

and called to him (v. 5). Zacchaeus hurried in obedience to Jesus and welcomed Him joyfully (v. 6). Then, Zacchaeus even said he would give half of his possessions to the poor and make amends for anything if he had extorted from others (v. 8). So, his earnest desire to serve Jesus was met with actions of obedience.

**Christians in Macedonia.** 2 Corinthians 8 records Paul giving instructions to the Corinthians concerning the need for them to make a contribution to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. In doing so, he appeals to the example of the Christians in Macedonia. Although they were experiencing a severe trial themselves brought about by their own affliction and extreme poverty, they wanted to contribute to help their needy Christian brothers and sisters (vv. 1-5). In fact, Paul attributes this to their generosity and says they begged them earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints. This was due to the fact they had given themselves to the Lord first and then to others!

**This combination pleases God.** While the other three combinations fall short of what God desires from our service, this combination hits exactly what God wants. It is the appropriate intersection of the internal motivations of our heart and the external actions of the body, as demonstrated in these examples as well as other passages. Matthew 18:35 illustrates this in the fact that Jesus expects the action of forgiveness to be accomplished from the heart. Ephesians 4:20-24 demonstrates that the transformation God expects from everyone who turns to Him involves a change in action plus a renewal in the heart/mind. 1 John 5:3-4 teaches that true love for God involves both keeping His commands and for those commands not to be a burdensome obligation (implying the motivation is a desire to live for God).

### Conclusion

It is not sufficient to define our service to God through whatever combination of our motives and actions that we desire to give. Instead, we have seen that true service to God involves motives that are pure and pleasing to God plus actions that are right and pleasing to God. Therefore, you must evaluate your past and current service to God so as to see if God is pleased with how you have been and are serving Him!



There are two crucial components when it comes to serving God: Your motives and your actions. That is, the internal motivation of a person's heart and the external actions that are actually accomplished. Unfortunately, it is fairly common for people to skew what God desires either so that our motives are not as important as God says they are or that our actions are not as important as God says they are. However, God's judgment of us will include both the hidden components of our hearts and the actual deeds that are done in the body (Hebrews 4:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10)!

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how your motives and actions impact whether you are truly serving God by considering four possible combinations of your motives and actions.

### Wrong Motives + Wrong Actions

**Adam and Eve.** The first sin mankind ever committed is an example of people having the wrong motives and the wrong actions (Genesis 3:1-6). Although God had given clear instructions to Adam and Eve concerning the fruit they were forbidden from eating (Genesis 2:16-17), Satan convinced Eve to see the tree as something that was good for food, delightful to look at, and desirable for obtaining wisdom. Then, she violated the law by eating of its fruit – and gave it to Adam, who also ate. So, these selfish motives prompted the disobedient actions. Consequently, they experienced spiritual death and were cast out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:7-24)!

**Wicked people in the days of Noah.** Many of those who were living during the days of Noah were guilty of having motives that failed to please God as well as actions that were displeasing to God (Genesis 6:5-7). This combination was detestable to God, to the point that He was

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deeply grieved and determined to wipe them all off the face of the earth with a flood! And, notice that God saw the motives and actions of each one – to the point He could distinguish between them and Noah (Genesis 6:8)!

**This combination does not please God.** It may be fairly easy to understand that this combination fails to please God, as these examples have illustrated. However, there are even additional passages in the Scriptures that plainly demonstrate people must avoid this combination if they desire to serve God. Romans 2:8, for example, speaks of the wrath and anger of God that will be experienced on Judgment Day by those who are self-seeking and disobedient to the truth (while obeying unrighteousness). 1 Timothy 6:3-5 demonstrates God's disapproval of those who were using godliness as a way for material gain and teaching false doctrine. Revelation 2:20-23 shows Jesus's abhorrence of a woman called Jezebel who was deceiving people into committing sin and had no interest in repenting.

#### **Right Motives + Wrong Actions**

**Saul.** God instructed King Saul to attack the Amalekites so as to completely destroy everything they had and everyone (1 Samuel 15:3). However, Saul spared King Agag, along with the best of what they had, destroying everything and everyone else (vv. 8-9). So, God sent Samuel to confront Saul for his disobedience (vv. 10-12). Interestingly, Saul was actually proud of his accomplishments and believed he had carried out the Lord's instructions (v. 13). When Saul was confronted about the sound of the sheep, goats, and cattle, he said the troops had spared them to offer a sacrifice to God (vv. 14-15). Yet, these good motives did not make his disobedience pleasing to God (vv. 17-23) – and he was rejected as king (vv. 26-29).

**Uzzah.** Although God had given specific instructions as to how the ark of the covenant was to be transported (Numbers 4:1-15), 2 Samuel 6 records the ark of God being transported in a different way (vv. 3-4). King David and others were dancing and celebrating (v. 5). Then, when they reached Nacon's threshing floor, the oxen transporting the ark on the new cart stumbled – and Uzzah reached out his hand and touched the ark (v. 6). Although it is reasonable to assume he had good motives in wanting to keep the ark from falling, the Lord struck him dead on the spot for his disobedience (v. 7; Numbers 4:15)!

**This combination does not please God.** Many conclude that this combination pleases God because, even though a person may do the wrong things, he/she means well. Yet, the Scriptures plainly demonstrate God is not pleased with this combination in our service to Him (both in this

passage and in other passages). Luke 10:38-42 describes how Martha was distracted by her many tasks around the house when Jesus came to visit (likely with the right motive of hospitality) and failed to do the right thing of sitting and listening to Jesus. Acts 26:9-11 demonstrates how Saul (Paul) persecuted Christians to the death and was not pleasing to God, even though he thought he was doing what God wanted. Romans 10:1-3 shows that the Jews who did not obey God were not saved, even though they had a zeal for God.

#### **Wrong Motives + Right Actions**

**Those who followed Jesus in John 6.** After Jesus miraculously fed a multitude, a crowd of people followed Jesus. However, Jesus recognized that they were not following Him so they could learn from Him and really be His disciples. Rather, He knew their motivation was simply to have the physical food Jesus provided (John 6:26-27). This was further demonstrated whenever Jesus taught them that He is the Bread of Life sent from Heaven (vv. 35, 41). After His teaching, many of the disciples could not bring themselves to accept His teaching and turned back so as to no longer accompany Jesus (vv. 60-61, 66).

**The church in Ephesus.** Although the church in Ephesus appears to have pleased Jesus in various places in Scripture (Acts 19-20; book of Ephesians), they had drifted by the time they were addressed in Revelation 2. While there were still many things about the church that were good (vv.2-3, 6), Jesus knew their hearts and saw that their obedient actions lacked the love that should have motivated them (vv. 4-5). As a result, Jesus viewed them as having fallen and needing to repent!

**This combination does not please God.** Many will also conclude that this combination pleases God because of its external obedience to God's instructions. Yet, these examples and other passages clearly demonstrate that Jesus is not pleased with someone's service just because of this outward obedience. Matthew 6:1-4 (also vv. 5-9, 16-18) records Jesus instructing people not to give (as well as pray and fast) to be praised by people. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 demonstrates that if good things are done (including giving your life for the Lord) without the proper motivation of love, your service is not pleasing to God. James 4:3 teaches that prayer that is focused on your selfish pleasures fails to please God.

#### **Right Motives + Right Actions**

**Zacchaeus.** In Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus (a chief tax collector who was rich) climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus (since he was short and could not see over the crowds). As Jesus passed by, Jesus saw Zacchaeus