

## Controlled by Love

Two days ago, February 24, was the first anniversary or marked the first anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war.

And it is quite unbelievable that Ukraine was able to sustain or to protect itself for this long, given that it was initially targeted to be a week or two event by the Russians, yet they did not accomplish their objective.

And so, they survived the onslaught of the Russian firepower even until the present time.

And so we asked, how was it possible?

What attributed to the Ukrainians being able to protect themselves against a superpower like Russia?

I know that several nations supported them.

It was not just because of the Western allies in support militarily and financially, but I believe more than that, it was the sheer resolve and love of the Ukrainian people that they were able to protect their nation's sovereignty, led by the president, that every inch of their territory they will have to reclaim.

And so we asked, how about for us believers, how about for God's people?

What would it take for us to withstand discouragement, hardships, even troubles in our Christian life?

It is not just plain resolve by us that would take us through such difficulties.

It is it and it is, and it should be the love of Christ that should motivate and encourage us in our pursuit, no matter what difficulties, hardships we may face or we are facing maybe at this moment and even for this year.

And Paul demonstrates this before the Corinthians, and I trust that we would also learn from Paul's experience as well as from his teachings.

And I would like to invite each one of us to open our Bibles to a specific text, a specific portion of scriptures that expresses such motivation of Paul to be able to withstand difficulties amidst hardships in the ministry and in his relationship with God's people.

Let me invite you to 2 Corinthians 5 verses 14 and 15, but we will be reading starting from verse 11 to 15.

Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others, but what we are is known of 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 it in the heart.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God.

If we are in our right mind, it is for you.

Verse 14, 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.

And this letter of Paul was written as a response to the good news received by Paul from Titus of their positive response to an earlier letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the severe

letter which we do not have any idea of what it is.

And it is perhaps, this letter is perhaps the most personal of Paul's letter because in this correspondence, he bears out his heart in dealing with the issues of this church in terms of their sin as well as in defending his apostolic ministry against those false accusers.

And initially in this letter, Paul was explaining the various issues and concerns.

He was speaking of the hardships he suffered in Asia and Macedonia.

He spoke of the change of his travel plans and finally the need of the church to forgive and restore a repenting offender, which he asked them earlier on to deal with.

And this portion that we have read, he will be dealing with, this portion that we have read is dealing with, is part of the central section of the letter of Paul.

And in here, we find Paul, specifically chapters 5 to 7, we find Paul appealing to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God and to open their hearts to him.

This is in chapter 6 and chapter 7.

And so, to start off his appeal, he sets two important foundational grounds in response to criticisms against him.

In the verses that we have read, verses 11 to 15, he lays down the proper perspective of the style or the conduct of his ministry before he spells out the theological basis upon which reconciliation with God rests.

This is in verses 16 to 21.

And so, in laying down the proper perspective of his ministry, he defends this by citing two key motivations, key two motivations of his ministry.

And this is in verse 11, healthy fear of God.

And secondly, in the verses that we have read, verse 14, knowing the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, as what we have read, what does Paul say concerning the love of Christ?

He says that it is the controlling, it is a compelling force that drives his life and ministry despite criticisms and doubts from others.

And so, this is the message I want to drive out from this text for us this morning.

The love of Christ manifested in the Gospel is the compelling force that drives faithfulness in the Christian life and ministry.

Again, the love of Christ manifested in the Gospel is the compelling force that drives faithfulness in the Christian life and ministry.

In other words, the proper understanding of this love was Paul's motivation to be faithful amidst difficulties.

And Paul describes the love of Christ as controlling.

It is, it constrains, it compels, and it means Christ's love is a compulsive force in the life, in his own life and in the life of believers.

A dominating power that effectively eradicates choice in that it leaves them no option but to live for God.

It keeps us, therefore, from self-seeking and selfish motives.

And Paul here explains Christ's self-giving love in two ways.

First, what it brought it about and the result.

Firstly, Christ's self-giving love procures salvation for sinners.

And secondly, Christ's self-giving love enables self-denying life.

Let us consider the first, Christ's self-giving love procures salvation for sinners.

Verse 14 tells us, one has died for all, therefore all died.

This is quite a difficult or a confusing passage for us to think about.

But one commentator calls this statement as a theological shorthand.

For Paul does not wish to expound the death of Christ, but rather to argue from it.

It is a form of, it is what we call, or Paul's statement is a form of syllogism.

A form of reasoning wherein two propositions are stated and each one draws to the conclusion.

Let me give you an example.

All dogs are animals.

All animals have four legs.

Therefore all dogs have four legs.

That is syllogism.

And this is exactly what Paul is doing here.

He is saying, in other words, he is saying all humanity was condemned to death because of sin and Christ identified with sinful humanity and died, therefore all died.

The all encompasses all humanity.

The benefits of Christ's death include both Jews and Gentiles, but sadly many refuse to submit to Christ, thus remain in condemnation.

And thus only those who would put their faith in Christ's death come to salvation.

What Paul is saying here is that Christ's self-giving love demonstrated by his death is the only means for the salvation of sinners.

The idea of love of Christ can mean three things.

It can mean Paul's love for Christ, which is objective, or it can mean Christ's love for Paul, which is subjective, or it can even mean both.

But the best, it is best to interpret this as Christ's love for Paul because of what follows, which says Christ's death for all.

It looks back actually to the historic death of Christ on the cross, thus reminding Paul of his Damascus Road experience where the glory of the resurrected Christ appeared before him, calling him to salvation and to his ministry to the Gentiles.

Paul in his former life, who was a Pharisee and a zealot, was vigorously pursuing death of Christ's followers because of his hatred for them, because of the blindness he had in his own Jewish belief.

But we are told in this text, at a certain point came a conviction.

Verse 14 tells us, we have concluded this was the turning point at the back of his mind in his own heart, thus a reversal of opinion about Jesus Christ.

The once Jewish rabbi who was crucified upon the tree was indeed a curse.

But as Paul now knew, it was for the reason that he bore the curse of the punishment of sin in the place of all people, Paul included, his elect.

And such knowledge and deep conviction of this truth was that great power and motivation so strong because of Christ's love for him that became the controlling force in his life and continuing ministry.

And that's why my question for some of our friends, for anyone here joining us in this place and online, have you known that love?

Have you experienced the saving mercies of the Lord Jesus Christ brought about by the love of God in sending forth his son?

My friend, that is the only way wherein you will find reconciliation with the true God because of what his son did on the cross as a substitute for sinners like you and me.

This is what 1 John 4 says, in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the prophesiation for our sins.

This should be a reminder, again a call for you, the sinner, to come to Christ in repentance and faith.

We are familiar with OFWs, Overseas Filipino Workers.

Previously they were called Overseas Contract Workers, OCWs, and OFWs are called to be our nation's modern heroes because as a country we export human labor around the world.

And indeed they are heroes because they contribute to the economy by sending forth billions of dollars to our economy to make our country stay afloat in times of financial crisis.

And what do they do?

They sacrifice for the sake and love for their families, go into those countries to earn a decent income so that they can send money for their families.

And we should greatly acknowledge their labor and effort.

But brethren, for a believer, the greatest love is Christ's sacrifice for you and me.

Nothing can change or can surpass such a love demonstrated by God himself in his son.

And the challenge for us is let the undeserved salvation we receive from Christ's self-giving love move us to self-giving service for the kingdom.

This is why this love became for Paul his source of strength, wisdom to endure ministry despite sufferings and hardships.

He would mention his hardships in the succeeding chapters in 2 Corinthians 11 verses 25 and 28 where in here Paul narrates what he experienced and endured being beaten, stoned, shipwrecked,

sleepless nights, and dangers.

He endured this not to brag or to show off but to vividly illustrate the power of the gospel and his love for his Savior in pursuing his calling as an apostle.

As believers, the hardships may we endure in this life for serving Christ will not be enough to repay the gift bestowed upon us to the salvation that we have undeservingly got because of Christ.

So the question is in what area or situation are you called to endure difficulty or maybe perhaps to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel?

When I look back to the lockdown experience we all had it was perhaps a real test of faith for many of us and sadly for some depression settled in for the good life and freedom suddenly was curtailed.

It tested whether they would seek comfort and peace in God's love and promise protection for his people or murmur and complain of restrictions and boredom at home.

But I believe for many of us it was also a time for more refreshing communion with God seeking to nourish our souls during those troubling and distressing times.

And I would say that for myself I really profited.

And this is a reminder for us for God says be still and know that I am God.

Taking and looking for ways despite difficulties we tried as a church to minister to others

because we know that it calls for God's people to respond to the needs of the time despite restrictions and we did by the grace of God by the protection of God.

Paul here challenges us to take serious reflection on our profession of faith.

Is it genuine?

Are we convinced and convicted of the love of Christ?

You and I need to answer it deep inside our heart.

Because opportunities are opening up and it seems normal times are back.

The danger is once again to be sidetracked, carried away by the cares of this passing life.

Our ministries are normalizing.

Have you considered involvement and active participation?

Brethren, we need hands who would dirty themselves.

Just take a portion of the leisure time you have and making use of it for Christ.

And so my question is are you considering it?

Life is short.

Opportunities will not always be there.

You are given time, the gifts, and the strength.

And I trust that you would respond to the call to minister to others, to serve the Church of Christ for the advancement of his kingdom.

Perhaps many of us know D.L. Moody.

He was the 19th century American evangelist and this is what he said.

There is no use trying to do church work without love.

A doctor, a lawyer may do good work without love, but God's work cannot be done without love.

And this is exactly what Paul is saying to us, is reminding us because he said the love of Christ compels me and this should also compel us to labor for the kingdom because we receive that love and in turn our love for Christ compels us to serve his kingdom and his church.

But secondly, it also tells us that Christ giving love, tells us that Christ self-giving love enables self-denying life.

In the name of Christ, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God, in the name of God.

Verse 15 tells us, and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Here Paul explains and qualifies what this atoning death entails for himself and I trust for each one of us as believers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is death to a self-centered living.

This the one who receives reconciliation with God through Christ's death will say no to self and say yes to Christ.

In other words, this tells us that Christ self-giving love should result in renunciation of a self-promoting life.

This implies that prior to conversion, self-pleasing, self-seeking, and self-preoccupation was the kind of life a believer lived.

The driving force behind one's behavior, but after conversion, the motivation changed. In other words, it was a 180-degree turn, turn around if you may.

After conversion, the motivation for all of life should be the desire to please Christ.

This is what Paul says in Ephesians 5 verse 10.

If you are walking in love, it means discerning what is pleasing to God.

In fact, Paul, and this is specifically what Paul prays for the Colossian believers in Colossians 1 and verse 10, that they walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in knowledge of God.

And this should be our conscious pursuit and prayer for our lives as believers.

Relation of a self-promoting life, therefore, entails living a Christ-centered life instead.

And thus, a Christ-centered life should be filled with action for the benefit of others, just as Christ's life was.

Christ-centered life doesn't mean that we can say, I want love and serve anyone else but God.

It sounds holy, but that is not right.

It is not biblical.

Rather, our love for God and our life for God is expressed in the way we serve, care, and show our concern for others.

When we say that we live for God, we cannot use it as an excuse to neglect serving others.

In other words, it is applying the two great commandments in Matthew 22 verses 37 to 40.

Love for God and love for neighbor.

God created us for the purpose of living for Him, not for ourselves.

And so it is a corruption of our nature that makes us want to live for ourselves and not for the Lord.

In Revelation 4 and verse 11, it says, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things.

And by your will, they existed and were created.

This is the picture of the 24 elders falling down before Him who was seated on the throne.

A glorious occasion to come.

And this is exactly the purpose of every believer, loved by God, called to serve.

We are familiar, or psychology today says, defines corrupt mentality or what we call talanka mentality as it is an analogy to the selfish and envious behavior of someone upon other people's success.

And we naturally hate and call out such an attitude and mentality.

No one likes that because it wants to promote self rather than others.

It also runs.

It runs similar to a believer who promotes self rather than God in one's life.

Perhaps it is no different.

So the challenge for us is to evaluate your life, evaluate yours and my life in the light of the call for the renunciation of a self-promoting life.

We live in a world that promotes self, engrossed with self, extols self and many times looks after oneself only.

Sadly, this seems to be the kind of life you see in some, if not many, who call themselves believers or Christians.

And it is an irony.

It is a sad sight to behold.

So when Paul was referencing to Christ's sacrificial death in verse 15, actually he was subtly applying some pressure on some of the Corinthian believers who were still slaves to self-love.

And so we find a clause, no longer live for themselves.

That's part of the verse.

It indicates that he was shifting the turbulent issues he had with the Corinthians.

Remember the problem he had with the Corinthian church.

He was shifting the turbulent issue not between me versus you, but rather a matter between Christ and us.

On this regard, Paul makes clear that more ultimate matters are involved in the dispute between him and them.

It is not just a conflict between us and God's people, but what is at stake is the greater glory of God who has loved us.

Christ's death must change the way we live here and now on earth.

It must mold how we live our lives.

Thus, it provides a criteria for discerning who truly belongs to Christ and who does not.

We will know who is the true believer and who is an apostate.

In a world given to self-indulgence, Christians should stand out as distinctly different in all aspects of life.

Our Christian worldview, our perspective, and mindset must be lived out as a witness in this dark world because of the power of the Gospel.

Again, in what areas of your life are you falling short of this call?

For the young and old alike, it challenges us to purity and holiness.

The Gospel challenges believers, for it is the greatest expression of love.

It is the standard and strongest motivation for purity in courtship and marriage.

And finally, the Gospel is the functional centerpiece of yours and mine, of my life.

This is what we ought to be reminded and to seriously take note in these changing times of ours.

I am not talking as one clean on all these issues, but rather reminding what the love of Christ demands from us.

This is a reminder for all of us.

We are all guilty in some ways, but we should not just be passive about this, but actively seek to look into our lives so that we may do something to make our lives bring glory to our God.

Again, we have been taught and reminded time and again that it starts in the mind.

Whatever we do, whatever actions we take, it starts from the mind.

And an English Anglican theologian writer by the name of Harry Blamires wrote a book, *The Christian Mind*.

And he notes that the Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness

and nerdlessness unmatched in Christian history.

That is how he assesses the Christians during his time.

And he again notes in another book, *Recovering the Christian Mind*, and this is what he says. He sees our generation suffering from religious anorexia, a loss of appetite for growth in Christ.

Anorexia is a serious mental health condition, and I hope this is not what will describe of us, of our minds, because we fail to fill our minds with a thought of the love of Christ and the glorious salvation that we have been provided and be given because of that sacrifice of Christ and the cross.

And this should challenge us in the midst of difficulties and challenges.

Are we going to buckle down, run away from our faith, rather go back and reflect to the love of Christ, for it is a compelling force for Paul, and I trust that it would also be a compelling force for us to progress in our Christian life.

And our response to him says in the first verse, O Master, let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free, tell me thy secret, help me to bear the strain of toil, the threat of care.

Whatever it is, whatever situation may come before us, may we faithfully walk with our master and savior because we were loved as believers.

Let us sing this hymn, O Master, let me walk with thee.

Let us close in prayer.

In need of Father, we do thank you.

We thank you for your word.

We thank you for this precious reminder that if we call ourselves Christians, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been loved by the Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrated by his death on the cross, so that through his death, as a substitute, we may find eternal life, save eternal life for our souls as promised in the gospel.

Give us, O God, for many times we take for granted this truth and reality.

It is because of your love that we can hold on to these benefits, these blessings that we have in this life and in the life to come.

Help us to truly marvel at this great salvation and as such, move us not to a self-promoting life but rather to a self-sacrificing life because of the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May you help us to examine ourselves, to reflect upon this truth so that we may serve you faithfully

zealously, promoting the kingdom, sharing your word and even living our lives so that the glory of the gospel may shine before this dark world.

Forgive us for our slothfulness.

Forgive us for our self-promoting attitude.

Help us, O God, by your grace to serve and honor you through your church so that your name may be praised, your name defined by this world.

Trust these things to you, O Lord, for we pray all these things in the most precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen.