**What Makes You Tick?**

Each and every one of us lives a multi-faceted life. A person may simultaneously be a father, a husband, a friend, and an employee. But those of us who are Christians would be quick to point out that our relationship with Jesus Christ is the basis for every other relationship. So maybe for the child of God, the question is better expressed, “What motivates you as a Christian?” When times are good, the true nature of a person’s reasons for discipleship may not be evident, but when life becomes a struggle, those reasons become crucial to their continued faithfulness.

It might be worthwhile to take a few minutes to review some attitudes that may creep into our thinking and consider implications associated with each one. The first reason for serving God will probably sound familiar.

**I’m afraid of what will happen if I don’t.** A fear of hell is certainly rational. Considering the New Testament description of the place, any sane person would want to avoid it at all cost. In fact, I would maintain that avoiding eternal condemnation is one of the legitimate motivations for obeying God. Paul once said, “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men…” (2 Corinthians 5:11). In Romans 11:22, he cautioned us of the “kindness and severity of God.” But there is a danger in obeying God solely or primarily because you are terrified of His punishment.

The 66th Psalm suggests that a simple desire to avoid punishment can lead to superficial compliance with the demands of the one in control. Verse 3 says, “Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You.’” An adolescent child motivated primarily by a desire to avoid a parent’s wrath may comply with the family rules when the parent is around, but is likely to break the rules with little compunction of conscience when he feels he is acting with impunity. “What Dad doesn’t know won’t hurt me!” God expects more from us than simple pain avoidance.

**If I don’t live right, everyone will be disappointed.** Once again, this statement touches on yet another factor that can be a help in our efforts to live righteous lives. Godly associates can be a positive influence on us. All brothers and sisters in Christ should “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24) and encourage one another when we assemble regularly (v.25). We also must be sensitive to the kind of influence we project onto those with whom we associate (Matthew 18:6).

That being said, if the driving force in a person’s heart is the constraint they feel from watchful eyes, they may be in real danger when those eyes are far away. Psalm 32:9 offers wise advice in this regard: “Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding; whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.” Bits and bridles are useful, even in the spiritual realm, but if I allow myself to become the kind of person who likely will not to draw near to God without artificial restraints, I am the spiritual equivalent of a mule without understanding.

**I love the Lord with all my heart, soul, strength and mind.** Bingo. This is the gold standard of motivation for devotion to God and it is nothing new. God demanded this whole-hearted and undivided love from the Israelite people (Deuteronomy 6:5) and Jesus reiterated it during His ministry (Matthew 22:37).

Granted fear of punishment and concern for reputation are legitimate considerations, but John clearly defined the relative connection between these factors in the heart of the mature Christian. In 1 John 4:18, he taught, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” The mature Christian loves God because He recognizes the love that God first manifested (v.19). What began as obedience born of fear has grown into ready compliance that comes naturally in a loving relationship.

Our final reference from the Psalms is found in Psalm 116:1. “I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.” God through His grace and mercy has found a way to establish an intimate, eternal relationship with me that allows me to stand justified in His sight and that grants me constant and ready access through the wonderful avenue of prayer. He acknowledges me as His son and encourages me to address Him as Abba, Father!

Of course I could incur His wrath by turning my back on him and living by my own will. Sure, I could ruin my reputation by engaging in the works of the flesh, but why would I when I consider His unfathomable grace and mercy and love and the relationship He has enabled me to enjoy?

Each of us should strive to avoid feigned obedience and sole reliance on artificial constraints on our behavior, and grow more and more to live in fear of disappointing the Father who we love with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.