



Constrained by Love

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

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We have been going week by week through this book, and we are now in the middle of chapter 5. You have seen, as we have gone week by week, that this is a letter in which Paul opens up his soul, as it were, to us in terms of ministry, of how he is passionate for the gospel ministry, and the difficulties that go along with it. This morning, we will look at chapter 5, verses 11-15. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Second Corinthians 5, beginning at verse 11:

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. O Lord, we ask this morning that you would open up your Word to us, that in it we might see the glories of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; that we would long, O Lord, to tell others of his greatness, of his majesty, and of what he has done for us. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

What motivates you? What gets you out of bed in the morning? For some of us, it may be financial necessity. We realize that if we don't get out of bed, the mortgage won't pay itself, that we need funds for groceries and for other things to sustain our way of life. Or perhaps it's the idea of providing for your family, not just in a financial way but in a relational and emotional way, to encourage your children, to come alongside your spouse. That's what motivates you each day.

Or perhaps, especially for the younger among us, it's plans for the future that motivate you. You realize that you have to get up and get going and get yourself through middle school and high school to get to college so you can get good grades in school and then graduate and find a job and start your own family. That's motivation. It may even be something as simple, for the youngest among us, that what motivates you is Mom or Dad coming alongside and saying, "Get up! I'm your alarm clock. It's time to get moving."

But these are not the true motivation of life for the Christian. That's what Paul is going to teach us this morning. There is a motivation for the Christian about how he or she should live that comes from a knowledge of who God is and what he has done for us in Christ. So, this morning, I would like us to see the three motivations Paul discusses in this passage.

First, Paul says we are motivated by the *fear of God*. The fear of God motivates us. Secondly, he says we are motivated because we are *revealed before God*, that we are open and revealed before God. Then, finally, Paul says it is the *love of Christ* that motivates us. I think this is the most powerful of all of our motives. The fear of God, revealed by God, and the love of Christ.

The Fear of God

As we begin in verse 11, Paul tells us, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." Paul has been telling us how he lives. Specifically, you may recall, just in the last passage we looked at last week, Paul told us he lives to please the Lord, in verse 9. The immediate context of this letter is Paul's ministry, that Paul is ministering to the Corinthians, and he wants them to see what the ministry looks like. But there is a broader context to this book and to this passage: that believers are, in some sense, ministers.

All believers are called to serve Jesus as they live their lives. This is part of the fundamental change Jesus brings about. We no longer just live for ourselves, but we live for Jesus. How then do we live? Well, the ultimate answer, Paul says, is that we live for the Lord. That's what we saw last week. We live to please God. But the proximate answer, how we do that ultimate living, is that we serve the gospel. Our purpose here on earth is to see the gospel spread, both in our own lives and in the world around us.

So, as usual, Paul moves from cause to effect. He begins our passage here this morning with that oh so familiar *therefore*. This is familiar, and you should get used to it, because four more times in this chapter Paul will give us a *therefore*, and the *therefore* moves us from cause to effect. Because something is true, its effect is *this*. That is the case here. Paul has told us in verse 10 that we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

What is the effect of that knowledge? The fact that we know that causes...what? Well, Paul tells us. He doesn't leave us waiting very long. He picks it up right here in verse 11. This is classic Paul. He uses the same word in verse 11 he has used previously in verse 6: *knowing*. Because we know this is true, *this* follows. "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others."

In verse 6, he told us that because we know the difference between life in the body and life with the Lord, we can be of good courage. Here he says that because we know we must appear before the Lord, we know the fear of the Lord. Now what does that mean? We might at first think it means a sense of terror that grips Paul. Maybe it even makes it impossible for him to make a decision or to act. We might think it would be a fear of punishment or even a fear of losing his salvation, but that is why the *therefore* is here in this text.

This fear of the Lord for the believer comes in the context of knowing that we are walking by faith with the Lord, in verse 7, and the fact that we know that after death we will be with the Lord we read in verse 8. So, we know the judgment is one of reward for what we have done *for* Christ, not whether we are *in* Christ. This fear, then, is reverence. It is respect. It is the respect we have for our Father. So, the Christian's motivation is to please his Father. He wants his Father's smile, not his disapproval.

Do you think about this for your everyday life? As you make decisions or as you act, do you think, "Would this please my Father? Would he be thankful that I'm living this way?" You should think like that. It is a powerful motivation. But there is another aspect to the fear of God. Knowing that all must appear before the judgment seat means the Lord is also the Judge, and he is the Judge of all people.

That includes not just those who believe in Jesus Christ and walk by faith. It's not just those who stand there and will have the advocate of Jesus. It also includes all of those who are still in rebellion against the Lord. Paul understood this well. That describes his early life. So, there is a second way that the fear of the Lord motivates him. It makes him persuade others. He knows that every person must stand before Christ, and the only way one can stand in that day is to plead Jesus' saving work.

There is no hope trying to convince the Judge that you have done good enough. Hebrews tells us it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Jesus tells us we are to fear not those who can kill the body but he who can destroy both body and soul. Paul reminds us in Romans that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Even John, the apostle of love, tells us that if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and whoever does not believe is condemned already.

This is the story of the Bible of sinners who are under judgment and who need grace. Paul says, "Knowing this, I have to persuade others." The verb *persuade* here is in the present tense. It means this is not something Paul did once or just occasionally. It was his life's work. For example, in Acts, chapter 18, it's exactly what he did in Corinth. Luke recounts for us Paul's ministry in Corinth, how every Sabbath day he went into the synagogue and tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks.

Then in Ephesus, for three months, he boldly reasoned and persuaded the people that Jesus was Lord. Even as Paul stood on trial for his life before Agrippa, he was more concerned to persuade Agrippa that Jesus is Lord than he was about mounting his own defense. This must be the way we look at life. Beloved, life is short. We all must stand before Jesus as Judge. That thought should fill you with terror if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your only hope on that day is to say that Jesus died for you, that you deserve punishment but that God in his grace poured out his punishment and his wrath upon Jesus instead of you. This should motivate every believer here today. Every person around you who does not know Jesus, every family member, every friend, every neighbor, every coworker, will have to stand in the judgment. They may not know that. They may not believe that, but you do. That motivates the Christian.

Revealed Before God

The second motivation is that the believer is open or revealed before God. There is no hiding before God. the word here *known*, "But what we are is known to God," is the same word in verse 10 that is translated *appear*...appear before the judgment seat. You will recall we said this word has within it the idea of being completely open, revealed, transparent before Christ as the Judge.

So, Paul is telling you that you don't need to wait to be transparent. You are transparent right now before God. Right now, God knows and sees everything you do. There is no deceiving the Lord. I think of how this works itself

out sometimes with families, when Mom calls the children together, and the three siblings gather around, and she says, "All right. Who ate the last piece of chocolate cake? I want to know." All three siblings vociferously deny having eaten the cake.

They shake their heads. "No, no, no. Mom, I would never eat the cake without your permission. Never. There's no chance that would happen." Except one of the boys has chocolate all around his mouth. Mom looks at him and says, "Do you think I can't see it? Do you think I don't know already that you've eaten the cake? I was just giving you an option to come clean." That's an analogy, because the Lord doesn't need to see the chocolate on our face. The Lord knows all of the thoughts and intentions of your heart. The Lord knows every word you have not spoken. There is no deceiving the Lord.

Now, when we hear about being revealed and open before the Lord, this is not a fearful expectation. Paul is not trying to say to you that you are known by God, who you are is known to God, that you should be afraid because of that. No. He is, instead, adding a second motivation to the fear of the Lord: the approval of the Father. The believer should have no anxiety or unease about the outcome of life. Believers are prepared for the day of reckoning because they are in Christ.

Paul is saying that is enough for us. He says his true character is known by the Lord because the Lord is the one shaping him. This is far more important than his reputation before other people, although that has some importance, and we'll get to that in a moment. Let me ask you this. When you get up in the morning, are you aware that you are living, as the theologians say, *coram Deo* (before the face of God); that there is no part of your life that is hidden or unimportant to God? Christian, you should be motivated to live for the Lord because all of life is lived before the Lord.

Now, it is true that Paul finds the Lord to be the most important audience for his life, but that does not mean his life before people has no importance. He picks this up in the rest of verse 11 and verse 12. "But what we are known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart."

Remember, Paul is writing this letter because of a tax he is receiving at the hands of the church of Corinth. He is seeking to clear his reputation in the church in Corinth. He's not saying, "Well, what you think doesn't matter at all. I don't care." He says, "What is most important to me is my testimony before God, but I also hope you have seen that true testimony of me."

He uses that same word again: *known*. "...it is known also to your conscience." This is a perfect or a past tense verb. The idea is that Paul has already established the man he is, and the Corinthians had accepted him as such. Now he wants them to remember that he has not changed. What motivated him to bring the gospel to them has not changed. He brought the gospel to Corinth for them, not himself. Not for appearances but for his people. This is crucial in ministry.

The gospel ministry is all about people...loving people enough to tell them the bad news that they are sinners and the good news of Jesus. If people think that while you are doing that you are putting on an act or trying to obtain personal gain, they will not listen to you. Paul says it is important how we appear before people so that we can live to please God, to do the work of the gospel.

The Love of Christ

Then in verse 14, Paul brings up a third motivation. He writes, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died." We might ask, "Why is Paul engaged in the gospel ministry at so great a personal cost?" He gave up his family, his past life, and now he's wandering around the world, going from city to city, under attack from place to place, to minister the gospel to others.

We can bring that into our own context and circumstance. Why did I leave my life as a lawyer and move my family across the country to come to Houston, Texas? Why are you here today? Why do you spend each Sunday morning not sleeping in? Why do you give of your time and your money to support the gospel ministry? Why is it? The answer, Paul says, is the love of Christ. The love of Christ controls us.

This is important for us to see. When Paul says, "The love of Christ," our first thought may be that he's speaking of his own love for Jesus, that Paul is waxing sentimental here, that he's getting emotional, that he's so taken with Jesus, that he loves Jesus so much that drives him to work and live for the Lord, but that's not what Paul means here. Here Paul is not the *subject* of the love; Paul is the *object* of the love. It is Christ's love for Paul, Christ's love for *you* that motivates.

It is the greatness of Jesus' love that motivates Paul each and every day, and this love controls. It coerces us. It presses us. The word can even mean to hold someone in custody. It leaves you no place to turn, no other option at all. This is the verb Paul uses in Philippians 1:23 when he says he is hard pressed between two desires: one which is better, to be with Christ, and one which is to remain with the Philippians to minister to them, which is better for them. He says he's hard pressed. He's left no other choice.

This word also describes the crowd in Acts, chapter 7, when after Stephen preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, the crowd comes, and they press upon him, and they sweep him up, and they carry him off to be stoned. The love of Christ not only motivates Paul to act; it directs him on *how* to act. How can that love be so powerful? How can we see such love from Jesus? Because, Paul says, we have come to a conclusion. We have made this judgment.

The judgment Paul has made is that one has died and, because one has died, all have died. This is the judgment Paul made. It's a judgment that every Christian must make. It is a judgment that *you* must make. Jesus died for all. The question then comes... *Who are the "all" here?* Again, our first instinct might be to say, "Well, everyone without exception," but that doesn't fit not only the theology of the Bible; it doesn't fit the context of Paul's passage or even the rest of this sentence.

The context reminds us. Remember what we said about the judgment seat of Christ. Only those who trust in Jesus will stand before the Judge and have confidence and hope. Jesus died for them. Then look at the end of verse 14. "...one has died for all, therefore all have died." What Paul means is that Jesus died in the place of others. Where

others should have died, Jesus died. When Jesus died, all *in* Jesus died. The punishment was taken away. Their death was experienced by Jesus.

If you believe in Jesus today, you have already been declared dead to sin. You already passed the judgment. On that judgment day, you will be found not guilty because of what Jesus has done. Because Jesus has died, all those who are in Christ have died, but there is more than that. We're still living now. Paul is writing about the motivation we have to live *now*. The love of Christ is not just found in his death for us; the love of Christ is shown in our lives. It's shown in the way Jesus changes us.

Evidence that you believe in Jesus, evidence that he has died for you, evidence that you have already died to sin and judgment is found in the way you live. Jesus died for the purpose that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him. Do you see that change in yourself? Do you no longer live for yourself but for him? What does that mean? Well, first and foremost, it means telling others about Jesus. It means living for his glory, not your own. It means living in obedience to his commands, not to your own desires. It means the glory of Jesus is the great end of your life.

A great truth of the gospel is the death of Christ for sinners, but that is not the whole of the gospel. Jesus is also risen. He not only died for sinners; he is risen that they might live. Jesus loved you not only to die for you but to be raised for you. We all need motivation. We need to know why we should do what we're doing, why we should live in a certain way. For the believer, that means living for Jesus.

Maybe that should be so simple and obvious we shouldn't need motivation, but Paul gives you great motivation to live for Jesus. Your life is not your own. If you believe in Jesus today, know that he died for you and that he rose again that you might have life. The love of Jesus constrains you. It gives you no other option, and that should cause us to be ready and eager to tell others about Jesus, because we who are forgiven know that everyone must stand in the judgment, open before God.

The only hope anyone has in that day is to say, "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to your cross I cling." Do you believe that today? Then you are called to live it. Paul gives us these three great motivations to live for our Savior, the one who has died that we might have life and who has risen that we might live for him. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Praise be to God for it.