

From The Pulpit Of



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

Compelled by Love

No. 13

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

Series: 2 Corinthians

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Text

[11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. [12] 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 in the heart. [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. [14] 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)

Introduction

- Arouse Interest:
 - In 1886, Robert Lewis Stevenson published his famous gothic novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.
 - In his story, Dr. Henry Jekyll was, by all accounts, a model citizen of their community. He was polite and respectable. A man highly esteemed by those around him.
 - But Jekyll had a secret. Now and then, the honorable Jekyll would transform into the monstrous Mr. Hyde, a man who indulged in lust and pleasure without any thought for those around him.
 - As Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde wrestle for control, the reader is left to ask the deeper question: who are we all really, deep down inside? We may have everyone around us fooled. We may even trick ourselves.
 - But when the lights are off, and there's no one watching, what is it we actually want? And what does that say about us?
- Surface Need:
 - It's sad but true these days that you and I are just used to people being hypocrites. We're not surprised when a politician fails to keep his promises. We're not shocked when a celebrity pastor falls away from the faith. It's painful when loved ones show us their true intentions, but deep down, it's not like we never had our suspicions.

- What about you? When the pressure's off, and there's time for you to think for yourself, who are you really? And if the rest of us in this room knew, what would we think of you?
- Orient to Text:
 - In our passage today, the apostle Paul lays out for us the fundamental heart motivations that ought to characterize every true believer in Christ.
 - Even though he wasn't perfect, Paul sought to orient his life around three key convictions. And when you unpack them today, you can clearly see that there's really one thing that fundamentally compels Paul throughout all his life and ministry. In short: ***Real Christians are compelled by reverential love.***
- Organizational Statement:
 - As we will see in our passage today, Paul gives us three motivations that motivate him and that ought to motivate every true believer. In verse 11a, Paul states that he is motivated by the Fear of the Lord. Then in verses 11b-13, Paul states that he is motivated by his Faithful Witness. Finally, in verses 14-15, Paul argues that the primary motivation for the Christian life is Fidelity to Christ.

Fear of the Lord (11a)

- So let's get into this passage. As Paul states in verse 11, one of the core convictions that animates his life is the fear of the Lord. As he writes in verse 11:
 - [11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.
- Now, in this one sentence, there is already a lot to say. Notice the word "persuade" here at the end. As we've stated in our study of 2 Corinthians, the church in Corinth at this time was being lured away from the gospel by several false teachers.
- Here, Paul is contrasting his own ministry with the ministry of these fake apostles. Unlike those teachers, Paul isn't seeking to persuade others for the sake of his own money, power, or fame. No, Paul is seeking to persuade others about the truth of the gospel because Paul himself sincerely fears the Lord.
- Because Paul fears God rather than man, he would rather say what God wants him to say than say what would be popular to hear. He would rather suffer now for the truth than be ashamed of a lie in the future.
- Notice also that in this verse the fear of the Lord isn't simply some arbitrary reverence. It has weighty content behind it. If you look right above to verse 10, you can clearly see that Paul fears the Lord because he knows one day he will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for how he conducted himself throughout his life and ministry.
- Knowing that judgment day is coming, Paul strives to be the kind of minister who is more concerned about how God sees him than how he is perceived by others around him.

Application

- In your own life today, are you the kind of person who is concerned about how God sees you? Or are you more motivated by the perceptions of others?
- The judgment seat of Christ is a useful doctrine for the Christian life. It's a healthy reminder that meek and mild Jesus is just as holy as his Father in heaven. And even though he loves us, he will be the one to sit in judgment over all the living and the dead.
- If you're here today, and you're an unbeliever, I would never tell you that the main reason you should get saved is to avoid hell. I would never say that that's the main reason to become a Christian.
- But to be honest, it's not a bad place to start. It's okay to have a little bit of fear of the Lord. It means you understand who you're dealing with when you talk about God. We're talking about a being who created everything, who's in control of everything, who's altogether just and good, and who knows everything about us. And according to Paul, this God will judge us for every deed we've done, whether for good or for evil.
- For those of us who are in Christ today, even though there is no condemnation awaiting us on the day of Christ's judgment, that doesn't mean we won't be evaluated. The Apostle Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 that even believers will have their work evaluated by the Lord.
- This shouldn't make us paranoid. But every now and then it is worth doing some reflection and asking ourselves, "Is the life I'm living really the life I want to present to Jesus? Am I really doing my best with the gifts and opportunities God has given me? Most importantly, knowing the judgment that is coming, have I done my best to persuade as many people as I can of the truths of Christ's gospel?"
- Obviously, none of us is perfect. But friend, on judgment day, you would want to know that you did your best to please the Lord more than you sought to please the world around you.

Faithful Witness (11b-13)

- It's clear that for Paul, he was a man more concerned with how God sees him than with how others saw him. But having said that, it's not like he wasn't concerned at all with how others perceived him. At the end of verse 11, Paul states that he is also motivated to preserve his faithful witness before the Corinthian church.
 - [11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. (ESV)
- Notice here that before the Lord, Paul's conscience is clear. God knows who he is deep down. The wording here in Greek has the idea of being clear and visible. God knows Paul inside out. He knows the true intentions of his heart.
- But Paul isn't satisfied with God alone knowing him. Paul also wants the Corinthians to know him inside out as well. And look at why Paul wants this in verse 12.

- [12] 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 in the heart. (ESV)
- Apparently some of those false teachers in Corinth were starting to question the ministry of Paul. And we can see some of the accusations they were making against Paul here in verse 13:
 - [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. (ESV)
- Now there are a couple of ways we can take these accusations.
 - It could be that Paul's critics are accusing his ministry of being passionate but not rational. Paul's intense and a little crazy. He doesn't seem to have a lotta time for nuance or sophistication.
 - It could also be the exact opposite. The accusation could be that Paul is too rational, too intellectual, and he doesn't seem to be too in touch with the Spirit. You can see in 1 Corinthians 14 that Paul doesn't seem to show off his speaking in tongues or other things like that.
- We don't know for sure how they were coming after him. Either of these interpretations could fit with what we know of the Corinthian church. This was a church that had different people fixated on different gifts or talents. Some liked the flashy spiritual experiences, while others preferred the heady stuff.
- It could be either of these accusations. It could be both. Sometimes in ministry you tend to get accused of being contradictory things. Too strict or too lenient, too stoic or too emotional.
- Whatever the case may be, we can see in verse 12 that Paul isn't concerned with pleasing the crowd, but he does want the church to truly know him. He wanted them to understand his heart. And when you read verses 12-13 together, you see clearly what Paul is getting at. If the Corinthians understood his intentions, they would realize that in all that Paul did, he did it because he really loved God, and he really loved them. Again, verse 13:
 - [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. (ESV)
- Knowing Paul, the Corinthians would be able to respond to the accusations of these false teachers.
 - Our pastor may not be the most emotional guy, but we know that he gets the most excited when he's talking about Jesus
 - Our pastor may not have all the fancy degrees, but we know that he works hard in his studies to honor the Lord and to give us something true and spiritually useful from God's Word.
- Paul wanted this church to know him. To know what made him tick so that they, in turn, would trust him and trust the gospel he tried to preach to them.

Application

- Friends, this is something important for all of us to think about. Because of the internet, you and I have access to so much knowledge...and so many different opinions.
- It can be hard to know who to trust. It's especially difficult for those here today who are seeking. Who are either doubting their faith or are checking out the faith for the first time. There are experts on all sides of all kinds of different issues. Who should we listen to?
- My advice? Listen to people like Paul. Listen to people who you think really love Jesus and really love you.
- To be clear, I'm not saying you shouldn't study or read different perspectives. I'm not even saying that Christians get it right all the time. Sometimes Christians can be wrong about things.
- However, I do think there's wisdom here in the way Paul approached a church whose members were having serious doubts and earnest questions. Paul asked the church in Corinth to not simply think about the arguments but to also think about the character of the people giving these arguments.
 - Are these people doing this for their own power, popularity, or wealth?
 - Or are these the kinds of people who are seeking to tell the truth because they really believe it? Are they even willing to make sacrifices because they love the Lord and love his people?
- Brothers and sisters, Paul's argument here raises important questions for you and me today. Are we the kinds of people whom others around us can trust? Jesus himself teaches us in Matthew 5:16:
 - [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (ESV)
- If you're a Christian here today, you should know it's inevitable that the world is going to think that you're weird. That you're a little too moral or a little too passionate about Jesus.
- But even if we come off that way, I generally think it should be clear to people that the reason you and I do what we do is that we sincerely love God and we love them. It should show in some way and bring some measure of credibility to our gospel message because we ourselves are credible witnesses for Jesus.
 - Credible because we sincerely believe we will stand before God and give an account of what we say.
 - Credible because we clearly love the people we're speaking to.
- This isn't just for unbelievers. Other believers who are struggling in the faith benefit when they see that their brothers and sisters in Christ are sincere Christians who are motivated by reverential love for God and his people. Friends, when others know that you are someone who truly loves them, they tend to listen better when you have something difficult to tell them. So it's important to ask

ourselves this. Are we the kind of people who are clearly known for loving God and for loving others?

- By the way, this assumes another principle of the Christian life. It assumes that you are the kind of Christian who is transparent with people. Who, like the apostle Paul, sincerely wants others to know you at a deep level. And this is hard. It requires us to be honest and vulnerable with one another.
- I'm not saying that everyone around you needs to know everything about you. But friends, people need to know you. They need to know what makes you tick if they are expected to listen to your truth.
- And that's hard. We're not perfect. We don't do everything from a heart motive of reverential love. And we don't want people to see that.
- But friends, I would challenge us this morning that it's actually helpful for people to know these aspects of us as well. I think you should try your best to be a godly witness for Christ. But I also don't think any of us are being a good witness if we start pretending to be better than we actually are.
- For many of us, we can be a better witness for Jesus by simply admitting when we're wrong. When you confess your sin to your brother or sister or co-worker. When you apologize for your mistakes and repent publicly before others.
- Friends, when you openly own your sin before others, you show others that you fear God more than you revere the opinions of man. That you love people more than you want them to love and respect you. When you own your faults, in an odd way you actually show that you are the kind of person whom others can trust and talk to about their faults as well.

Fidelity to Christ (14-15)

- Some of you here today have tried to trust other Christians before, and you've been burned by the experience. Maybe for some of you, the credibility of the Christian faith has been obliterated by the experiences you've had of other so-called believers around you.
- If that's you today, I'm sorry you went through that. Christians aren't perfect people, and not everyone who claims to be a Christian truly lives up to what they say.
- Nevertheless, I would still encourage you to give Christianity another try. There are real Christians out there. Christians who aren't perfect, but who are incredible people to get to know. Who demonstrate in their lives a reverential love that would be hard for anyone to deny. It would be worth your time to get to know these people.
- But ultimately, if you are interested in Christianity, the thing you need to decide is not whether Christians are trustworthy people but whether Jesus Christ is a trustworthy Savior.
- Paul has spent his time talking about the motivations of a real Christian. He's talked about the fear of the Lord and the concern for a faithful witness. Now Paul turns to give us his third and most important motivation in life. The fundamental conviction that drives everything else he does. Fidelity to Christ. This is what Paul says in verse 14:

- [14] 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)
- The word “control” here is a strong verb. It’s the same word Paul uses in Philippians 1:23 when he speaks of being hard pressed between either being with God in heaven or serving his people on earth. It could even be understood as being compelled, constrained, or held captive.
- And what was it that held Paul captive? That left him no choice but to live for Jesus? Verse 14:
 - [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;
- According to Paul, the true depth of Christ’s love is displayed in the gospel, in his death on a cross for our behalf. That’s what captivated Paul.
- There’s a little bit of a debate whether what is said of Christ’s death here has to do with Christ’s substitutionary death on our behalf or our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. I don’t think you need to choose. Paul is going to emphasize both in verses 16-21.
- In one sense, Jesus died in our place. In love, he took the condemnation you and I deserved on the cross. He died, and because he died, you and I are legally considered dead in Christ. The punishment we deserve has been paid.
- But in another sense, you and I participate in the death of Christ as well. Paul talks about this more specifically in Galatians 2:20:
 - [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)
- Our old self, enslaved to sin, has died with Christ, and when he rose again, we too rise in him to new life. To a renewed life, where we now love Jesus and serve him from a pure heart.
 - By the way, Isaiah helped point this out to me the other day. When you hear that Christ died for all, that doesn’t mean that everyone will benefit from Christ’s death and resurrection. This doesn’t imply universal salvation. It’s very clear in verse 17 that all means all those who are united to Christ by faith.
- But friends, the bottom line of what Paul’s getting at is simple. Jesus demonstrates the depths of his love by giving us everything we need to be saved from our sins.
 - If you feel guilty today, Jesus paid the full price of your pardon.
 - If you feel enslaved to old habits, Jesus buries your old self in the tomb and raises you up to new life with him.
 - And if you feel far from the love of God today, at the cross Jesus demonstrated how far his love is willing to go: he would even die on a cross to save sinners like us.

- Friends, when you really get what Jesus did for us, what Jesus did for you, you just can't help but love him in return. You just can't help but be compelled to trust and follow Jesus for all the rest of your life.
- And if you don't feel that way, then in my opinion, you just don't get it yet. You don't get how serious sin is. You don't get how good God is. You don't get just how much Jesus did to save sinners who don't deserve to be saved. And until you get this, Christianity will never fully make sense to you.

Illustration:

- Becoming a Christian is a lot like getting married. And I say this as a guy who is married to the best wife in the world. Getting married is kind of crazy.
 - You're promising to love each other for the rest of your life.
 - You're promising before God and all your family that you're going to be together until you die.
 - Whatever good happens, I'm here. Whatever bad happens, I'm still here.
- That's a crazy thing to do! Unless you know your wife loves you. Unless you really love her too.
- Friends, marriage is the craziest promise you can ever make in life, unless you really love each other. Because if you really love each other, then it's the only sensible thing you can do.

Application:

- It's interesting nowadays how many Christians try to make Christianity look normal in front of unbelievers. And I find that kinda funny. Because it's not normal. It's really weird. Like marriage, Christianity is kind of a crazy thing to ever ask someone to step into.
- Think about it. We want you to believe that God came down as a man, died on the cross for our sins, came back from the dead, and is coming back one day on a white horse to judge the world. That's a weird thing to believe.
- But we don't just want you all to believe it. We want you to bet your life on it. We want you to trust and follow Jesus for the rest of your life. We want you to get baptized and publicly proclaim to all your family and friends that your old self died, and your new life is in Christ. We want you to formally join a church where you have other people keeping you accountable. Where others can check in on your life to make sure you're keeping your promise to trust and follow Jesus for the rest of your life.
- That's a crazy thing to do. That doesn't make any sense. Unless Jesus actually loves you. Unless you yourself are compelled by the love of Christ, born down, hard-pressed, held captive by his love. Because if you really get what the love of Christ means for sinners like us, you would have no choice but to love Jesus back. If you really get how much Jesus loves you, it makes all the sense in the world to love him and serve him for the rest of your life. It's the only sensible thing to do.
- Friends, why are you here? Why are you following Jesus today? What's the true motivation of your heart?

- Do you think you're gonna get rich or get famous for being a great Christian? If that's why you're here, that's a foolish reason to keep doing this. You, of all people, look the craziest to everyone.
- But if you're here because you love Jesus, because you understand what Jesus really means when he says that he loves you, then you know deep down that trusting and following Jesus isn't an option for you. It's the only thing you can do. Love him. Serve him. And persuade others to do the same before the day of judgment too!