

**2nd Corinthians 5: 12-14a; “The Love of Christ Compels Us”, (Part 1) A Sermon for
the New Year, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 4th, 2015.
In the Morning Worship Service.**

What is your attitude toward the passing of time? Many people simply let time go by, with no resolution to attempt to do anything new for God, or Christ’s sake. If this is you, you will find that whole years will go by, and you may find yourself pretty much serving only yourself, and pursuing only your own worldly interests, and not those of Christ’s spiritual and eternal kingdom. This I would declare to you is not glorifying to God. Good time management of spiritual things is glorifying to God. If you are a person who would know God better, you should understand that a Christian is a person whose greatest loyalty is to God. Ask yourself this question in terms of your loyalty to God: How much of your time, in your thoughts, is really given to God? If you really know God as you ought to know Him, you will serve Him by attempting to include God in all of your thoughts. Of the wicked it says in the Bible: “God is not in all of their thoughts”. So conversely, in the case of the righteous, God will be in all of your thoughts; or at least, this is the way that it should be. If you are following my logic, you will begin to pray and ask God that you might grow in faith and every grace. That is, you will pray to exercise the faith which He has given you. And you will consciously attempt to grow in the knowledge of Christ, and pass that knowledge on to others.

Time passes by, and it is all too easy to let spiritual improvement slide; to not see the major issues in living the Christian life. Let me ask you, as we begin this time; Do you have saving faith? If you have saving faith it is because you have been born again by the Spirit of God. If you want to bring glory to God you need to recognize and publicly acknowledge that the reason that you are a true Christian is because God regenerated your spiritually dead heart. It was proceeding from this gracious act of God, that you believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Saving faith does not proceed from a spiritually dead heart. Faith is not merely an intellectual assent to the gospel. No, if you are a true Christian you are a New Creation; you are a New Creature. How should you then live? This is the question that we want to seek to answer. Am I living, as a New Creature in Christ should live? You have been given another year now, with the dawning of the year 2015. It is a New Year for a New Creature. So the question we want to seek to answer is this: How can I know Christ better, and have Him in my thoughts more, in this year 2015? Well, there are 3 things which you can pray to learn. 1st of all – You can learn to boast in heart, and not in appearance. (verse 12) 2nd – You can attempt to learn how to better understand how the truth should affect your mind and your heart. (verse 13) And 3rd – You can pray to learn how to better understand the love of Christ. (verse 14a)

1st – If you would have Christ more and more in all of your thoughts, you will learn to boast in heart and not in appearance.

The Apostle Paul says in verse 12: “For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.” We see Paul making a contrast here. It is between some people who boasted in appearance and some people who were boasting in heart. What do these things mean? Well the people of that day who had been boasting in appearance were those who were boasting in men and their fleshly abilities. The people who were boasting in heart were those who knew that it takes the grace of Christ to be saved, and to be strengthened so that they could then learn, and do, God’s will. You must come to understand this important principle in terms of your living your Christian life unto God; that being a mature Christian does not mean that you have to try to appear to be more spiritual than people around you. And yet this is often what either false teachers or babyish Christians fall into. They boast more in their own supposedly

spiritual activities and think themselves more spiritual than others because of their determination to do them. They think like the Pharisee in Luke 18: 11 – “I thank You God that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.” “I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” They boast in the things that they are doing that they think will impress other people around them. Their ultimate regard is not so much to have a heart religion, as it is for outward appearances; the way that other people see them. They may boast in their own intellectual knowledge and the degrees which they have earned at the hands of men. They may boast in their own, or other people’s natural or spiritual gifts and abilities, rather than in the Lord Himself and what He has done for them. They boast in the privileges of a man-made worship and religion rather than the privileges of a God-given, simple, Biblical worship and religion. Theirs is a religion of humanly pleasing works without saving faith, and it is based upon self-independence rather than God-dependence. They are often unconscious of their pride in this regard, and they see themselves as very independent of all true authority; very self-sufficient people who are proud of the fact that they do not need the saving help of God, or the help of mature Christians, to accomplish all that concerns them.

But you and I who would know God better and walk with Him closely cannot adopt or hold to this sinful attitude of self-sufficiency. A true Christian starts out saying, “God have mercy on me, a sinner,” and then they continue to see their need of Christ at every point of their Christian experience. A New Creature in Christ must, and they eventually will, adopt this sincere and holy attitude as they go about to do the Father’s will. How about you? If you are not this way now, will you not change your mind and go a better direction? You can see Paul describe it as you look over at 2nd Corinthians Chapter 2, verse 17. “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” “Do we begin again to commend ourselves?” “Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?” “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” “And we have such trust through Christ toward God.” “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit give life.”

To boast in heart and not in appearance is the sincere attitude of the Christian man or woman who is seeking to know God better, and walk with Him more closely. A New Creature in Christ will strive to see themselves in this way, as dependent upon God and Christ for every good motion of their heart, and every good work that they engage in. Let it be understood by every Christian, that it is making progress in holiness to boast in the Lord’s work in men; and that it the better part of wisdom to make it clear that you support the godly ministry of His word, not a superficial, or worldly, or selfish ministry. 1st Corinthians 1: 12 – “For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” “For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand.” “Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.” Notice, once again, the simplicity and godly sincerity, the straightforward bold, but humble ministry of the Apostle Paul. He states that they conducted themselves among the Corinthian church with this sincerity by the grace of God.

Therefore Paul and his helpers could boast in what God had done for them, and they also could with a clear conscience boast in the ministry of Paul to them without there being any sin in the matter. It had all been of God’s working that they had received the truth of the Word

preached, and had begun to live it out in accordance with its heavenly wisdom. It was all of the Spirit's working that they had seen the grace of God in Paul and his traveling companions. And it was of the Spirit's further working that Paul could see and legitimately boast of what God had done for them, and in them, and through them, to the glory of God. Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Let him who hears the Word of God preached in godly sincerity boast in this blessed benefit to their soul. Let no one boast in appearances, but in spiritual realities which are in accordance with the truth of the Bible. This is a good attitude, and it shows maturity. It shows that a person is a New Creature in Christ when they boast in God's working, His power to save and to keep and to make fruitful in His service. It shows that a believer is growing into maturity when they can boast in what the minister of Lord has done for them in preaching the truth. In this holy sense we as pastor and people can boast in what God has done in our lives.

2nd – If you would have Christ more and more in your thoughts, seek to better understand how the truth should affect your mind and your heart. (verse 13)

Verse 13 of our text says: For if we are beside ourselves it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you." Many people thought that Paul was "beside himself" as he ministered the word of God. As Festus said in Acts 26: 24, "Paul, you are beside yourself!" "Much learning is driving you mad." But let's let Paul defend himself from his own statements. He says, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason." Whenever a man has the love of Christ compelling him, he will desire to win souls to Christ and to do them good in every way. This year, as you look around you and you see the many people who do not know God, people who do not know Christ, think also of how you represent Christ to them. As you perceive their lost estate, there may be situations where you may not be able to entirely control your emotions before them. To them, you may seem to be "beside yourself". There is a holy reason that this is taking place in your heart. It is because Christ is there showing you the implications of their unbelief. And He is doing this so that you will become more like Him. And He would have you, in your own way, convey the truth and your feelings in relation to the truth, in order that they might be shown that it is not God's will of desire that any perish but that all come to repentance.

What will it take for them to see the truth of their perishing in their sins? Will it take you weeping over them, as my own dear father did with me? No, you cannot atone for their sins by your weeping, but you can show them that the love of Christ compels you. If you do weep before them, let it be the truth of the matter, something which comes from your sincere love for them, even as you attempt to convey to them the truth that only in Christ can they find eternal life. In verse 20 of 2nd Corinthians 5, a verse just following the text that we are studying, Paul says: Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading (beseeching, making an appeal) through us; we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." You see, a God with no feelings would not plead or beseech; but our God, who has God-like feelings, which are greater than we can describe, does plead. And who does He plead through? He pleads through the person who is sharing the gospel. Let it be understood that this is not at all incongruous with the doctrine of Election and God's predestinating foreknowledge. It shows that our God does all things in a fair, and righteous, and equitable manner, and with feeling. Yes, God is impassable. He does not have feelings as a man has feelings. But His love does have God-like feelings. He must have indescribably great feelings which attend His purposes in Electing love. He is not moved to do anything contrary to His eternal purposes, but within those purposes His eternal love is greatly engaged in the salvation of sinners. Yes, He is love personified in our Lord Jesus Christ. If you are beside yourself, Paul says here, it is that others around you might receive the truth and be saved, or that they might receive the truth and grow by it, if they are a Christian already. That is what Paul is saying.

Let think about the love of Jesus Christ for a moment, how compelling His love was to the multitudes of people who needed Him. Turn over with me to Mark Chapter 3, verse 20. “Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.” “But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’” (There it is; He is beside Himself, He is crazy to conduct this kind of ministry) No, Jesus was not out of His mind; He was simply doing the will of the Father, loving God with all of His heart, and loving His neighbor as Himself. Look also with me over at John 7, verse 1. “After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him.” “Now the Jew’s Feast of Tabernacles was at hand.” “His brothers therefore said to Him, ‘Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.’” (There’s the boasting in appearance) “For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly.” “If you do these things, show Yourself to the world.” “For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” Let us understand that the thing which Jesus’ brothers were telling Him to do, was to advertise Himself so that people could boast in appearance. They did not understand what it meant to boast in heart, because they had no saving faith in Jesus, yet. However, Jesus knew how to pray in secret, and how to conduct a tremendous ministry of kindness and love without attempting to draw attention to Himself.

Why did the Lord Jesus weep over the city of Jerusalem in Luke 19: 41? Jesus was the God-man. He knew all things. He knew the purpose of His Father was to destroy the city in 70 A.D. Listen to Thomas Manton on this: “So when He came near to Jerusalem, a city not very friendly to Him, yet it is said in Luke 19: 41, ‘When He came near and beheld the city, he wept over it, and said, ‘If thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes.’” “Our Lord Jesus was made up of compassion; he weeps not only for His friends but His enemies.” “As a righteous God he inflicted the judgment, but as man he wept for the offences.” “First He shed His tears, and then His blood.” “O foolish, careless city, that will not regard terms and offers of peace in this her day!” “He bewailed them that knew not why they should be bewailed; they rejoiced, and he mourned: Christ’s eyes are the wetter because theirs were so dry.” “And now He is in heaven, how doth His free grace go a mourning after sinners in the entreaties of the gospel!” In this year of 2015, my friends, will you not pray for lost sinners and weep for them. Only God can have mercy on them and save them from their sins, but God uses means to accomplish His ends, and therefore your tears are of real use in God’s hand to cause the lost to think of why you should cry for them.

And it says here in our text that, “If we are of sound mind, it is for you”. Will you not, dear Christian study this year to be of a sound mind in your presentation of the gospel to others around you? Will you not think to yourself, and pray to God, and ask Him for wisdom and grace and for the Spirit’s working in your heart and mind, so that you will be able to tell others around you what Christ has done for you? He has obeyed God’s law perfectly and has fulfilled its righteous requirements in their entirety. He has suffered in the place of each sinner who looks to Him in faith, seeing Him as their substitute; the One who bore the sorrows of their shame, and the punishment due all of their sins. Yes, you must have a sound mind to communicate the truth of what Jesus has done for you. But God can, and will, give you this as well. 2nd Timothy chapter 1, and verse 7. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” He has given each believer this kind of grace, but you must not receive it in vain. You must pray for the wisdom of how you should present the gospel to the various people around you who need to hear it.

And then 3rd, You will find that Christ will be there, revealing Himself more and more, when you seek to better understand the love of Christ. (verses 14a)

“For the love of Christ compels us...” The King James says: “For the love of Christ constrains us.” The New American Standard says: “For the love of Christ controls us.” The

word in the Greek is *συνεχη*. (soon-ekh-o) It is the love of Christ for the Christian, personally known and apprehended, which keeps them motivated to do their duty in keeping the commandments of God. John Gill says that it, “holds and keeps us in our station and duty, as soldiers are held and kept together under a banner, or ensign displayed; to which the church refers, when she says, ‘His banner over me was love”. (Song of Solomon 2: 4) Let me ask you in closing whether you have come to know the love of Christ in this precious way? Is the knowing the love of Christ in your experience the greatest motivation for you to persevere in faith and in doing good works to the glory of God? This is exactly what God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ intend by their revealing it to you, dear believer.