

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 5 FEBRUARY 2017



## The Missing Motive

*Eric Alexander*

I am notoriously bad at remembering anniversaries, and it was quite a surprise to discover that 2008 marked the fiftieth anniversary of my ordination to the Christian ministry. Not that the occasion was other than memorable. Indeed, it was a very special day for many reasons.

But I am bound to say that the truly unforgettable part of a moving service was one of the statutory questions put to me by the presbytery: “Are not zeal for the glory of God, and a desire for the salvation of men, so far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements in seeking this ministry?” I had to answer, “They are.”

For the past fifty years that question has haunted me, especially as I have climbed the steps of various pulpits to preach, or attended the ordination service of others, or as I have reviewed the year each 31st December.

Abraham Kuyper, that extraordinary Dutch theologian who became the prime minister of his

country, points out that the Reformation slogan is not just *Deo gloria*, but *solī Deo gloria*. It is a passion for the glory of God as the *sole* motive of everything.

Now in recent years I have been troubled by the tendency in the evangelical church to be more taken up with methods rather than motives. So frequently I hear of conferences where brethren meet to share insights into new and better methods by which we may fulfil our ministry. I’m sure they

are very valuable, and I hope I am not so naïve as to think that methods are unimportant in God’s work. But I have almost never heard of a conference where brethren have met together before God to ask each

other: “In all honesty, what are the compelling motives that determine the direction of my ministry?”

Yet Jesus laid great stress on motives: “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). Looking back over His ministry He says, “I have glorified you by finishing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). The glory of the Father was the terminus of everything for Jesus. There was nothing beyond this. And He means it to be so for us.

***It is a passion for the glory of God as the sole motive of everything.***

That is why it is such a serious thing to rob God of His glory. He will not share that glory with another just because He cherishes His own glory above everything else and is necessarily jealous of it; it is the motive of everything He does (Isaiah 48:11). Paul tells us that the Father's motive in exalting Christ to the highest place and giving Him a name that is above every name is "the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). If we have any other end in view, then quite simply we will labour without the blessing of God.

Zeal for the glory of God as the controlling motive of our thinking and working will deeply affect at least four areas of our life in the evangelical church. They are worship, evangelism, unity, and church growth.

### Worship

What makes worship in heaven so remarkable and so different is that there is only one desire among God's people there, and that is to bring glory to God and to the Lamb (see Revelation 4:11; 5:11–14). Our worship here on earth is intended to be a preparation for that pure and perfect worship there. Yet, I suspect that in our concern to make our worship acceptable to those who come to our churches, we are more interested in their acceptance than God's pleasure. The one quality that equips us to worship God in spirit and in truth is a hunger for His glory.

### Evangelism

If you ask members of an evangelical church what the motives for evangelism are, they will almost certainly respond with two accurate and acceptable answers. One would be the Great Commission, and the other would be the condition of the lost who are without Christ. But neither of these is the ultimate motive. The ultimate motive is that throughout the world there are places where God is being robbed of His glory: in our own street, at our place of work, in professions and governments – wherever we turn it is true that men and women have "worshiped and served the

creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever" (Romans 1:18–32).

### Unity

The reason Jesus brings the glory of the Father and the Son together with the unity of the disciples in the church in John 17 is that the motive of the former (God's glory) is the only effective way of securing the latter (true Christian unity). Unless our entire motivation is set on fire by an overwhelming desire for the glory of God – all wills bowing in the same direction, all hearts burning with the same flame, all minds united by the same obedience – we shall never know the unity for which Jesus prays.

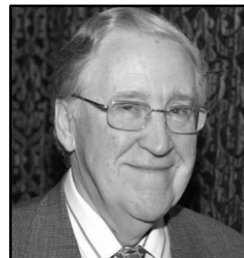
### Church Growth

How is God most glorified in the growth of the church? Not primarily by growth in numbers but by growth

in depth and in quality – growth in the knowledge of God.

So, we really do need to allow that question to haunt us in a helpful and healthy way: "Are not zeal for the glory of God and a desire for the salvation of men, so far as we know our own hearts, our great motives and chief inducements in seeking this ministry?" God help us in the last day to reply, "They were."

***How is God most glorified in the growth of the church? Not primarily in numbers...***



*Rev Eric J Alexander is a retired minister in the Church of Scotland, most recently serving as senior minister of St George's-Tron Church in Glasgow until his retirement. He is author of "Our Great God and Saviour" (Banner of Truth, 2010).*

*Edited from: [www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/missing-motive/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/missing-motive/)*

© 2010 *Tabletalk Magazine, Ligonier.org*

*For the complete library of St David's Sunday Articles, please go to [rest.org.au](http://rest.org.au)*