

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

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CHAPTER SEVEN

MOTIVES AND AIMS OF MISSIONS

BEFORE WE TALK about the particular motives and aims that we ought to have in missions, we need to understand our terms. We often confuse the two words, motives and aims, both in our thinking and speaking. We use them to mean just the same thing.

Now a motive is something that prompts one to act. It is the force that impels us to do what we do. It may be considered as answering the question *Why*.

An aim is an objective, an end in view. It is what we expect to accomplish through our action. It may be regarded as answering the question *what or to what end*.

What brings the two into such close association that they are hard to distinguish is this: *sometimes the purpose to be accomplished by our action is so desirable in itself that it moves us to act. The motive force then is the force of attraction.* It is the force of the magnet instead of that of the rocket. It is the sort of power that a prize has to make men exert themselves more than they ever would through a sense of duty.

In this chapter, however, we are going to try to keep the two things distinct. To get at the motives we want to ask, "Why do people want to be foreign missionaries? What reasons impel them to offer their lives for Christian service in foreign lands?" We are going to keep it on this personal level, which is basic, rather than talk about the Church's motives.

We need to answer these questions. In one way or another every young person who volunteers to serve CHRIST in the foreign field has met them or is sure to do so. Sometimes those who ask the questions are scoffers - those who have no real comprehension of Christianity and can't be expected to understand its world ministry. But just as often they are professing Christians, some of whom would sincerely like to know. Then sometimes, too, it is the candidate's own heart that wants a clear-cut answer.

If you are thinking of foreign missionary service, you want to evaluate your motives carefully. There is perhaps no other type of work where your motives will have so much to do with your success. Romantic notions, the desire to travel, the "lure of the exotic," the purely emotional

response to a stirring missionary message - all these are motives. They may even be strong enough to get some young people out to the field. But their weakness shows up just as soon as the young missionary comes face to face with conditions in an unfavorable, even actively hostile heathen environment. They won't keep you going.

A Chinese writer, now teaching in an American university, has commented on the ineffectiveness of many modern missionaries to China. He says that one of the main reasons is that missionaries today don't have the strong motivation that earlier missionaries had. Maybe some of the early missionaries were not as well educated as they should have been, but they had an overpowering sense of divine mission that overcame all obstacles.

There are some today who with their superior knowledge criticize and even ridicule those early missionaries. They made many mistakes, we are told. They held to a theology that is outmoded. They attacked the pagan faiths indiscriminately, without appreciating the good features to be found in them. They sometimes became dictatorial. And according to modern standards they committed many other errors.

Yet at the same time some of these critics, alarmed at the confusion, uncertainty and lack of real effectiveness today, have urgently called for a re-examination of the basic principles of missions. And of course that involves motivation. But any amount of study is not enough. Study can clarify motives, but it can't generate them. And the missionary, to be effective, must have something fundamental, something deeply compelling to thrust him out - something such as what the apostle Paul experienced when he wrote, "**Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!**"

In the experience of most successful missionaries there are two motives that seem to stand out as more compelling than any others. First is a keen realization of what we have in CHRIST. It is the consciousness that in CHRIST we have what the whole world desperately needs. We have a message and a life so eternally valuable that the whole world ought to have them.

When a man is sure that the way of CHRIST is not only a better way but is the only good way; when his experience of CHRIST has transformed and ennobled his own life; when he faces heathenism frankly, realizing its awfulness, but at the same time realizes that it can be changed by the same Saviour who changed his life; he cannot help feeling the constraint of missions. Such a motive, such an inner constraint, is not only enough to send him to the field; it will also sustain him in the midst of difficulties and discouragement.

There is a second motive, closely related to the first. It is simply the command of CHRIST. Of course, for one who has never acknowledged the Lordship of CHRIST His command has no force. Neither does it have much force in the life of one who has never learned to obey. But the one who wholeheartedly has submitted to the authority of CHRIST, who finds pleasure in seeking to do His will, or even feels strongly the sense of duty to his Lord, finds that this motive is a strong one. It may even be sufficient of itself. No other reason is needed, such a one decides, for the Lord himself has commanded, and it is for His servants to obey.

These two motives have generally proved to be more compelling than any others. But we don't mean that there aren't any others. There are many others. In fact, it is doubtful if any of us can

completely analyze his motives in all their complexities.

It is difficult to know just how much of the spirit of adventure enters into the decision of some young people to be missionaries. Others have been led to think that full surrender to the Lord necessarily means foreign missionary service. Sometimes a young man wants to serve the Lord, but he doesn't think he can qualify as a preacher or a teacher. So he thinks he may find in foreign service a place for the abilities that couldn't be used at home.

Where missions send out short-term missionaries for teaching, some may look at it as an opportunity for getting some experience. In the case of missionaries' children, they sometimes simply follow in the footsteps of their parents, doing a work with which they are already somewhat familiar. And we might add that some young people are moved by an appeal to youthful idealism and by an altruistic desire to help humanity. For young people are still idealists.

These and many other motives may or may not play a part in sending a missionary to the field. Even where they do, they do not need to be condemned. What we need to recognize is that they are inferior motives. They don't have the powerful drive or the sustaining force of the two principal motives. At best their place is secondary.

Now it is the motives that determine the aims of foreign missions. The man who is moved only by compassion for human suffering will feel that his ministry is done when he relieves that suffering. His aim is to heal sick bodies, to feed the hungry, to give shelter to the homeless, to stop unjust oppression. But the one who is moved by a sense of obligation to make known the Gospel goes much deeper. It has meant life to him. His aim is to see that Gospel brings the same life to others in other lands.

In greater detail, we may say that the true missionary of CHRIST has one great aim, in two phases: to witness to CHRIST in such a way that (1) men will put their faith in Him, and that (2) the Church of CHRIST will be established and built up. This aim is entirely spiritual, as it should be. Did not CHRIST say, "**Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you?**" (Matthew 6:33). And the aim includes both evangelism and teaching.

Notice that we do not say that the one aim is "**to preach the Gospel.**" Such a statement is as shallow as it is inaccurate. The missionary cannot "deliver his soul" by delivering the message, regardless of results. He is more than a herald who merely repeats the words he is told to repeat. The missionary is a witness - a witness who is deeply concerned that others shall believe his testimony and render a favorable verdict.

Preaching is important in missionary work. It is a prime way for presenting the message and seeking to persuade men to accept it. But the preaching must be in terms that men can understand; it must be with the sincerity born of experience; it must show a warm interest in those to whom it is directed. And preaching is only one way of witnessing. There are many others.

We have said that the true missionary has one great aim. This does not mean that he may not

have many other related aims. It simply means that the others will be subordinated to this one principal aim.

For instance, he will heal the sick and feed the hungry, but not as an end in itself. It will be as an expression of the life of CHRIST which dwells in him. He will teach the illiterate, that they may come to a better understanding of CHRIST. He will introduce new ideas, new practices, perhaps in a few cases a new civilization. But it won't be because he thinks these things are in themselves of prime importance. It will be because they are necessary to the full expression of the life of the Saviour. All his purposes will center in the one great purpose, and from it they will all derive their significance.

Perhaps the greatest weakness in Christian missions today comes from a deviation from this one great aim. Our mission schools continue to bear the name of Christian long after they have lost sight of any distinctively Christian objective. Our social services become so involved in the physical and the economic that the spiritual is omitted or given scant attention. We become interested in promoting our mission, our denomination, our movement, and forget the Saviour and His Church which He bought with His own blood. We content ourselves with making modest progress toward some minor objective, not noticing how far short we fall of the main goal. Even when we don't actually turn aside, we tie ourselves up with trivialities.

GOD grant us a clear vision of our objective!

~ end of chapter 7 ~
