

Love of Christ Constraineth Me

by William MacDonald

The love of Christ is the greatest constraining motive in the world, motivating us to live for Him and share the gospel with others.

Duration: 38:42

Scripture: Psalm 69:13, 2 Corinthians 5:13-19, 2 Corinthians 5:21 - 6:1

Topics: "Love Of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the Apostle Paul's response to accusations of being beside himself. Paul explains that whether he appears zealous or sober, his actions are either for God or for the benefit of others. The speaker then references a conversation between Jesus and a young man who asked about the meaning of life. Jesus succinctly replied that loving God and loving one's neighbor are the essence of life. The sermon concludes with Paul's urgent plea for people to trust in Christ and accept salvation, emphasizing that now is the accepted time and the day of salvation. The speaker also highlights the transformative power of salvation, stating that when a person is saved, they become a new creation. The sermon emphasizes the importance of the love of Christ and its role in motivating believers to share the gospel and engage in the ministry of reconciliation. The speaker also references the story of C.T. Studd, who was deeply impacted by the realization that if Jesus Christ is God and died for him, then no sacrifice is too great to make for Him. The sermon concludes with the reminder that the Christian faith calls believers to consider the eternal value of their souls over worldly gain.

Transcript

Well, tonight I wonder if we could turn in our Bibles to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, and beginning with verse 13. 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, and verse 13. Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

For the love of Christ constraineth us, 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, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.

Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation to it, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Chapter 6 of 2 Corinthians, verse 1, We then as workers together with him beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee.

Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. May the Lord bless to all our hearts this portion of his precious word.

If I could give a title to this, I would describe it as Paul's explanation of why he acted as he did. We would say in the slanguage of today, what makes a Christian tick? Now, at the outset, I think we see as we begin with verse 13 that the people of Paul's day accused him of being berserk. They accused him of being insane.

They said that Paul is beside himself. And you know, there is that about a Christian whose following in devotion and dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ, there is that about him that makes him an oddball in the eyes of others. A strange thing.

And Paul doesn't plead innocent to the charge, he pleads guilty. Reminds me of Cornelius Van Der Breggen, a lieutenant in the Marine Corps during the Second World War. They took him up before a medical review board charged with having lost his mind.

He pled guilty and gave it his defense that he had found the mind of Christ. Well, that was true. He was acquitted, of course, and had a very long and fruitful career in the Navy.

And Paul says, I understand what you're saying. I understand that you accuse me of being beside myself. Then he says, for whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God.

Or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. He says, no matter what the reaction you might have to us, there is one of two explanations, God or others. And you know, Paul said a lot when he said that.

Remember when the young man came to the Lord and said, Lord, what's important in life? Give me a summary of the law. If you wanted to digest the meaning of life as compactly as possible, Lord, what would it be? And the Lord Jesus said very compactly and very concisely, love God and love your neighbor. Love God and love your neighbor.

That's what Paul says. If you think I'm beside myself, my zeal and dedication and devotion are to God. And if I seem to you sober, if I have changing moods and varying emotions, then it's for your cause that I am so.

And then he says, for the love of Christ constraineth us. Now, I'd just like to take some of these verses item by item, and I hope you follow along with your Bible. The love of Christ constraineth us.

First of all, I think we should point out that that expression, the love of Christ, doesn't mean Paul's love for Christ. It means Christ's love for Paul. And the love of Christ is the greatest constraining motive in all the world.

Do you think if any human authority had ordered Jim Elliott to go down to Ecuador with those four other fellows and die for the Alca Indians, do you think he would have done that for a million dollars? I don't believe it. Why did he do it? The love of Christ constrained him. And, you know, it's an interesting thing that men will do out of love what they would never do for any other reason in the world.

Now, actually, everybody is motivated by something. Everyone is constrained by something. Some are constrained by money.

Some are constrained by fame, by comfort, by popularity, by pleasure, by patriotism, and all the rest. The greatest constraining force in all the world is here, the love of Christ. That word, constrain, is an interesting word.

I like to illustrate it by the crowd that's shopping at Christmas time. You go down to the Loop in Chicago, and there's an awful mob down there. If somehow or other you could get in the middle of that mob and lift up both feet simultaneously, you'd be constrained by the mob.

That's what it means. It means just borne along. It just means moved forward by a force outside yourself.

And that's what moved Paul. The love of Christ moved the Apostle Paul. The love of Christ constraineth us, it says, because we thus judge.

And I like that expression, we thus judge. Christianity involves or welcomes the deepest thinking. In fact, I sometimes believe and often believe that Christians really think more deeply than anyone else.

I often think of Einstein. He willed his brain to medical science after he died. But you know, Einstein never dwelt on the lofty themes that the simplest child of God can dwell on.

Einstein's mind was bounded by the things of time and sense, but he never knew what it was to enter into the deep truths of the Word of God. And here you have a great man, the Apostle Paul. He's sitting down and he's starting to think.

But you know, that's a great thing when a Christian starts to think. And I'd like to suggest this to you tonight, that if you'll sit down and you start to think about the truths of the Christian faith, you start to think of the incarnation and the sinless humanity of Christ and his substitutionary death on the cross of Calvary, his burial and resurrection, his ascension and coming again, and what it means to you. I want to tell you, if you'll stop and think seriously about all that, it'll lead you down a one-way street.

It really will. That's the street that's described here in 2 Corinthians 5. I suppose every man who's ever made history for God has walked down this street. It hit C.T. Studd with resounding force.

And here's the conclusion he came to, and it's the same conclusion you have here in 2 Corinthians 5. If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him. And I would suggest to you tonight, if you've never come to that conclusion, it's because you've never thought very deeply. You can't avoid it.

Everything about the Christian faith says it so. The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge. If you stop to think about it, you'll have to come to the conclusion, what is a man profited if he gained the whole world and lose his own soul? Or you'll come to the same conclusion that Jim Elliott came to when he wrote, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

You know, I sometimes think that one of the devil's greatest successes in this world is to get Christians so busy that they don't have time to think. And I believe that's all too true, that you can live your life and I can live my life, and we can be so busy for the Lord that we never really stop to think of the solemn implications of the Christian life and take the action that really has to follow those implications. We thus judge.

Now, notice, how do we judge? Well, it says, we thus judge that if one died for all. Now, that one, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, it's astounding, it's easy enough to read those words, one died for all, but it's another thing to stop and think of it, that the Lord of life and glory left the ivory palaces and came down to this world to die for you and for me.

You know, I think it's a wonderful thing here tonight that I can stand before you and say, somebody died for me, and that somebody was not a mere man, but the Son of God Himself. And that's an event of such tremendous importance that there are solemn implications involved in it, and I must follow them through to their logical conclusion. One died for all.

Now, notice, if one died for all, then we're all dead. What does that mean? Well, dear friends, it means, for one thing, that if Christ died for me, then I was on the scrap heap, I was dead, I had no claim on God, I was bound for a lost eternity. I had nothing.

I was nothing. And He came and died for me. Now, this should really affect my life.

From the moment I accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, this should have a tremendous influence on my life. If Christ died for me, the only reason He died for me was that I was dead. He didn't die for me because there was some hope in me.

He died for me because I was hopeless. I couldn't do anything for myself. But that isn't all.

If one died for all, then we're all dead. And that He died for all... Notice, that He died for all, it's repeated again. Wherever you get repetition in the Word of God, it's because the truth is important.

One died for all. He died for all. And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.

Dear friend, here's the logic of Christianity. The logic of Christianity is this. Did Christ come from heaven to die for dead people? For those who were dead in trespasses and in sins? Yes, He did.

Why did He die for them? So that they would go on and carry on the way they always had up until that time? No, He didn't. The Lord Jesus died for them so that those who would be saved through His death should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. And this, of course, is where we must come.

You see, Paul brings us right away to the cross of Calvary. And the cross of Calvary is the best place in all the world to see things the way they really are. When you come to the cross, you see the person who died,

the Lord of life and glory.

When you come to the cross, you see what He suffered. You see those three hours of darkness when He was separated from God, His Father. And you see Him bearing our sins' guilt in His own body on the tree.

And you know, the ice of my heart melts in the warm glow of Calvary. And any person who has been really saved should never be able to stand before Calvary's cross and look upon the form of the dying Savior there and never be the same again. Dear friends, if it's true, my life has to be different.

If it's true, it means that I must henceforth live for Him. The hymn writer says that. Thou hast bled and died for me, henceforth I will live for thee.

And so the purpose of His redemption was not so that we would live for ourselves, not so that we would live for food and clothing, not so that we would live to make a name for ourselves or the world, not so that we should even choose our own careers, but so that we would live first and foremost for Him alone. I'd like to suggest this to you, and before you eviscerate me, I'd like to explain it. I don't believe anywhere in the Bible that a man is called to be a plumber or a carpenter or a doctor or a dentist.

I see your blood pressure rising, but I really don't. I don't. It never says in the Bible, Paul called to be a tentmaker.

It says Paul called to be an apostle, and he made tents to pay expenses. I think we should think that over. I think we should think that over.

I'm not saying tonight it's wrong to have a secular occupation. Very much the reverse. But that's not our calling in life.

Our calling in life is to be apostles of Jesus Christ, to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and the job is secondary. It's a means of paying expenses. And that's something to think over from the Word of God.

You see, we tip things topsy-turvy, and after a while, our secular occupation, that becomes our vocation in life. That becomes the thing that we live for. And the things of the Lord really take secondary place.

But that isn't the way it is in the Word of God. Not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again. Notice those three expressions again in these verses.

I like to emphasize them. One died for all. He died for all.

Him that died for them. You know, it astounds me in the light of that, to see the attitude that many parents have with regard to their children. We've said this before.

I just mentioned this. There was a servant of the Lord visiting in a home, a young girl growing up in the home. He said to her, what are you planning to do? She said, well, I plan to become a nurse.

And he said to her, fine. He said, I hope you'll keep the mission field in mind. He said, you know, there's a wonderful opportunity for nurses today in various mission fields of the world.

Nurses can sometimes get in when just a simple preacher of the gospel can't. The mother interrupted and she said, don't you talk like that to my daughter. That isn't what I have planned for her.

And I like to think in contrast to that, to what Spurgeon wrote to his son. He wrote, I should not like you if meant by God to be a missionary, that you should die a millionaire. I should not like it were you fitted to be a missionary, that you should dribble down into a king.

What are all your kings, all your nobles, all your diadems when you put them together compared with the dignity of winning men to Christ, with the special honor of building for Christ, not upon another man's foundation, but preaching Christ's gospel in the regions far beyond. One time a missionary named John Mott was invited by Calvin Coolidge to become the ambassador to Japan. And Mr. Mott said to Calvin Coolidge, Mr. President, since God called me to be his ambassador years ago, my ears have been deaf to all other calls.

Billy Graham also tells about a missionary in China, when China was still open to the gospel. Standard Oil Company was looking for a representative in this area, and they heard about this missionary and he seemed to have the ability that they wanted. And so they came to him with a proposal to be their representative in China.

They offered him \$10,000 and he turned it down. They offered him \$25,000 and he turned it down. They offered him \$50,000 and he turned it down.

They said to him, what's wrong? And he said, your price is all right, but your job is too small. Your price is all right, but your job is too small. Unto him that died for them and rose again.

Then the Apostle Paul says in verse 16, Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh. Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Paul says why when salvation comes into the life, a man sees things through different eyes.

People really become different to him, and you know that's true. I don't know if you realize this, but in the unsaved world today, almost all decisions between individuals are made on the basis of, what will it mean to me? Seems uncanny, but it's true. Social life, business life, all areas of life today, really the motive behind it all is, what will that person, a man in the flesh, mean to me? Paul says that isn't true.

After we become a Christian, we don't know any man after the flesh. We don't look upon him as someone who can benefit us. We look at him as a precious soul for whom Christ died.

And I'd just like to say again tonight, which I think is something I suggested before in one of the meetings, that to me, one of the greatest thrills of living is to think that we as Christians can do a work under God in the lives of others that will last for eternity. I don't think I'll ever get over the joy and thrill of that. To think that you can witness to a person, that that person can be brought under conviction of sin, be converted to God, be saved for time and for eternity, you tell me what in life compares with that.

Now, I don't think there's anything wrong for a man to fill a person's teeth as a means of livelihood. But mind you, I would hate to think that that was my contribution to eternity. I would like to think that that was a way by which I could make a living and devote my life primarily to the spread of the gospel and the building up of the people of God.

Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we him no more. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, there's a new creation. He's a new creature.

Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new. The Apostle Paul, remember, is explaining why he's beside himself.

He's explaining what makes him react the way he does. And he says why, of course, that's it. I don't blame the world if they think I'm different, if they think I'm odd, if they think I'm queer.

When a person is saved, there's a new creation. He's a new creature. Old things are passed away.

Behold, all things are become new. And then notice how this slides along. There's a definite movement in this portion of Scripture.

It starts off with a man beside himself telling why he's beside himself. The love of Christ constrains. Now notice what the love of Christ constrains him to.

Well, it's going to lead up to the gospel. It's going to lead up to the ministry of reconciliation. It's going to lead up to the fact that as a saved individual, he can't be indifferent to people about him.

That's the movement of the plot in this portion of the Word of God. He says, And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. This is beautiful.

A two-fold thing. First of all, God reconciles us to himself by Jesus Christ. My sin had created enmity between my soul and God.

And as a result of my sin, there was distance between myself and God. And that must be remedied before God can draw nigh to me. How is it going to take place? Well, I didn't have the power.

And so God sent His lovely Son, the sinless Son of God, came into the world, and He died to take away the penalty of my sin so that I might draw near to God. He has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and then He says, Now you go forth with the ministry of reconciliation. The blessings of God are never intended to stop with us as terminals.

The blessings of God are always intended to flow through us to others. And you have that beautifully expressed in this portion of the word of God. First of all, He reconciled me.

Why? So that I might go forth with the ministry of reconciliation to others. How selfish it would be if I should enjoy reconciliation with God and do nothing about it. Well, this begins to explain things, doesn't it? This begins to explain why a Christian can't leave other people alone.

This is what the world can't understand. Why don't you leave me alone? Why do you have to pass that tract to me? Why do you have to make me uncomfortable speaking to me about my soul? This is why. He's reconciled me, and He's committed to me the ministry of reconciliation.

And I have to go forth to men with a message they don't want. And I have to wound them and offend them before they can be saved, it seems. And Paul says, I don't blame you for thinking I'm beside myself, and I'm not denying it.

And here's why. Here's the why and the wherefore of it all. He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Now, what is the ministry of reconciliation? Well, the next verse explains it to it that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. My, what words of luster these are. The Lord Jesus Christ is hanging on Calvary's cross, dying for the sins of the world.

God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. You know, nobody but God would have ever bothered. Really.

If you think of your own heart and the depravity of your own heart, the wickedness of your heart, within a single week, and you start to think about it very seriously, you'll realize that nobody but God would have ever bothered. I wouldn't do it for anyone else. God did it for me.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto Him. If I had received what I richly deserved, I would have gone to hell. There's not a single, logical, sane reason why I shouldn't have gone to hell.

God, in grace, acted toward me and saved my guilty soul, not imputing their trespasses unto Him, and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, the word of reconciliation is found in verses 20 through the second verse of chapter 6. In other words, Paul, beginning with verse 20 and going down through the second verse of chapter 6, gives a little short account of the gospel he preached. Now, he wasn't preaching this to the Corinthians, but he was telling the Corinthians the message that he preached to the unsaved.

Now, what was it? Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. You know, there's a tremendous dignity to being a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can imagine how your chest would swell tonight if you were appointed by President Kennedy to be an ambassador to some foreign country.

But I want to tell you, and I say it in all sincerity, this will sound like an exaggeration, but it isn't. It's a far greater honor to be an ambassador of Jesus Christ. And that's what we are if we're saved by the blood of Christ.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is one who represents a sovereign power in another country. And that's our calling.

That's what the Lord Jesus has called us to, to represent Him in a foreign land. This is not our home. We're pilgrims and strangers journeying on to our heavenly home.

As though God did beseech you by us. Notice those words. As though God did beseech you by us.

You know, sometimes a Christian speaks a word of testimony and the person snarls or sneers. Well, really, they're not sneering at us. They're not snarling at us.

They're snarling at God. God is speaking through the believer. And the reception the Christian gets is the reception God gets.

Those who receive a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, it says. And those who reject the ministry of reconciliation, they're rejecting God. Isn't that amazing to think that God speaks through the humblest believer? Sometimes you might be embarrassed by the witness of a simple child of God.

Just remember, he's a mouthpiece for the Most High God. And as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's dead be ye reconciled to God. Paul says, I sat down, I fought this thing over, I've gone

over the implications of the cross and the resurrection, and it boils down to this.

We go forth to men and women and we beseech them be reconciled to God. Why? Because if you don't, if you die in your sins, you'll perish forever. Provision has been made, come and accept the provision God has made and be reconciled to God.

Now here's the basis upon which reconciliation can be made. Verse 21, For he hath made him, he, God, has made him Christ, to be sin for us. That is the sin bearer.

God caused our sins to be placed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He bore the penalty of our sins in his body on the tree. God hath made him Christ to be sin for us, he who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Matchless exchange. My sins on Christ, God's righteousness on me. You know, in the cross of Calvary, at the trial, at least, of the Lord Jesus, they put on him a scarlet robe.

A scarlet robe. My sins on Christ. My sins were a scarlet.

They were placed on Christ. He died for me. I accept him as my Savior.

God clothed me in the robe of his own righteousness so that I, as a believer in Christ tonight, can look up into the face of God and say, Oh God, I thank thee that I'm clothed with thine own righteousness. And you know, that's what makes me fit for heaven, isn't it? Nothing in myself, nothing in my hand, nothing of my works, but the fact that I'm clothed in the righteousness of God is the thing that will get me to heaven at last. He has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

And then Paul says, now there's an urgency connected with the message. Too bad there's a chapter break here. He says, We then, as workers together with God, beseech you that you receive not the grace of God in vain.

This is what Paul preached to the unsung. He says, Now I've told you the word of reconciliation. I've told you that God wants you to be reconciled to him.

He's provided the basis upon which you can be reconciled to him, the cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now don't receive the grace of God in vain. That is, God has come out in grace.

He's offering you salvation. Don't spurn it. Don't turn it away.

Don't reject it. Receive it. Receive it when? Well, he says, For he said, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in a day of salvation have I succored thee.

Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. And so Paul ends this beautiful summary of the reason for his being and why he behaved the way he did with his urgent plea to men and women to trust Christ now.

Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. According to the word of God, there's only one time when a person can be saved, and that's now.

N-O-W. God promises tomorrow to no one. God says, Act now.

You've heard the word of reconciliation. You've heard the message burning from the lips of a servant of God. Now accept it.

And accept it now. Now just think back over the portion of Scripture we've covered tonight. A man charged with being beside himself.

He said, Very well, it's to God, and for your sake, everything I do. I'm driven on by a power outside myself. That motive power is the love of Christ.

I look at the cross and see what He did for me, and I realize that I must turn over the reins of my life to Him. I realize that He bought me with His precious blood, and if He bought me, then I belong to Him. And if I take my life and use it the way I want to use it, then I'm a thief and a robber.

And God not only reconciled me to Himself, but He committed a message to me. He conferred upon me the tremendous privilege and dignity of being an ambassador of Jesus Christ. And as an ambassador of Christ, I go to a people with a message.

I tell them to be reconciled to the King whom I represent, to my Lord and to my Savior. And I tell them to do it now. And dear friends, that's what we tell you to do tonight.

Should there be some in our audience, and you've never been reconciled to God, you've never laid down the arms of surrender, and if the truth were told, you're fighting God tonight, and you know what I mean, too. And you've been fighting God all this week. And God's been speaking to you that you won't give up.

But dear friends, not until you lay down the arms of warfare will God save you. During one of the wars in which Britain was engaged with France, the two flagships of the fleets came together. Apparently the British had won this particular battle, and the French admiral came on board the British ship.

And he strode up to the British admiral, and he reached out his hand to shake his hand. The British admiral said, Your sword first, sir. You know, in a sense, that's what God is saying tonight to sinners.

Your sword first. You lay down the arms. You come to me and say, Lord, I surrender.

I give up. I've been fighting against you, but tonight I will accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Dear friends, the moment you do that, you're reconciled to God on the basis of the work of Christ 1,900 years ago.

You're saved by matchless grace and sure of a home in heaven. Tonight at the end of our meeting, at this closing meeting, evening meeting of the conference, we would invite you to do that. While we close the meeting in prayer, we'd invite you to look to God and say for the first time, Lord, I want to be saved.

I can't save myself. I believe Jesus died to save me, and I'll commit my case to Him. I'll put myself in His loving arms, and I'll trust Him for time and for eternity.

Would you do that tonight?

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