

## *The Love that Compels Our Witness*

2 Corinthians 5:10-6:2

Let's look at this verse from the Apostle Paul as we begin today: *If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you -- for Christ's love compels us...* (2 Cor 5:14-15a).

What makes some people do things that other people think are crazy? Maybe they **are** crazy! Or maybe, they simply have come to know something – or experience something – that has absolutely changed their lives and, in light of that, what seems crazy to others is not really crazy at all. Do you think that's possible?

This weekend, we'll look at how Paul responded when people, even church people, called him crazy. He had been one of the best educated and probably most affluent people in his society. He would have been voted the most likely to succeed among the young people in his country. But, he left all that behind for a life of going into city after city telling about Jesus and, for doing so, being rejected, beaten and imprisoned. Basically, what he says to those who say his is out of his mind is this: "If you experience what I have experienced, then you will know that I am not out of my mind. In fact, you will even begin to adopt some of my ways yourself."

This brings us to 2 Cor 5 when Paul tells us that some people in the Corinthian church thought he had lost his mind. One of the reasons they called him crazy was that they thought Paul was too confrontational and blunt. Reading between the lines of Paul's letter, we can almost hear their voices, "Oh that Paul... he's too pushy! He's always pressing his faith in Jesus on other people. He's like the man wearing a sandwich board that reads, 'Turn to Jesus or Burn.' He runs people off. Paul embarrasses our upstanding church people."

I'm pretty sure they used a word about him that Paul used in v. 11, i.e., he "*persuades*" people. The Greek word translated *persuades* is a very strong word. It can mean to bully or to brow beat. In fact, it's the very word that Paul was accused of in Acts 18 when he first preached in Corinth. Paul's trying to "persuade" people to believe in Jesus had led to him being abused in that city.

In our passage today, Paul says, "Maybe it is true. Maybe I do come across strong as I seek to tell people about Jesus. But, let me tell you why I do it. It's all about 1) what I've come to know about God, 2) what I've experienced from Jesus and 3) what God has told me to do." Those things directed his life. What did he say?

**Motivation #1: What We Know** -- *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade people (5:10-11).*

What Paul is saying here is that we who follow Jesus know that how we live our lives matters to God. In fact, we know that all people will stand before God to give account of how we have lived. **Notice how comprehensive that is.** We know that "we **all** must appear before the judgment seat of Christ." There has been quite a debate throughout history about whether that "all" in 10 refers to all people or to all Christians. For reasons I won't go over now, I think he is speaking of all people. But, either way, we who have read the Bible know, as Paul knew, that all people are not ready to meet God on our own. As Paul will write in 1 Cor 5:20, people need to be reconciled to God, i.e., we know that all people need to be made right with God (5:20).

So, "all" means all! And, notice this too: **the individual nature of what we know**, i.e., "*Each one will receive what is due him (5:10b)*". So, when we stand before God, it won't just in groups that we are assessed. The Bible says, "Each one."

To get a feel for the significance of his words, look at that phrase in v. 10, "judgment seat". That had a special meaning to the people in Corinth. When people were put on trial in Corinth, they went into a public place of judgment and sat on what was called the "bema seat". That seat still stands among the ruins in Corinth. <https://holylandphotos.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/gsplco05.jpg> I've been to Corinth a number of times and preached next to that bema seat. Only one person can sit on that seat. And only that person could answer the questions that were posed.

**So**, there will be a time during which you and I will sit on that seat individually before God to give account to him for how we have lived. We will have to stand there personally, and individually and give account of how we have lived – and, for us as believers, for how we have stewarded what we know about Jesus.

Do you find that a solemn thought? **The point is: We know that people do not have forever to turn to God.** So -- soon Christ will return to this world and we all will give account to Him. So now, imagine you knew that

the clocks would stop tomorrow, i.e., that tomorrow would be the day when time would come to an end and all human beings will stand before God. Would there be some telephone calls you would want to make right now? Some texting would do? Some visits you would make? Some relationships you would want to repair?

You see, **sharing the good news about Jesus isn't a Christian hobby. It's a rescue operation**, as urgent as it was at Dunkirk when lifeboats went out to try to evacuate British soldiers as the Nazi armies were coming. You see, we **know** something that is good news for all people. That is why Paul tried to "persuade" people. And, let's face it: You and I know what he knew. Does knowing that lead you to want to tell them about Jesus?

And, this brings us to the second motivation, i.e., it's a beautiful truth and, it's almost shocking too. **The one before whom we all must stand loves all people so much that he died for all people.**

**Motivation #2: What We've Experienced (5:12-17).** *Christ's love compels us for we are convinced that one died for all.*

To understand this point, you have to know that, for most of his life Paul had lived for himself (as he confessed in v. 15). He would have firmly resisted the thought that he needed anybody to die for him; indeed, to do anything for him. He felt that if anybody was right with God, it was he! And, that self-directed way of life had taken him to the point of being a leader in the movement to rid the world of Christians. Then, one day, on a journey he took to Damascus to kill Jesus-followers, he met... Jesus (see Acts 9).

From that day on, Paul saw himself in a different way. He owned up to what was inside his heart. He also owned up to what he was capable of. Indeed, he called himself "the chief of sinners." But, **the most shocking and life-transforming thing in his life was that, in meeting Jesus, he had met someone who knew everything about him -- and loved him still.** He learned that the Jesus he had rejected had died that he might be saved.

The impact of anyone experiencing a love this should be, as Paul wrote in 5:14-15, that we "*who live should no longer live for ourselves*" -- that is the key phrase -- "*but for him who died for them, and was raised again*" The love of Christ, Paul is saying, means who have experienced it no longer put ourselves at the center of our universe. As Steven Curtis Chapman put it a song, "We are seized by the power of a great affection."

With that in your mind, note this: The opportunity to experience Jesus's love was not just for Paul alone. No, it is not just that Jesus only loves missionaries and pastors. The Bible declares unreservedly and consistently that Jesus died for all! Regardless of what is in your past. Regardless of your age, race or nationality. If you are human, Jesus died for you.

"And," Paul said, "that is why I must love others enough to try to persuade them. The love of Christ for me and for all people, compels me in this matter." In vv. 16-17, Paul said, "I have met Jesus, so I no longer see him as I used to. I know he's more than a rabbi or a Messiah-want-to-be." He's the Son of God and Savior of the world. He's the one who died for all people -- and I know it. Experiencing that has changed my life."

Let me tell you this: One of surest ways to know that you have truly experienced the love of Jesus is that you, like Paul, begin to see all people in a different way. I watched a documentary last week about Mr. Rogers. Do any of you remember him? He's the one who saw everyone as a neighbor. He said, "There's one thing that always makes me angry. I get angry when anyone demeans other people." All people are special in the eyes of God and should be in our eyes as well. And, much like that, Paul wrote, "*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come* (5:16-17).

When we really believe those words, we no longer see people around us -- including those who are very different from us -- in the negative, pessimistic way so common in our world. Oh, we don't shut our eyes to people's flaws. We begin see all people as the transformed persons that they could become -- if only they would experience the love of Jesus.

We're going to be having communion together in a few moments. We're going to remember -- with gratitude and awe, that Jesus died for us. Shouldn't we do as Paul did and add the phrase? -- "*not just for me but for all!*" **Should not the love of Christ transform our perspective on the people around us so that we can see them as they could become if only Christ entered their lives? God save us from ministry that is not powered by that kind of love for people.** God save us from ministry that we engage in only so that we can say, "Look how many people are coming into our church." The love of Christ, once we've experienced it, always flows out into

a love for people, people for whom he died. That is Paul's second great motivation for telling people about Jesus. Even if that were the only one, I think it should be enough, don't you? But the Bible does speak a third.

**Motivation #3: What we have been told to do (5:18-6:2).** *God gave us the ministry and message of reconciliation.*

The verses running from 5:18 – 6:2 are so important that we could – and probably should -- devote many weeks to them. In them, Paul outlines concisely the core of the gospel message that God has told us to pass on to others. Today, I'll show just a few things of central importance:

\* **Who took the initiative** -- "*All this is from God (5:18)*." The Christian faith is not about human beings striving to find God; hoping to learn enough or to become good enough to be acceptable to God. No, our faith is about God loving us so much that he took the lead. He has made a way for us to be right with him.

\* **What God did** -- "*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them (5:19a)*." You see, this is the root problem that a holy God had to address if unholy people would be right with him. The basic problem of human beings is not a lack of education or the meaninglessness of life. The root problem with the human race is the sin and guilt that we have in our lives.

And God has found a way to overcome our sin. He did it in Christ. See **5:21**: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*." This is what Christians have called "the great exchange". As a result of God's grace-filled, mercy-driven work, Jesus bears the punishment necessary for our sin, and we become right with God. It is so simple and yet, it's so wonderful.

\* **What God tells us to do** --

-- "*God gave to us the ministry of reconciliation (5:18b)*,"

-- "*God committed to us the message of reconciliation (5:19b)*,"

-- "*We are Christ's ambassadors. It's as though God were making his appeal through us (5:20)*."

It is amazing to me that the task of making this great plan known has been put in our hands. Notice that God has given us both a **message** and **ministry**. **Message** is important because it tells us that to fulfill our calling, we have to be involved in more than silent testimony. We must find the courage to use our words to speak about Jesus.

But, **it is also ministry**, i.e., service. When we see people suffering, hurting, damaged – we need to show them practically the love of Christ. So, God's call upon our lives requires both words and action. This message about what God has done in Christ has to be passed on. No one can believe the Gospel unless they have heard it. And, our ministry must be "love-driven" or the message will have no authenticity. It is the love of Christ flowing through us that drives our witness,

Let me end my message today by giving you a few pastoral thoughts and suggestions. I think that, once we have experienced the love of Jesus, we should more and more naturally speak and live lives in ways that point people to Jesus. I don't think we are all called to go from city to city and do this as the Apostle Paul did. But, each of us should truly embrace our calling from God to be Christ's ambassadors to the world. We too know what Paul knew. We have experienced the same love of Jesus that he did. We have heard God say, "I've entrusted to you the message and ministry of reconciliation."

I have a few **suggestions about how to go about this**. Here they are:

- **Find the courage to identify with Jesus.** This doesn't have to be a formal or preachy sort of thing. I'm thinking we should all learn, in normal conversations, to speak of Jesus and to do so in such a way that people know you genuinely know him and love him. Be warned: When you do this, i.e., identify with Jesus, that brings with it the responsibility to live in ways that honor his name. Doing that will give you the impetus to be a better employee or boss. A more love-filled parent or sibling. In other words, it will help shape your life into one that honors the name of the one you speak of.
- **Develop genuine caring relationships** – Find ways to enter in to people's lives to and get to know them. Hopefully, you'll grow to see them and care for them as Jesus does. To do this, you might

intentionally go to the same check-out person at a food store or ask for same server at a restaurant. Be creative in finding ways to get to know people. As you do, look at no one from “a worldly point of view”. Pray that you’ll have your Father’s eyes as you see people.

- **Be alert for opportunities to bring your faith to bear in discussions** – It may be because I’m a pastor, but I find that many of the people I meet will eventually come to me and share a difficulty in their lives. I’ve learned, in those times, not to pounce on the opportunity and preach. But, I begin with saying something like this, “You probably know that my own life is directed by my faith in Jesus. So, is it OK for me to speak to you about how that affects times like this in my life?” Here in SoCal, I’ve found that one of the easiest things for me to do is just to ask, “May I pray for you – even right now?” And, of course, look for chances to invite those you’re beginning to care about to a concert or to a gathering of friends. One thing for sure: Don’t be afraid if they ask questions and you don’t have answers. That’s all a part of a genuine relationship. If that happens, say, “Good question. Here’s how I think about that now – but let’s talk about that again later.”
- **Begin praying right now for the people you know who need Jesus** – that they too will experience God’s love.

And, now we will go to the communion table together as brothers and sisters in Christ. We will remember that Jesus loves us so much that he died for us. Today, I want you also to think, “Jesus, you died not only for me – but for all. But, not all people know you. There are people I love, Lord Jesus, who will not be at your table.” With that in your heart, will you think right now about one person you know who could not be taking communion with you today because they do not yet know Jesus. Do you have one person right now, in your mind, whom you would love to be sharing communion with you?

Please find a sheet of paper now. Yes, you can use the sheets for “sermon notes” in the pew in front of you. Write that person’s name on that sheet now – once at the top and once at the bottom. Tear it in half and put one half in your pocket, wallet, Bible or purse so that you will remember to pray. And, bring the other half to the communion table with you. We will have baskets at each table. Leave that name in the basket. We will put it in a large container that we will keep here and weekly pray with you for each name...