

**"Man sees your actions,
but God your motives."
(Thomas A. Kempis)**

Ananias and Sapphira's trickery did not fool the man of God. How did he know? Was it revealed on their faces? Did the Holy Spirit reveal it? Someone could have warned them, "Watch out, your motivation is showing." It was too late. Peter saw their deceit and hypocrisy. It was totally unnecessary. They were not forced to give the proceeds. Failure to do so was not a sin. But they lied to the Holy Ghost. They expected to hear complimentary words from the man of God. They were hoping to gain glory and recognition. Their root sins seemed to be a love for money and a desire for the praises of others. Instead, they both received a hasty punishment for their short-lived attempt to deceive the Holy Ghost.

Their attitude was different from that manifested by Barnabas, the son of encouragement. He sold a plot of land and freely brought the proceeds to the apostles' feet. What was the difference? It was a difference in motivation. Barnabas was kingdom-minded. He wanted to see the kingdom of God strengthened, extended and expanded. Ananias and Sapphira were other-minded. Are your motives kingdom-minded or other-minded?

Kingdom-minded or Other-minded?

"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Philippians 3:15).

The Man Who Refused the Election

"Now the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Be our king! You and your sons and all your descendants shall be our rulers, for you have saved us from Midian. But Gideon replied, "I will not be your king, nor shall my son; the Lord is your King!" (Judges 8:22-23 *TLB*).

Gideon was timely called to a position of leadership. He never sought glory for himself. He was kingdom-minded. He took a small army of 300 men and defeated the enemy. As a result, the people wanted him to be their king. He would not take honor that belonged to the Lord, and declared Him as king.

We should not be tempted away from what God has directed us to do for temporary fame and glory. Many are motivated by a quest for power. The three great temptations to man are money, sex, and power. It has been said, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Lucifer was brought down because of a quest for power. It is wrong to seek power, personal glory and/or prestige. Desire for positions of power and working politics to get them has disqualified many from a spiritual ministry. Make a commitment now that you will never be motivated by personal ambitions for power and position. It is easy to spot someone desiring power. His motivation shows!

**"God has placed some men above kings as He has given them a mission to fulfill rather than a position to occupy."
(Alexandre Dumas)**

He Is Greater Than I Am

John the Baptist was a bold prophet called to prepare the way for the promised Messiah. After living a solitary life, he enjoyed a large following. Once Jesus came on the scene and started His public ministry, many of John's disciples left him and followed Jesus. John could have been jealous. Clearly this represented a decrease in his power and influence. But, he preferred the kingdom. Surprisingly, John the Baptist was overjoyed and confessed, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

"John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me" (John 1:15).

Whose Kingdom Are You Building?

King Saul's motivation disclosed his desire to bring honor to himself.

"Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal" (1 Samuel 15:12).

Even when the man of God revealed Saul's disobedience, Saul still wanted to protect his honor before the people. He was more concerned about maintaining his reputation than being right with God.

"Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before I srael, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God" (1 Samuel 15:30).

In Christian service we must be careful not to try to bring honor to ourselves and build our own monuments (kingdoms). We are building the Lord's kingdom. Saul was other-minded. David, a man after God's own heart, was kingdom-minded.

"Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of I srael. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God:" (1 Chronicles 22:6-7).

God is a jealous God and is not willing to share His glory with others.

"I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (I saiah 42:8).

O. A. Battista said that people are often motivated by at least two reasons; "the one they tell you about and the secret one." This may be the rule, but Christians and effective leaders should be the exemption to the rule. We should not have secret agendas.

The Man Who Had Everything, Almost

Naaman had prosperity. He had both wealth and power. He is described as a mighty man and honorable. He had everything a man could ask for, but he was a leper. Money, prestige, position and knowing people in high places could not buy him healing. Naaman's wife's

little godly maid had the answer. She told him to go to the prophet for healing.

Naaman thought he could wield power and influence to persuade the man of God. He sent a letter to the king. The king shouted, "What am I, God, that I can heal leprosy?"

Next, Naaman and some of his men went to see the man of God. He thought Elisha would be impressed by his presence. He just knew that Elisha would rush out to receive him, invite him into his house, call on his God, strike his hand over the leprosy, and heal him. However, Elisha was not like many today. We give the rich sinner the best seat in the place and spoil him with our attention. Elisha just sent a message, "Go and dip seven times in the muddy Jordan River." Naaman was furious.

His servants tried to calm him down, "If he had told you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it?" They persuaded Naaman to obey.

As the prophet had promised, Naaman was cleansed of leprosy. He offered Elisha money. Surely, he would accept it. Elisha refused and said, "How can I take money for something that God did?" Naaman promised to serve the true God.

Gehazi, My Heart Went with You!

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him" (2 Kings 5:20).

Gehazi had a different motivation. He ran after Naaman and lied to him. He was given

two talents of silver, two changes of clothes, and two servants to carry these things to his house. He hid them in the house and appeared before his leader.

Elisha asked, "Gehazi, where have you been?"

Gehazi casually answered, "Nowhere!" Watch out, Gehazi, your motivation is showing.

"And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments. . . ? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow" (2 Kings 5:26-27).

The Man Who Escaped without a Coat on His Back

Joseph was a young man with a big dream from God. His jealous, hateful brothers sold him into slavery, and he eventually found himself in Potiphar's household. The Lord was with Joseph and directed his footsteps. He became a prosperous man and the overseer of Potiphar's house.

Everything was left in Joseph's hand, except one thing, Potiphar's wife. She had her eye on handsome Joseph and pleaded, "Sleep with me!" But Joseph was in the house to do business and sleeping with his master's wife was not part of his motivation. She tormented him daily. He kept his flesh under control and replied, "There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Joseph remained strong in a situation

where many would have failed. He kept his motives and actions pure before God and man.

Wrong motives eat away at a man's integrity and eventually destroy his testimony and ministry. It does not happen overnight. No one falls suddenly.

Luis Palau in *A Man After God's Heart* relates a story of the Teton Dam in the USA. When this dam collapsed, everyone was stunned. Without warning, the huge structure suddenly gave away, sending millions of liters of water into the river basin. From all outward appearances, it seemed like it was a sudden disaster. A closer look revealed a hidden fault beneath the water line that slowly weakened the entire structure. It was just a little weak spot, but it was detected too late.

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Check Your Motives

It is important to ask often, "Why am I doing this? Are my motives pure? Am I doing this for the right reasons?"

It's Time to Think

What are some good motives in ministry? What are some bad motives in ministry? Do you have bad motives for the actions you take as you minister?

David prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and

lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23-24).

**"The actions of men are the best interpreters of their thoughts."
(John Locke)**

Tom Johnson, quoted in Richard Edler's book, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now* said, "Do what is right. If you aren't sure, ask yourself this question, 'How will my actions, taken in private, look if published on the front page of the newspaper . . . ?' You never need to lie or cheat to succeed in life."

Study Questions

1. What did Thomas A. Kempis say (in the quote in this lesson)?

2. What was the difference in attitude between Barnabas, and Ananias and Sapphira?

3. What happens to those who desire power?

4. What are the three greatest temptations to man?

5. What did Alexandre Dumas say (as recorded in this lesson)?

6. What did John the Baptist say when his disciples left him and followed Jesus?

7. What concern did King Saul express when caught in sin and disobedience by the man of God?

8. What did Saul want to build?

9. In contrast, what did David want to build?

10. How was the way the prophet treated Naaman different from the way most treat rich sinners?

11. What happened to Gehazi for being money hungry?

12. What do wrong motives eat away?

13. What is a "motive"?

14. Why did Joseph not commit adultery with Potiphar's wife?

15. According to John Locke, what is the best interpreter of our thoughts?
