

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:11-15 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

There is a real “strangeness” about gathering this way... we still long to be face to face with all of us. So our gatherings in the days ahead will be out of the ordinary for us but not out of the ordinary for the church throughout history.

This week I have been thinking about the church in Rome in the first three centuries after the birth of the church. Lifestyle and values were starkly in opposition to the normative ways of Roman culture. And the church was literally an underground church. Worshiping in **catacombs** among graves. Descending into the darkness to be reminded of hope and eternity.

It is hard to compare our moment to theirs. But something drove them to it. It wasn't to make a statement about the overreach of a tyrannical Caesar or even to meet primarily a personal need for companionship, for belonging. They were driven by something deeper, more meaningful - more lasting than those temporary things.

It was the love of Christ that brought them to worship; that compelled them to do what some would say was crazy...

Paul, the Apostle and author our text, has a depth of experience being driven by the same thing and as the mission of each Christian and the church is revealed here in 2 Corinthians 5 we are invited to do some inspection of our own hearts, to surrender them to the love of Christ.

We are driven by the love of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

Paul in the preceding chapters and verses has been laying the Messianic pattern before the church. A life of humility, suffering, difficulty but with abiding hope and perseverance. These descriptions have been a defense of his ministry that was criticized for not scratching the itch of the people well enough.

And it all comes as an invitation into the utterly different life of forward-focused trust in Jesus. Here Paul gives the basis for the mission of the church.

The **love of Christ**, and **how it controls** those that belong to him.

1) The Love of Christ

We hear all the time that God is love, true, but what does it mean? Why does love benefit anyone?

God's love for us revealed in Christ is the bright center of our existence, the gospel exposed in grace to us.

We don't deserve love but judgment. Born into humanity corrupted by sin and rejection of God and his way, we are in need of an intervention to bring us before our Creator, to restore the primary relationship each of us was given breath for.

Living as if the individual was ultimate, everything ordered behind the self, we are lost to sin (missing the mark of God's way) and idolatry (making ourselves or other things god).

Yet, love comes, to make things right. **John 3:16–17** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (ESV)

And it is not some generic, throw-pillow-quote type of love, **it is personal**. **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (ESV)

To be loved changes everything. We know this in children. In the early days of their lives, it is essential to be cared for and experience comforting love, it shapes them for life. Taking in a child with a different experience requires labored, intentional love, to bring restoration. It is a giving up of your life for it. In the same way, the love of Christ, his willingness to live for us and die in our place,

personally, to call us to new life, radically forms us **overriding all the false loves** that have come before.

It shapes then all of life for those in Christ - that believe in him and call him Lord.

John 15:12–13 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (ESV)

It's why we gather - because Jesus laid down his life for us and we have been formed into a family of love. Not as a hippie commune but as designed from the beginning of time to dwell together in the presence of God, in love.

This is the unifying factor in the church and it is applied to hearts that are made new by the Spirit of God.

“The gospel is not just a mechanism for getting people saved. It is the announcement of a love that has changed the world, a love that therefore takes the people who find themselves loved like this and sends them off to live and work in a totally new way.” **NT Wright**

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2) Love's Control

The love of Christ then is not an additive to an already busy, individualized, self-derived life; it actually wrecks those things and the result of the gospel's work in our hearts doesn't always make sense to those yet to experience it.

This is why Paul's life and ministry look passe to the silver-tongued hucksters passing themselves off as spiritual leaders.

"The logic of love outweighs all other logic known to the human race. That sense, of a love which changes everything, and gives people the power to face things and do things they wouldn't otherwise have done, is what Paul is talking about in this passage." **NT Wright**

The boast of the believer is not the outward appearance but the heart and the heart shapes outward behavior. “We know the fear of the Lord; not a cringing terror before an uncaring despot, but awe and inadequacy before the incarnate Lord of all. This, too, should help to explain why Paul does what he does; he isn't concerned about what human standards people might impose from the various cultures they live in, since the only standard that matters is the one that Jesus himself will set.”

Our perspective is altered so that we no longer focus on outward appearances but on a radical interior radiance.

The underlying reason why the apostle behaves as he does is not because of a theory, not because of fear of judgment, but because of love.

We find the meat of the effects in verses 14 and 15. **2 Corinthians 5:14–15** “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] 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.” (ESV)

Yielding control of our life and purpose. Because Jesus died we are dead to sin and lives of idolatry. Living for Jesus rather than self.

Love is the establishment of covenant that in us produces commitment and submission to our Sovereign's will and way. So if we miss love, we can end up serving the wrong Lord because we always serve something.

If we have eyes to see our idols, we might experience breakthrough! *You think you are free*, but you are living for something, something masters you. You think you are free but you are not. If you are living for anything other than God you are a slave. Only Jesus is the master that gives you what he promises. Christianity gives the only identity that is received and not achieved.

A master who makes us children, co-heirs with him for all of eternity. He starts with love, and continues with love all the way through our transformation and

mission. Emboldens us to face the awkward, the difficult, the sacrificial, for Him and His glory.

"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me can not be my disciple.—**Luke 14:27**

He is worth more than anything else.

He is worth more than friends.

More than ministry.

More than respect.

More than admiration.

More than money.

Jesus over everything." **Bezner**

By his love, this becomes our reality. When Christ is our supreme love, he reorders all other loves.

Take heart, this reorienting of our lives is ongoing, *Lord knows I am a work in progress!* So we are all in the same boat, sailing on Christ's love for us to transformation. For the church this has us aligning around what matters.

John 13:34–35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (ESV)

Moves us outward.

Mark 12:30–31 “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Love God and love neighbor, because you are loved!

This leaves us then in need of more - the experience of Christ's love and humble submission of my life for him.

Paul sets an example. There is a vast cloud of witnesses that have gone before us living the same way, surrendered with Christ as the most important thing about us, how we work, serve, play, and pray.

Do we live this way? Do I?

What are the things getting in the way of living for Jesus? What is too precious to give up? Is it just that I haven't experienced his love for me? Or is it my pride, my self-righteousness?

Like Pentecost, we need a move of the Spirit for this love-formed, sacrificial, Christ-glorifying life.

"We need an outpouring of the Spirit that does more than tickle our private, religious lust for more experiences...We need the kind of outpouring that empowers us with boldness to push back the powers of sin and death." **Rich Villodas**

"When the Spirit comes upon a person, He kindles that spark. He starts a flame that consumes the heart and soul so that the affection born that hour will increase in intensity as we grow in Christ..." **R.C. Sproul**

Romans 5:1–5 “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (ESV)

We are driven by the love of Christ.

Receive Love: Admit your need for it, for forgiveness, and hear Jesus' claim over you by laying down his life for you. Believe in him.

Live from Love: Say with Paul, “we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him.”

It's the order that matters, we don't live for Jesus' sake because it will gain us access to special powers or the forgiveness we desperately need, we live for Jesus' sake because he has already given himself for us, he died so we are dead to sin, forgiven, empowered. Now we live.

This is a perfect time to renew our commitment to this life. 2020 is hindsight! It offers us a **mid-course correction**. We can determine to live for Jesus. Ask the Spirit to pour this love into our hearts and send us to love others.

As you do, be accountable to community, to ensure we have our loves ordered right. That we haven't missed it.

I encourage you in the next day or so to write a new purpose statement - it doesn't have to be much but mark this season with direction. What you are living for and what that practically looks like in your day-to-day. Then share it with someone, your spouse sure, but also some else that can walk with you, check-in and spur you on to love.

We are driven by the love of Christ. May the world know we are his by it.

Returning back to the **worshipers in the catacombs**. Not only did they worship there but many were buried there as well.

Epitaphs: “Here lies Quintilian, a man of God, a firm believer in the trinity, who loved chastity and rejected the allurements of the world.”

Another epitaph reads, “Here I rest, free from all anxiety, what I awaited has happened, when the coming of Christ occurs I shall rise in peace.”

Yet another reads, “Now that I have received divine grace I shall be welcomed in peace.” One last epitaph simply says, “This person was a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

A beautiful witness of the lives of believers who had experienced the love of Christ and let it control their lives.

We don't much write epitaphs anymore, but my prayer is that these things too could be said of us as *we live from love, by his grace, for his glory*.

We don't have to worship in the dark, even if we one day get to! But we do have to let the love of Christ drive us, there is no other way.

Onward.