

The Love of Christ
II Corinthians 5:11-16
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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary chorus that we sing affirms "We are loved, we are loved". This is one of the great realities that makes a difference in the conduct of life for the Christian.

Paul presents two great sources of motivation for the Christian in this chapter. Already we have considered the coming judgement seat of Christ. Knowing that we shall have this awesome encounter causes us to persuade men. It motivates us to a fervency in our Christian witness. The other great reality focuses on the love of Christ.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us". That Paul means Christ's love for us is made clear by the discussion that follows. He continues to talk about how One died for all. Indeed, we will have no love for Christ until we begin to realize the depths of His love for us. Indeed, we are loved more than we can ever comprehend. Paul later prayed for his friends in Ephesus that they might "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth-and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Knowing this love is an important thing in the Christian life.

Let us consider the extent of His love that is set forth in this passage and the effect that this will have upon us as we comprehend it. It will not make much difference in your daily walk until you "comprehend" and "know".

I. THE EXTENT OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Paul indicated to the Ephesians that this love "passeth knowledge". No one would dispute this but we can have a growing understanding of it. There are some helpful indications in this passage about the extent of the love of Christ.

It will be helpful to consider how many He loved. Who can rightfully be considered as an object of His love? We can know the answer to this if we can know for whom He died. Listen to the witness of Paul. "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead". "And that He died for all." Paul states it twice in these verses. Christ died for all.

This must not be taken as a love that encompassed the mass but really did not focus on the individual within the mass. Actually, he died for all because he died for each individual within the all. The love of God in Christ is not just a love for the "world" but is rather a love for each citizen of the world. This means that you personally are the objects of this love. "He loved me!" can be your confidence.

Look around you! Jesus loved and died for every individual in this room. There may be some of them that you do not like, but Jesus loved them. Close your eyes for a moment and picture all of the faces you have seen over the past week. They, too, were loved by our Lord. He died for them --- for each one of them individually.

Another thing that will be helpful in understanding His love, will be to consider how far His love went. What was He ready to do because He loved? when Paul speaks of the love of Christ he is not referring to some emotional response or-kind feelings that God had toward us in Christ. Rather, He is referring to a definite action Christ took to express the love that He had for us. Paul states it so simply, yet, so powerfully, "one died for all". The implication of this statement is that the death was voluntary. It was His idea that He die for us. No one forced this upon Him. The only constraint He knew was the constraint of His love for us. The other thing indicated about the death is that it was vicarious. While Paul does not use the preposition ordinarily used to indicate a vicarious act,

everything in the passage indicates that this is the force of the preposition. He died in our place as our substitute.

Jesus knew the death we were to die. He knew that our sins demanded judgement. He knew that there was no way we could ever make amends for our sins. He knew that the only way for us to ever be saved was for Another to die in our place. He loved us so much that He voluntarily took our death upon Himself. He died for you --- in your place. When you read the record of the death of Christ in the Gospels, you are reading the record of the death of another in your place. He died for you! This gives us some insight into the extent of His love. There is no way that He could have loved you anymore or given anymore for you. He gave His all.

II. THE EFFECT OF THE LOVE ON US

Paul's behavior was not always understood. It became a matter of controversy among the Corinthians. Paul writes this beautiful passage to give some insight into what is behind His behavior. He explains it in the one simple statement, "The love of Christ constraineth me." The idea in the word translated "constraineth" is not that of drawing, driving or urging. Rather, the idea is that of shutting up, of restraining, of controlling. Paul sees the Christian as being bound in by the love of Christ, being under the control of that love. Just knowing that you are so loved, means that your life will never be the same. It will have a profound effect upon you.

It will affect your attitude toward yourself . "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves." Knowing that you have been so loved by Christ, will cause you to be "dead" unto yourself. It will put to death the selfishness that is so characteristic of fallen humanity. -It will prevent you from serving only yourself and your selfish interests.

"Live unto themselves"---does that not describe many people you know? They seem to feel that this is their own personal little world and they have resentments toward anyone who seems to get in their way. They act as though they were a little kingdom all to themselves. Everything they do can ultimately be explained by some selfish interest. Ever when they do good things, they have a selfish motive. They are always looking for some kind of return to themselves. The love of Christ does not leave room for such a life in you. It will lead you away from such a little life and give you a larger understanding of your place and purpose in society.

There is a reason for this effect. Once a person really knows themselves to be loved by Christ, it meets a deep life need that each of us share. The things of earth just never look the same once you know you are loved. You know that if you are loved by Him, you have everything in Him and you have worth before Him. So much of the littleness of life comes out of our insecurities and our uncertainties about who we are and why we are here. Knowing that you are loved makes a difference, especially when you know that you are loved by Christ.

The love of Christ also affects our attitudes and actions toward others . In the statement that opens this discussion, Paul gives some indication of this. "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: Or whether we be sober, it is for your cause." Paul's manner of ministry could be explained only by His concern for the welfare of the people. He goes on to explain, "For the love of Christ constrains US." In his relationship with people, Paul had been seen as a very sober, reasonable, sincere kind of man. Behind these relationships was a sense of his being loved by Christ. This also explains the statement, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh." Men just look different when you see them as people for whom Christ died. William Barclay tells about a wise teacher who traveled from place to place during the Middle Ages. He gave his life to helping others. While in one of the towns in Italy, he became ill and was carried to a crude hospital of the day. Because of his outward appearance, no one

suspected that the man was a wise and learned teacher. The doctors were standing nearby discussing his case and the possibility of some medical experiments on the old man, since he was obviously just a common character off the streets. They were discussing him in Latin, not suspecting that the old man understood Latin. But the old scholar interrupted their conversation by saying, "Sirs, don't call any man common for whom Christ died." This was the impact that the love of Christ had on Paul. It restrained him from ever treating another human being as common. He never could judge their worth anymore on the basis of the outward and material things. He had to always regard them as the person for whom Christ died. If they are beloved to Him, should they not be loved by us? The love of Christ does affect how we relate to others.

But above all, the love of Christ affects our response to God. This was the thing that prompted the discussion. Paul's response to God was often misunderstood. He was evidently accused by some of being out of his mind. "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God". "Beside ourselves" can be translated "made" or "crazy". Evidently, there was such intensity and extravagance in the life of Paul as he responded to the Lord God that it seemed to his critics to be unreasonable. Some have suggested it may have been some of these experiences of worship that promoted this accusation.

Paul's explanation is to the point. "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 whole purpose of His being is now caught up in the One who died for him and who is now alive from the dead. Surely no sacrifice to Him could be too great. Surely, it will not be possible to be extravagant in a response to such love.

Have you ever encountered such an accusation? Not many of us! Most of us have been very predictable and reasonable in our response. We could never be accused of giving way to emotion or to acting in an unreasonable kind of way. Interestingly, Jesus our Lord, encountered the same accusation during His ministry. This surely puts Paul in very good company. Could it be that we just do not comprehend how much He loved us? Could it be that we need a fresh inner-revelation of this love to us?

Conclusion:

This passage has a very practical application to us. Most of us would be somewhat grieved over our lack of love for the Lord Jesus. Most of us would readily admit that we do not love Him as much as we ought. How can we remedy this? This passage suggests that the best place to begin is at the Cross. We need to spend more time seeking to understand the event of the Cross and the Resurrection. We need to spend more time meditating upon what was behind that awful event. As we come to know how much we are loved by Him, we will find a supernatural response being awakened in our hearts. We will find ourselves being more deeply affected by that love.

We are loved. O, That we could know how much!