

The Love of Christ Constrains Us

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14,15
Preached on: Sunday, February 4, 2018

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If you will this morning, turn with me to our text this morning. It's found in 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 15. It reads this way,

14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, how glorious, how worthy thou art, O Lord. How worthy thou art to be praised. How worthy thou art of our time. How worthy thou art of our attention. O Lord, we are very frail creatures in need of thy power, in need of thy strength, in need of you, Lord, to make us come away, to put down self, for in this passage today, you reveal how you do it. O Lord, may you come with power, the power of thy love, that you would show us, Lord, what you have done for thy people, the power of thy salvation, the power that we have in thy Son. May you reveal it to thy people this day for the praise and glory of thee. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Coming up in that time of year that this country and across the world we celebrate love and, you know, the world's love, it's a nice thing. It's good to be loved. It's good to be embraced. It's good to be thought of. It's good to be considered. But Paul says something this morning in this text that's very worthy of our consideration because in this life after the fall, and since the day we were born into this world, we struggle with self. Self-centeredness. Self-exaltation. Self-knowledge. Self-will. We have all these selfisms that plague us in our fallen nature. The text today is very powerful, very powerful if the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal to us what it is that the Lord uses, the power that the Lord uses to put down self.

It's so contrary to this world and what they look at love and how love is looked at. It's more than a thing or an emotion. For the child of God, it is a power. Christ's love is a power. That's what Paul tells us this morning. He tells us it's the love of Christ that constrains us and that's very important because, as I mentioned, we fight so much against self. Self every day will reveal itself. From the moment we get up, our minds are on self,

what we're going to eat, what we're going to do, what's in our day, how to preserve ourselves, how we can make ourselves feel better. These self things that go on in our mind is a plague. It's the plague of sin, but the Lord has something for the child of God that puts down self and Paul tells us what that is today, it's the love of Christ.

Today I want to look at our passage, today 14 and 15, I want to look at three parts. I want to look at for the love of Christ constraineth us, the first part; the second part, touch on what he says because we thus judge, that if one died for all then we're all dead, that's what the love of Christ reveals to us; and then verse 15 by itself, what the fruit of the love of Christ produces, life to live unto Christ and death to self.

So if you will, we'll start this morning in verse 13, "For the love of Christ constraineth us." That word "constrains" takes on a very deep meaning in this passage. It means holds; it means preserves; it means compels; it means empowers; and it even means forces. I know that we don't like words like that. Our carnal nature rises up against it. Our free will nature rises up and say, "I won't be controlled by any." But the child of God is brought to sit at the feet of his Lord to be revealed the Lord's power and this, this morning, reveals to us the love of Christ. Love that constrains us.

Now, I could think of no better place to start other than 1 Corinthians, so we go over to 1 Corinthians 13, of course, the definitive passage on love, the definitive passage on what love is. So we start in 1 Corinthians 13, but before we do, we look at how verse 31 ends in 12 because it tells us something about the power that is involved in 13. Paul tells the Corinthian people to "covet earnestly the best gifts." Now he's not talking about the cars, of course not of his time, or the riches of the world or the things, he's talking about in the church what the Lord has gifted the church: the gifts of speech; the gifts of prophecy; the gifts of love; the gifts... These are the things Paul is focusing on to covet earnestly the best gifts, but Paul says something really remarkable at the end of that verse, he says, "and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." There is a more excellent way than you and I to desire the gifts of the church. There is a more excellent way than for you and I to try to figure out our way and our power and how we can attain to love and how we can perfect love and how we can cultivate love. Paul says at the end of this verse that, "I shew unto you a more excellent way," and then the entire chapter of 13, Paul is telling us what the love of Christ is and this is very important because our passage this morning tells us that it's the love of Christ that constrains us, that empowers us.

So what is the love of Christ? And Paul at the beginning of 13 says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels." Paul said, "If I was given the greatest voice to speak and to preach the word of God and it was eloquent and it sang in the ears of all of men, if I had that power to speak and to proclaim the Gospel as the angels did, he is not here, he is risen, glory to God in the highest, peace, good-will toward men." The angels came declaring, Paul said, "If I had that power and if I had all I could do to speak of the greatest orators here on earth, but if I had not charity, if I have not the love of Christ, I am become a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. I am nothing. I am a voice crying in the middle of nowhere. My voice would be nothing. Anything that I have to say or preach when I preach Christ crucified, if it's not constrained by the love of Christ, if the love of

Christ is not the power behind my speech, then it's nothing. If I have not love in all of my words that I have to say, if the love of Christ is not the motivating reason or the power behind it or the power in it, they are empty words. The words mean nothing."

I pray this morning the Holy Ghost works in you now and quickens you and questions you if that's the truth in your life. Many times we open our mouth with words. We're always quick to give advice. We're always quick to point out things to people. But if the love of Christ is not in the message, this is what you become: a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. There is nothing in it, for it is the love of Christ that empowers the speech of the people of God and that is only for the people of God.

You will not get the love of Christ from the world. You will not get the love of Christ in any shape or form that you hear in this world because the world, as we know, seeks its own. But that's just in word, what about in thought? Paul goes to verse 2 and he says, "And though I have the gift of prophecy," I know all things, "and understand all mysteries," of this Gospel, that Paul said many times, "I preach unto you a mystery." What a great mystery it is that the Lord would condescend to come down here to save his people from their sins and yet man is so ignorant of it. Man knows nothing about it, doesn't want to know anything about it. It's a mystery. Paul said, "I can declare that mystery. I can understand all the mysteries. I can have all the knowledge of what Christ has done. I could preach everything, I could teach everything, I can have all of these things in my mind and if they're not constrained, and though I have all faith that I could believe everything that I know, everything the Lord has taught me, if I believe it, I can assent to it in my mind," Paul said, "I can conjure up a faith to believe it, however, and though I have all things so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. I can proclaim the Gospel. I can proclaim the mysteries of the Gospel. I can tell you about faith. I can believe that my faith would move mountains. I could believe the Lord's faith would move mountains. But if it's not empowered by the love of Christ, from the gift of Christ, from the head of Christ to his church, if it does not come with love," Paul said, "I am nothing." These are powerful things. These are not gifts that even we can sit and assent to today and say, "Oh, I can speak all these things. I can think all these things. I can believe all these things." And even if we could, if they're not empowered by the love of Christ, we are a sounding brass, we are a tinkling cymbal, and we're nothing.

But he doesn't stop there because it's the love of Christ that constrains our words, it's the love of Christ that constrains our thoughts, and it's the love of Christ that constrains our deeds. In verse 3 he touches on that. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor," I could take everything that I have and I could give it away to those who are needy, I could do all of this mighty work that is worthy of men's praise. I could give everything that I have away. I could bestow all my goods to feed the poor, "and though I give my body to be burned," I could be put on the stake, I could sit there and say, "I'm doing this for Christ." I could exalt Christ's name. I could say, "Christ, to you be all glory," as I'm sitting there at the stake and be given my body to be burned, "and have not charity," if I have not the love of Christ, "it profiteth me nothing."

It profits me nothing in this life. It profits me nothing for the life to come because the Lord prepares his people with his love and by his love, and it is his love that constrains us here on earth, and it's his love that empowers us to walk every day. It's not this Hallmark love. It's not this love that we see on signs, on church signs coming here today. It's not the love that we hear in Valentine season, that we love one another and the creatures of one another. It's the love of Christ and this love of Christ, Paul tells us in these first three verses, the love of Christ in the people of God only. It holds them. It preserves them. It empowers them to live and they live unto Christ. They live by thought, word and deed unto Christ.

Now, as we are examining people and we do that, as we sit in these seats, as we think about that we say, "Wow, there are many ways I fall short to that love." That's right. There is, even in the love you profess for one another. You fall so short. Why is that? Because 24/7 we're not exercised in Christ's love. The creature likes to rise up. The creature likes to fight against Christ's love because it's not like our love. Our love does seek its own. Our love isn't kind all the time. Our love is happy for the one we love as long as we're happy. Our love isn't that deep sacrificial love. I hope you know the difference as you look into your life as the Holy Spirit reveals today how the difference is for you, Christ's love being shed abroad in your heart as compared to your love, how you've been taught to love.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not," the love of Christ, have not "charity, it profiteth me nothing." Now briefly I'm going to read through what Christ's love is. May the Holy Spirit speak to us now in comparison to what Christ's love is and how we love.

"Charity suffers long." The Lord's love suffers long. Do you know what there is not in that verse? There is no ending to it. There is no ending to that suffering. It doesn't say, "I suffer today so tomorrow I'm not going to suffer." What are you going to do for me because I did for you?

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." The love of Christ does not speak like you love someone and you profess your love for that person more than you ever do for Christ. That's a puffing up of carnal love. The love of Christ is not puffed up.

"Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." Do you see how different that is from our love? We love based on how we see how everybody treats us. "Oh, I love that person but only when they treat me good, and when they're not treating me that way, I don't love them as much."

But love thinks no evil. Christ's love thinks no evil. "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." There are so many things in this life that are sins that we brush off. When we work our ways into this society, we take upon ourselves the things that we learn in society, we brush those things off as being, "Well, God put me here. Those must be the ways I'm supposed to act." And somehow by the way that we live, we rejoice in

that. We have joy in doing those things, but the love of Christ doesn't. I challenge you to look at Christ's life here on this earth, look at Christ and how he lived and how he did not conform himself to this world; how Christ's love and Christ's love for his people transcended this earth.

Christ's love rejoices in the truth. "Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." That's the love that Paul is talking about in our text today in 2 Corinthians 5:14. The love of Christ constrains us. It's a love that we know that when it's active in us, when the Lord empowers us in it, it is so different than how we love and the people of God that are around you, they know that love. They know it is sacrificial. They know, "That's Christ's love. That's not what the world's love is. That's Christ's love." That is the love that constrains us.

Song of Solomon 2:4 says, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." The constraining love of Christ is over us, it's in us, and notice what the passage said, we have to be brought there. We have to be brought away from ourselves. His banner of love must reign over us, which puts down self.

Jeremiah 31:3 tells us something about this love, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." I love that passage because of that word "everlasting." That's what 1 Corinthians just told us, his love endureth. It's not broken. We cannot sin away his love.

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." We see the word "lovingkindness," it's where love and mercy fit perfectly together. Lovingkindness. Out of my love, I'm kind, I'm merciful.

Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." May he direct our hearts this hour into the love of God, not the love of self, not the love that we measure, but the love of Christ. What is it?

Now turn with me over to Romans 5. We'll just start in verse 1 to get to where we're going here. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Faith is brought to the forefront here. Justified by the faith of Christ, what he has done.

"By whom," that's Christ, "also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Now here's where we're headed. I love this chain, if you will. It's kind of like a machine, okay? I want you to picture a piece of machinery and how this all works together what Paul says.

"And not only so," not only the faith of Christ, not only Christ and the grace that he gives us, but this is what it does, this is what Christ does, "not only so but we glory in tribulations." How? Well, we'll get to that. We glory in tribulations. Let me tell you something, when we're in tribulations, when we're in trials, we don't feel like we're

glorying. Never. Never in the trial do we see what the Lord has done and what the Lord has done for us and that all of that works together for them who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Paul tells us here that in tribulations we glory.

Not only that. We're not done, "also: knowing that tribulation," from that trial, from that purpose that God brought in our life comes patience. Listen to this, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience." From that trial we learn and we're brought to see that we are to wait upon the Lord's face to be shown. We are to wait upon the Lord's power of deliverance. We are to wait upon the Lord to make that way to escape for us because he said in his faithfulness in his word, that he would do so, but we have to be shown this over and over again. And every trial is the same for us, in every tribulation. Even as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and we know as the trial is going on, we know it in our mind, "The Lord will deliver me." The Lord is faithful but we have to be shown it. We have to see the power of the Lord. We have to be brought to be patient, which is a gift of God, is a fruit of the Spirit.

"Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience," And this experience is the experiential life of the child of God in experiencing Christ. We glory in the tribulations because he shows us what he went first and what he did for us. We glory in that, therefore the Lord works patience out of that to wait upon him. Then as he does that, he shows us the experience of experiencing Christ. This doesn't mean go out in the world, learn to live in the world and you'll gain experience, what the world calls experience. The more you work this job, the more you learn. You'll gain experience. That is contrary to the experiential life of the child of God. Experiencing Christ is not you experience what you've done, it's experiencing what Christ has done in the power of the Lord. That's what experiential life is, is seeing and being brought to see and rest in what Christ has done. Not you, what Christ has done.

That is the experience and from that experience come hope, the hope that the Lord will... and that's a living hope, that every trial we have, every tribulation we have, will work patience and experience. And how does all of this come about? How does this perfect machine as we see one wheel turn another wheel, as we turn another wheel, we need power now. We need something to make that machine go and Paul doesn't leave us without an explanation.

He says, "And hope maketh not ashamed." Why? "Because the love of God," the love that constrains us, the love of his Son that he has given to his Son to love his people, the love that Christ has which is the love of God, which as we see here is the love of the Holy Ghost, that's how we glory in tribulation. That's how we glory in patience. That's how we know and experience the Lord. That's how we hope and that's how hope, the hope of Christ, the hope of seeing him. But we see Jesus. That's how. It's the love of Christ that constrains us.

"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." That "us" is the church. That "us" is the people of God and them only. That's how we understand, that's how we live experientially, that's

how our text tells us today that we're constrained by the love of Christ and because we are, that is the power to see what comes after it and that's where we come to the second part of the verse back in our text in verse 14, but we're coming right back to 5 so hold your finger there.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge." How do we do that? By the love of Christ. Because the Lord reveals with great power his love for his church and individually for every sheep that is in his sheepfold. "We thus judge, that if one died for all," that's that union, "then were all dead."

Now, as I told my class this week as we ventured into one of these verses with the word "all," I don't want to waste my time there. I think we all believe in a hell, and if we believe in a hell, then we know that not all men are saved and we know that Christ didn't die for all men if there's a hell, and the Scriptures support that there is a hell. So I don't think we need to waste much time when we're in a passage like this to understand that when he says, "if one die for all, then we're all dead," he's speaking of the church that's in Christ; he's speaking of the union of the world of the elect that's in Christ.

So saying that, we turn back to Romans 5 and after those five verses, we're told something in 6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." We understand and we need to know what our text says today, the love of Christ constrains us to make a judgment in our life, to reveal to us that Christ died for us while we were dead. We were dead. Do you have, have you experientially lived a deadness? Do you know that you have been called to life from death? That's the question. That's what the love of Christ reveals. In the depth of his salvation, he saved you who were dead. He saved you who were dead and worthy of hell. He saved you who were dead in trespasses and sins.

That's what this passage says in 6, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." I don't know about you, but that verse tells me something about myself, I didn't choose him. It tells me something else, I didn't have any power to do so. It tells me something else, I wouldn't do it without him.

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Look at verse 8, "But God commendeth his love toward us," he reveals his love toward us, he shows us the love toward us, "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Once again, the love of Christ constrains us to see that we were dead and we were without strength and that we have nothing, absolutely nothing to do with our salvation and we have nothing to do with living unto Christ in this life. That's what the love of Christ does. It constrains us. It powers us. It is life itself to reveal the salvation of Christ and what he has done for us that we in the resurrection life of Christ will live unto him. That's the power of the resurrection.

We're not done because look at verse 10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled," the Lord reconciling the two parties who were at variance with one another. The Father because of

sin, he cannot look upon sin. He's angry with sin all the day long. We needed someone to reconcile us to the Father and it had to be a lamb without blemish. It had to be one who had never sinned. It had to be one who was worthy to stand in our place and to present us to the Father in a righteousness that's not our own and clothe us with the righteousness of himself.

"We shall be saved by his life." Think about our text now. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." That's what Paul just told us. We didn't have a part in that other than death. Well, what part do you have to add toward it? "Well, I was dead. I was dead. I needed life." Ephesians 1:5 tells us, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Verse 5 says even when we were dead in sins, "Hath quickened us together with Christ." That's what the love of Christ reveals to the child of God and empowers him in it. Empowers him. Constrains him. Reveals to him, "You're nothing without me. Your life is in me."

This is all to bring to death self. Do you see it? Do you see the argument Paul said? "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." There is nothing good in us, Paul is saying. We did nothing meritorious. Then he bleeds into 15, our last verse today, "And that he died for all," all of the elect, "that they," the elect only, "which live should not henceforth live unto themselves," the life of Christ and the love of Christ that constrains us produces a life of sacrifice of self. If you find in your life that you are living for self, that everything out of your mouth is your self-preservation, your professed love for another that's not Christ, your self-will, that's not the love of Christ. Paul tells us just as plainly here "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves." The love of Christ that empowers the child of God, it empowers him to live unto Christ.

"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." The love of Christ compels. The love of Christ empowers. The love of Christ says to the child of God, "Follow me. Life is in me. Life is by me." And if you are to live in this life, you are not to live it unto yourself but unto him which died for them and rose again. Not even for others but to live unto Christ which died for them and rose again. That's resurrection life.

Now, there is hardly a time that goes by up here where I don't refer to one of my favorite verses and that's Galatians 2:20 because that is what Paul depicts there is what he's saying here. Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." How Paul? I mean, being crucified with Christ means I was dead, I'm dead with him, and then Paul says something, he says, "but nevertheless I live." Well, how do you rationalize that, Paul? He says, "Well, yet not I." Yet not I. The love of Christ constrained Paul and the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul and he said, "What you're going to write in your letter to the Galatians is Christ, what Christ has done." How do you live, Paul? Do you want a personal testimony on how you live? No. Paul's testimony is what Christ has done.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It's not me, Paul said, it's Christ living in me. To him be all glory.

"And the life which I now live in the flesh," meaning right here like we are living today, "I live by the faith of the Son of God," I live by his faith, knowing that his faith tells me that he loves me. His faith tells me that I need his love to constrain me, because that's what he says next.

"And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me." With an everlasting love. Loved me with a powerful love that constrains me and it's that love that empowers me to write this letter out of love to you, people of Galatia. It's the love of Christ.

"I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Yet not I, Paul said. Why? Because he's constrained by the love of Christ. How much we desire in this life for others to see the good in us but rest assured of this, our true brethren, we are all the true brethren, are united by the love of Christ and the love of Christ is revealed to every one of them and the love of Christ is revealed in each other, and that's what the people of God see in each other, is the love of Christ and how much greater that is than any love they have or any love that person has. The love of Christ transcends the love of man.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am." We just sang Amazing Grace and how amazing it is, Paul said.

"And his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I." There he goes again. It's the love of Christ constrains him. Do you see that? Because I think we're all exercised in that. We like to put that "I" out there all the time. I. But it's the love of Christ that brings you back. No, yet not I. It's not me. Many times the Lord has exercised in that way. I'll be speaking to somebody and they'll be patting me on the back for something and saying, "Oh yeah, I did that." And I just have such conviction. Why? Because it's the love of Christ. It wasn't me. It's the knowledge the Lord gave me. It's the power the Lord gave me. It's Christ in me, the hope of glory.

"Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." It's the grace of God. It's the love of Christ that constrains us.

Romans 6:8 says, "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." That's that life part we're talking about. That's how our text ended today. They "should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

Before I read this text one more time, I'd like you to go to the end of Romans 8. In speaking of this love of Christ, in speaking of this "is it faithful," is the love of Christ faithful, is it? Is it something that we talk about mystically or sit in some kind of trepidation, "Will the Lord love me? Is the Lord's love for his church?" Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" That's a deep question. Who today? Do

you love someone that separates you from the love of Christ? And you say, "Well, you know, that's a powerful statement." Yeah, it happened in the garden. Adam loved Eve. Loved her dearly. Loved her more than God. Our relationships here on earth, if they're not bound by the love of Christ, then we're left to our love and the love of Christ that constrains the children of God, oh, what a gift. And you younger ones in here who have not been joined to another, I beseech and I say the only way you will ever experience true love, the love that the children of God experience that constrains us, is the love that Christ has that works in both parties. That's what he has joined together that no man can put asunder.

That's what 35 says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Shall any of those things separate us from the love that constrains us, that empowers us? Is there a way that it can fail? No.

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." That's where the power of being kept is. That's the preservation of the saints is in the love of Christ.

"For I am persuaded," and may the Lord persuade us all, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The love that God has given for his people is in his Son and his Son is faithful as the faithful head of the church to bring forth this love, to reveal to us truth in this love.

Our text one more time, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." Praise be to God that his love does that. It shows us what we are without him. "And that he died for all, that they which live," that shows us what we are with him, in him, empowered by him. They which live "should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." May the Lord constrain us this day and all of our days to live life unto him, not ourselves for the praise and glory of him.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, may you add your clarity and your power and your strength and your love to this message as it pleases you. To thee be all glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.