

It's Compelling

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 September 2011

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] God's grace, God's undeserved mercy and love to us, which is completely radical and which turns life and our understanding of even love, turns it completely on its head. And I hope that you've seen that over the last number of weeks and to a greater or lesser degree have been challenged by that. And we need, of course, we really need the Spirit of God to take that truth and to unfold it and unravel it and enable us to see it in all its glory. And we pray for that and we long for that. Today we're looking very much about our motivation for living the Christian life. And I really want you to consider that today. If you're a Christian, I really want you to think about that, to engage in the message by considering, you know, I don't know anybody, I can only know my own motive. I don't know anyone else's motives. But you know your own motive for living the Christian life and your own motive which gets you up each day as a Christian. And it's good for us to examine what that motive is. And if you're not a Christian, I want to really challenge you with the gospel message today and with grace more than anything. Because some people would argue who you're not keen on grace and the concept of grace here may be more legalistic in their thinking. We think that we need to earn our favour with God or to somehow please Him and in that way to be accepted by Him. And I hope we've debunked that thinking to a greater or lesser degree. Some people will argue, well, grace doesn't help me to live the Christian life. It's a demotivator because you just think, well, on the end of the day, it doesn't matter how I live, grace will pay the bill. Grace will pay the bill. At the end of the day, Jesus has died for all my sins. There's nothing I can do about it.

No point trying to please God in a special way to earn favour. Grace will pay the bill. And so maybe we can be demotivated if we misunderstand grace and what it is for us. Or it may be that today you live your Christian life in order to impress someone, including God. Or it may be other people, maybe people in the church, maybe the minister, it may be the elders, it may be other people. It may simply be that it's all about you on the outside and how you look and how you appear to people that you need to say the right things and think and act in a certain way in order that some people will be impressed with us. You may be, and I think this is a great, great challenge for Christians and maybe Christians who are brought up in the church, you're driven. Your motivation is duty. Oh, you have to do it. You must do it. Duty drive. We can be ought Christians. O, U, G, H, T.

I ought to do this. I ought to do that. I should be doing this. And duty is what drives us. We're driven by fear. We're driven by obligation. If I don't turn up, what will people think? If I don't come to church, will the minister be knocking on the door? Will I have a bad day if I don't read the Bible? I ought to do these things. Duty drives us. Well, I want to take all these motives, which we all have, to a greater or lesser degrees in our lives. I want to take them and deal with them in the light of grace and seek to understand God's grace a little bit more for us in terms of our motivation. I want to take a quote from the street. That's okay. A quote that people will use as a kind of blasphemy as a swear for the love of Christ. You hear people saying that, don't you?

And it's usually in blasphemy people will say, for the love of Christ people will say, they don't mean that. They're not taking it seriously. It's simply a throw away blasphemous comment that they use. It's interesting, isn't it, that so often blasphemy or swear words that people use all the time involve God and Jesus and Christ. I don't know why that is. But that's a common blasphemy that's used in our society. Common throw away comment. When people are exasperated, they will use that phrase for the love of Christ. But I want to breathe into that statement from God's word. The reality that we read about as Christians were new creations, so we take these old blasphemous phrases and we breathe life into them through God. And we recognize through God that we're new creations and that we live our lives for the love of Christ. That's our motivation. That's what drives us. That's what is at the core of our being. Jesus loves me this I know, the Bible tells us, I read an interesting thing. Let's think about a scientist who met with a Christian and they were deciding what each other

did. And the scientist said, was he a scientist?

No, he could have been. He must have been an astrom... not an astrologer, an astronomer. He was dealing with the stars. Now, a deep-seated kind of brainy guy that dealt with all the things up in the sky. And the Christian said, oh well I don't understand all that. All I know is twinkle twinkle little star. That's the only thing I know about that kind of area. And the astronomer who was also a Christian, what do you do? He said, I'm a theologian. And he said, well I don't know anything about theology. All I know is Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And it takes it all back to these absolute simplicity's, isn't it, for us in our lives. And I want to look at that scripture emphasis today about our motivation being grace. Okay, to live our Christian lives.

[6 : 05] And there's two verses that I want to look at to help us in that. And the first is from one of the from the reading. One of them is from the reading that we took in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

And in verse 14, Paul, when he speak, remember this letter, it's all about him defending his right as an apostle to go out with the gospel. And he says in verse 14, for Christ's love compels us. Okay, Christ's love compels us. So in our Christian lives we're living for love. And we are motivated as Christians by Christ's love or Christ's grace. You know, Paul recognizes the other motives that sometimes we have in verse 12. He says, we're not trying to commend ourselves to you again. In other words, not trying to impress you. It's not by doing my very best before you. But he goes on to say we're new creations. So we have a new perspective.

We are compelled to be apostles and to plant churches and to reach out with the gospel because of love, compelled by love, compelled by grace. And that doesn't change for us as Christians.

The temptation is very different, isn't it? All these other motives. But Jesus says and the Spirit says that compulsion is to be love. That's a great word there. Now, I know there's some Greek scholars here. So I'm not going to pretend to have deep knowledge or much knowledge at all of the individual words. But that word of compulsion, compelling there, that we Christ's love compels us. It's a really, it's about a strong, it's an inner conviction. I can only think of, you know, from the outside for a start, if someone really cares about you and really wants you to take you out of a place of danger, they would grab you by the arms and kind of pull you forward out of danger.

[8 : 05] Well, it's that times a hundred from the inside out. There's this compulsion you're kind of grabbed on the inside by this amazing love. It grasps us. It secures us. It propels us and drives us forward.

It absorbs us. That's the picture that we're given of grace at work in the life of the Christian, in terms of a motivation. It becomes and we seek it to become our engine room. And if it's not, we need to look at that and we need to look at our lives and look at why we're so burdened by duty.

Why we're so burdened by guilt. Why we're so burdened by impressing other people. Let's deal with them. Let's get rid of them. Let's work through them and not just sit in the same way every week and be unchanged by God and His word because we always find the challenges are there for us to live and to move and to be motivated by Him. It becomes our motivation compelled by wealth.

But can I also ask you to look at a second verse and then I just want to unpack a little bit about them or the truths that are implied in them. Romans chapter 12 is a very famous verse.

Romans chapter 12 and verse 1. Therefore, and you know if in the writings of scriptures there's a therefore, it means there's a whole lot before it. In the light of what's gone before, therefore, I urge you brothers, brothers and sisters, in the view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices. So here's the second motivation given again. In order to be sacrificial Christians, it is in view of what? It's in view of God's mercy. I'm going to say more on a different week when we're looking at grace about obedience and where obedience and grace dovetail and how the apparent contradiction or paradox between the two comes into play. But here Paul, Paul has spent 11 chapters in Romans. 11 chapters he spent. A big chunk of the Gospel of the epistle to Romans has been spelling out the Gospel righteousness that were justified by faith. You know, famous chapters about the theology of the Gospel of grace. And he's taken 11 chapters and then he says in the life what you've heard, in view of what? The theology, in view of hard work, in view of trying to impress, in view of God's right, not even his right, in view of his mercy. Offer yourselves as living sacrifices. It's a response to the Gospel of grace in our lives. We can be sacrificial and committed as we understand grace. And can I challenge you by saying and challenge myself, say, if we're not sacrificial and committed, it's because we don't understand grace. Isn't that right?

[11 : 12] Isn't that a great thing that I can hide behind today that I can't ask me or anyone else to be sacrificial and committed on the basis of duty, on the basis of guilt, on the basis of impressing,

but on the basis of grace and grace in our heart and in our soul. So can I unpack just for a moment that for the love of Christ, that blasphemy that people will use for the love of Christ, that's our motivation. That is when we understand who Christ is as God, God, the Trinity, God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, His glorious being, the progenitor of all science and all philosophy and all thinking and all reality, the creator of a universe with 50,000 million galaxies, of which ours is only one, the core breaker of every atom, the infinite God, this great infinite God, the author of all love, of all good, the infinite God who stands independent and free, our maker and our judge. That God is not the God that's in our back pocket. It's not the small tiny God that we bring out at Christmas time. It's not the God that we can mold in our own image just to let us live the way we want. God who stands free and full in His own, whatever we think of Him, this God who loves, uniquely divine and uniquely loving, most glorious in His love, His grace utterly and completely radical. Where is the glory of God seen most? Is it in the galaxies? Is it in His infinitude? Is it in His greatness and His wonderful being in and of Himself? Where is His glory greatest?

Is greatest on a grisly bloodstained cross in the Middle East from 2000 years ago? That's what His glory is greatest. That's where we see His grace at work. That's where we see the wonder of His pure justice and love at work. That is where we see it. We must recall that our love, which we often use to compare with God's, or we think God's love ought to be like our love, maybe just times a few hundred or something. Our love is because of our own rebellion and brokenness is a poor, even in all its glory, it's a poor and miserable reflection of this unique love of God, Christ. God loves for the love of Christ. He loves you. Speaking to Christians here, speaking to unbelievers here, God loves you. Christ says, Christians, we ought to have experienced and received and taken and enjoyed that love and been adopted into His family in a way we could never have understood or experienced or known before we come to faith. We exist in this world that's seemingly insignificant, where the easy option is to ignore God or to hate God, isn't it? These are the easy options for us, but in Christ we see and appreciate His love. We can't appreciate His grace.

It's impossible to accept if we reject the Christ and His verdict on our need. If we don't see our need for Christ, we will never understand His grace. We will always be distant from Him. If we want to take His grace on our terms without recognizing the price that was paid, we will never truly understand His grace. In Christ, my Christian friends, we are chosen and we have chosen. We choose and we are chosen, we are chosen and we choose. And we are to live our lives reflecting His great grace to us. Life may be senseless, you may feel it's meaningless and plain and failed and ugly. You may be hurt and broken, you may be hurt and broken by others, but we recognize in Christ that debt has been paid. We are adopted and rich, protected in the battles He says He is there. His grace has paid and covered all for us and we are free. I'm reading a wonderful book just now which I will recommend and will encourage you to read. It's called Scandalous Freedom and it's a great book and it will just turn your thinking upside down about grace. Don't agree with everything. I think he's being deliberately provocative, I love it because we're so staid and so we've made grace so ordinary and so plain and we've forgotten what it is to be free and we've forgotten to consider what God means by freedom, spiritual freedom in Christ.

We need to remember our future, unimaginably brilliant future in God's presence in grace. Some of us here, there was a great number actually from St. Clemmons, there was more from St. Seas, thanks for any church yesterday at the church planting conference and the speaker Richard Cokin who is working down in London and planting many churches through an organisation called Co-Mission.

[17:11] He spoke very tenderly and very beautifully at one point, not about strategy, not about church planting but about heaven and about what it would be like for the Christian to meet Jesus on that day.

I'm not going to repeat it because I'll only spoil it, it was far better than I could repeat. But it was hugely moving and a reminder to us a little bit about grace and our future and that a commentator speaking on grace has said, the problem is not that we make the gospel too good, the problem is we don't make it good enough. Isn't that why you don't believe if you're not a Christian today? It's because you don't think the life you've got is better without grace. Grace isn't that impressive, it's not that good. And I ask and plead with you, if you've been coming here for a long time and you're not a committed Christian, I plead for your forgiveness because obviously I haven't preached or we as a congregation haven't lived grace in such a way that would just attract you by its power and by its glory. It's not that we make the gospel too good, it's that we can ever make the gospel too good.

We've made it too rubbish, we've made it too plain and too ordinary and too bland so that people don't even turn their heads when they see us. They're not interested in our community and they're not interested in our Christian lives because we stutter and stumble and we're embarrassed and we're afraid and we never share the truth because it's not that important, it's not that great. God isn't that good my friends, the problem is the gospel isn't too good.

It's the problem is we haven't made the truth of the gospel good enough. That's why you're not a Christian today. Because you haven't seen your need and the glory and the beauty of grace for me to live as Christ. That is the compelling motive of our lives. Love changes everything, doesn't it?

The love of God changes everything in our lives. You see someone who wasn't a believer and who come to faith and it's the grace and the love of Christ that changes them.

You're attracted to somebody who loves you, aren't you, in your life. Generally in society, if you're in a group like this, you're not really going to go to the person who keeps on being critical and negative and dismissive. You don't go, you're not attracted to people like that. Generally in life, it's not a reflection of grace, is it? It's not a reflection of love. We tend to avoid people like that. And if you're avoiding Christ, if you're a Christian and you can't pray and you can't serve and you can't follow Him and you're far from Him, it's because you misunderstand His grace.

You think He's a harsh and oppressive God that's critical and negative, so you avoid Him. You avoid His company. You don't see the need for it because you don't understand and haven't grasped the reality of grace because it's the motive that drives us to, it's the need that drives us to Him every single day. Our worship today is dry and dead and meaningless if the motive isn't grace of God. What's our duty? This week, what will be your motivation to serve? Is it duty?

[20 : 31] Is it deserving? I'll go do this and then I'll be in, God will be in my debt. Is it pride? We often talk in maybe theological church circles about the gift of salvation and the cost of discipleship, don't we? I've used that phrase a lot of time, gift of salvation and the cost of discipleship and I think that kind of puts into our thinking a misunderstanding that grace is free, you come to Christ by grace and it's a gift but the rest of it, well it's heavy, sacrificial cost, I've just got to labor away and live as a Christian in my own strength and wait to see at the end of time. I think we should swap the phrase there. I think we should talk about the cost of salvation and the gift of discipleship. Discipleship is a gift. It's a gift of grace that we serve because it is our pleasure. What we're looking to serve because it's our pleasure and you know that's why today I need grace because of all the people in this congregation, I'm most likely to be legalistic.

I'm most likely as a full-time preacher to say it's my efforts and my best intentions and my energy and what I can do but I need most to understand is grace, to let go and to let grace to be convicted by that as a motivation for service and can I say that he is within that absolutely worthy? It's an interesting angle, I just want to spend a minute on this. He's a sovereign king. Don't get me wrong here. We have an absolute duty, every one of us, whether you're a Christian or not, you have an absolute duty, obligation to God, complete obligation. He's your maker, he's a sovereign, he's your judge, you'll stand before him just for who he is and us as created beings, you have absolute obligation to him. That's where part of our guilt lies in many ways.

But here, Danes, although we're his image maker, we're made in his image, we're image breakers because of sin, that the motivation he wants from us as new creations is not duty, it's not obligation, although he has every right to make that demand, it is mercy, it is grace.

He's dignified us in other words with not a master-slave relationship in our understanding of that, but with a father-son relationship, parent-child relationship. He's dignified us with this great and wonderful motivation of love, not duty. Now I know love can become, in a good way, a duty as well, but it is not cool duty that he uses, it is mercy. He dignifies us with that level of respect and relationship. Martin Luther, speaking on Romans 12 verse 1, the second verse we read, says, a law driver insists with threats and penalties, a preacher of grace lures and incites with divine goodness and compassion shown to us, for he wants no unwilling works and reluctant services, he wants joyful and delightful services to God. So can I just close with one or two problems that may have come up in your thinking or may be in your thinking with respect to this motivation, this compulsion for grace. Maybe today you're saying I just don't believe it, Derek, I don't believe that, I'm not convinced by that. I'm not convinced that that's the right way.

Well it's an impossibility, I know that, I recognize that, it's not going to stand up anywhere, but it's God's way, and it's the way of faith. And when we don't believe, the only place we can go to in order to believe is God. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. That is what we are to do, and that's what faith

is, is believing in His finished work, that your sins past, present and future are done with, are dealt with by His grace and He wants you to follow Him in that way, plead for the gift of faith to believe the gospel, because I don't know any other gospel.

[25 : 26] If there is another way then come on down on Wednesday to the Kunkwenel, and get rid of me and put someone in place who preaches the other way that there may be, or who lives, or who has a different gospel. If we don't believe it, and you're not a Christian, then it's a good place to be because it will drive you to the one and only who will give you the grace to believe, but you must go to Him. But you may say, well I don't understand it. It may be that you just don't feel the need for His grace. You know, you might be a very fortunate person, you might be surrounded by human love. You might feel quite secure in that and not need any other grace from God. You don't feel broken. You don't feel lost. You don't feel like a sinner.

You have the love that you need. Well can I ask you to recognize spiritual reality, that the love of God isn't on the same level or on the same reality as human love, and even your best human loves will be taken from you. They will be broken. You will be hurt. You will find loneliness and ultimately old age brokenness and death, where nobody will be able to take you and hold your hand, where a different reality will be expressed. And God says, I have everlasting love for you. A love where even the bad things I will take and use and protect you through and mould and they will be temporary. Don't feel the need or you may not feel the love of Christ in your life as a Christian. And that's difficult isn't it, because we're used to feeling love.

If you love someone you feel the love. Feel the love. We speak about that. In some places you don't feel the love, say, oh I don't feel the love here. I hope that's not your experience here. But sometimes we don't feel the love of God do we, and we just feel far away from it.

Well can I, I don't have any easy answer to that. Can I ask you not to compare it with human love and human emotional love just ordinarily, but can I also remind you of what God says about that love and his already expression of it on the cross and his promises not that this love that you have will give you everything you want or will take you out of the suffering of this life, but that he promises a higher purpose and a deeper and more spiritual love eternally for you. It's, can I, all I can really say is it's a learning process. When you're in a relationship with someone, you're getting married to someone or just an ordinary friendship with someone, and you meet someone and you like them and you get on with them, you don't know everything there is to know about them do you? It's a learning process, it goes on. And we might get to the stage where we think we know everything about our best pal, but we never, we just never get to the stage where we won't know or that there is to know about God. We will always be, we'll always be in a relationship of increasing knowledge. So can I say when you don't feel the love, take that to him, take that brokenness, take that pain and that sense of emptiness because he loves you and he will express and show you a deeper portion and understanding of his character that may be up to that point you didn't know, but don't go away from him with that. Does he? Well I can't feel the love,

I'm just going to head down to the pub instead. Don't deal with it on a shallow level like that, but wrestle with him through these complexities and the very last thing that I say to you is if maybe you don't believe it or you don't understand it or maybe you don't care. Maybe that's ultimately where you are today, you simply don't care. Another day, another sermon, yawn, yawn, fared it all before, life is good, you can't see it. You just can't see it. You can't see the love, the grace, the need, the urgency, the motivation, the compulsion, you can't see any of it.

[29 : 57] You can't really be real, it's not really part of my existence. Again I have no answers for you, really. Other than that I know because I'm such a deep scientific knowledgeable guy.

The only 5% of this universe is visible to the human eye, that's all I know. 5%, 5% all you see, that's visible. 95% of this universe is unseen to us, even in scientific and astronomical terms. I believe that to be the case, I don't understand it but can I ask you to consider spiritual reality in the light of that, that just because you can't see it presently doesn't mean it isn't real and that God says that we need to fix our eyes, we read that earlier on what is unseen, because what is unseen is eternal and that is the reality, we need faith to see it. We need to come to Him by faith. You're not going to just see it because you're intelligent or because you've been brought up in a Christian home or because you've read the Bible, none of these things. You need to be a new creation, a born again of the Spirit of God and it's impossible for you, I know and it's impossible for me but with God all things are possible so we go to God and that's my prayer that you will go to God if you don't care, if you don't care that you will go to God and that's a paradoxical statement I know but will you do that? Because

He makes promises to us and if you're far from Him as a Christian and you're motivated not by grace but purely by maybe ritual or fear or impressions or whatever and I ask you as I have to do myself to go back to Him and do your business with the living God, speak with Him, pray to Him and seek a fresh outpouring of understanding of His grace because it's the only thing that will keep us going, it's the only motivation that He wants for us in our lives. Let's pray our heads, prayer. Heavenly Father we ask and pray for your grace, an understanding of your grace, pray for the Spirit's outpouring so that we live by grace, that we understand and know that we're accepted, that you can no longer be angry with us because you've poured out your wrath on your Son on our behalf, sins are dealt with. We know we grieve you, we know we distance ourselves from you, we know we are angry with you but you have outstanding astonishing infinite love for us grace and acceptance and belonging and inheritance, we are your children, you love us unconditionally and fully and freely, may that set us free, set us free to be the motive, if I can say it, the motive to be a slave, slave for Jesus Christ because we love Him and serve Him. Lord how we know that in our love relationships we are driven and motivated to serve the other person out of love and not out of duty, may that be something we apply to our own Christian faith. Help us we ask and bless us and pardon us for Jesus' sake. Amen.