

A Service of Ordination and Installation
“By His Love Compelled”
II Corinthians 5:11–20
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January 7, 2018 • Evening Service

I heard a story of a man who died and got to the gates of heaven. The gate keeper said “Why should I let you into heaven?” The man said “Well, I’ve been a pretty good guy. I taught Sunday school for 15 years and that ought to be worth a few points.” The gate keeper said “That’s not worth anything.” The man said “I volunteered for a homeless shelter for five years so that ought to be worth something.” “No, that’s not worth anything either.” “Well, I served as an elder at Briarwood Presbyterian Church for eight years. I’m sure that’s worth something.” “No, that’s not going to get you into heaven either.” “Oh, I tithed for 20 years that has to be worth something.” “No, that’s not worth anything either.” “Good grief, at this rate it will take the grace of God to get me in there.” Isn’t that the point? That is the only way to get in there and that’s the message we have to tell people. Many people don’t understand the message of grace so we have to figure out how to do that.

Some people are wondering why we are trying to introduce a new way of evangelism. I want to ask you a question. What one word has research found that non-Christians felt most accurately described conservative Christians? Judgmental is the word. Barna did a research project and they asked people what they thought about evangelical Christians. One person said, “Christians like to hear themselves talk. They are arrogant about their beliefs but they never bother to figure out what other people think. They don’t seem to be very compassionate especially when they feel very strongly about something.” That is what people think of me and you because we are those conservative evangelical Christians. This makes our task of evangelism these days more difficult.

Many of you have probably seen at a sporting event or on TV while watching a sporting event someone holding up a big sign that reads ‘John 3:16.’ I’m sure that person holding up that sign thinks they are being a witness for Christ and telling people the Gospel but back in 1999 a survey was done that discovered that 70 percent of Americans had no idea what John 3:16 meant. So the person thought they were being a witness but most didn’t even know what it was about. I am finding that sometimes we think we are sharing the truth of the Gospel with people but their ignorance of God, Jesus, sin, forgiveness and important concepts are so great that they don’t understand what we are saying. So we think we have been a witness to them and they are missing the point.

As we look at II Corinthians 5 we will see what things motivated the Apostle Paul. Paul put up with a lot to spread the Gospel. He was beaten, ship wrecked, stoned to name of few. All kinds of things happened to him yet he kept on sharing the Gospel. The first motive we will see that Paul had was the fear of the Lord.

II Corinthians 5:11–13 says *[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.*

When Paul talks about knowing the fear of the Lord he is talking about knowing that the judgment is coming and we know that in the context of this passage by looking at verse 10 where he talks about everyone having to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. So here Paul has judgment on his mind where people are going to be judged on the last day and because of that he knows that will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

That word persuade in verse 11 means to bring about a change of mind by the influence of reason. The NIV translation says that 'we try to persuade men...' I like that 'we try' because it's not easy work. It can be difficult and there is also a spiritual battle involved because Satan doesn't want people to turn from his dominion into the Kingdom of our Savior, God's Son. So sometimes it is a trying process to get to that point.

In South Africa my wife and I were speaking at a marriage conference and the couples were doing a workshop, working together on resolving conflict. I saw this one man motioning to me to come over where he was sitting with his wife. He said 'We don't have any conflict in our marriage' and my thought was 'liar' but unfortunately I didn't have time to say that because then he went on to say 'There is one major conflict that we have never been able to resolve.' I said 'What's that?' He said 'She's a Christian and I'm not.' That is a conflict and now we know where things stand.

About a month or so later I invited him to come to a short investigative Bible study that I was doing with some businessmen and he came to it. At the beginning he told us he was not a Christian and he was only there because his wife wanted him to be there. His name was Philip and on the last night of our study I asked the men some questions and Philip gave a theologically correct textbook answer as to who Jesus is, why He came to earth, what it means to receive Christ and what happens when you receive Christ. I was so excited and I said 'So would you like to receive Christ?' He said 'No' and I said 'Why not?' He said 'He would change my life and I like it the way it is.' What do you do with someone like that? You have just shared the Gospel so do you say 'well you're going to go to that place where God's not going to be for eternity' or do you try to continue to reach them?

I continued to try and reach Philip for almost two years. During that time I did things like watch video games of baseball games with him and I hadn't watched a baseball game in 20 years but I watched it because he was interested in baseball. So we did things together, talked, had all kinds of conversations about the Lord and after two years he came to faith in Christ. Now Philip ran a car dealership and after he became a Christian he said 'I wish my salesman were as tenacious as you cause you wouldn't give up on me' but that is a process of learning how to have those conversations over and over again. We'll touch on this later as well.

Let's look at the second motive that motivated Paul and this will be the key one for this study and that is Christ's love for us. II Corinthians 5:14 says [14] *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died.*

This is talking about Christ's love for us not our love for Him. We have a knowledge that He loves us. The idea that Christ's love controls us is that it compels us and that's because His love is just so great which is something Paul never got over. The word 'compelling' means properly holding together, press on, to urge, excite and so here the compelling or exciting motive in the labors and self-sacrifices of Paul was the love that Christ had for him. He said in one of his writings that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church (a way he persecuted Christ) and yet Christ chose to reveal Himself to him. Paul never got over that for it always had a profound impact on his life.

As the passage goes on we are all aware that Christ died for us and because He died for us we love Him. When we love a person and they love us back we do all kinds of things for that person. Think about what we men do for our wives and what our wives do for us, it's amazing and it's because we have this love for one another. It should be the same in our relationship with Christ. Because we are aware of His love for us then we should love Him back, living for Him.

When I was in college I was a new Christian and I was very excited about so that I started learning to tell people about my faith in Christ and how they can know Christ. I came home one weekend and I was talking to an old high school friend. As I was telling her about this she claimed to be a Christian and said "I don't think you should be doing that." I said 'I think I should be because I want people to go to heaven.' She said 'I would never do that.' I screwed up my courage and said 'Maybe the reason I want to tell people about Christ and you don't is because your relationship with Christ is not worth telling people about.' I was afraid she might slap me but she didn't but her mouth dropped open and she said 'that's exactly right.' We need to have that kind of awe about the love of Christ where we want to tell people about it.

II Corinthians 5:15 says *[15] and he died for all (the idea of substitutionary atonement), that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* We it says He died for all we shouldn't try and twist that to say that everyone is going to heaven. That is a teaching called Universalism but the context of this passage and other passages as well would tell us not everyone is going to heaven but only those who believe. His death was sufficient for all but only efficient for those who put their trust in Christ.

Verse 15 talks about that we have died therefore we live for Him so what does it mean that we live for Him? It means a lot more than I have time to go over but we will look at a few things here. One, is that living for Him means willing to die for Him. We are fortunate that we live in a country where it is unlikely that we're going to have to die because of our witness for Christ but many of our brothers and sisters around the world will and do die for their witness. I do find that there is still a fear that we often times have that prevents us from doing things for Christ because we want to be comfortable, play it safe and not put our neck on the line by stepping out to talk to someone about Christ. I experience that in my own life as well so here is the question I like to ask.

What are you trying to do for Christ that will not happen unless He shows up? Sometimes we only do those things that we can do by our own hard work and ingenuity, but what are you trusting Him to do through you that if He doesn't show up it won't happen? I'm reminded of a story that Frank and Barbara Barker told me about. When Briarwood was still a small church in a store front in Cahaba Heights Frank was praying one day that they would be a church that would impact the entire world. Barbara thought he was just delusional. He was willing to trust God and look what this church has become. It does impact the entire world. So sometimes we need to pray for God to do things that are only going to happen if He shows up.

What else does it mean to live for Him? Living for Him means having a new perspective on people and that is the third motive Paul had. II Corinthians 5:16 says *[16] From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.* In other words, Paul used to have a superficial view of who Christ was but now he knows who Jesus really is. Paul thought Jesus was a blasphemer. Now he knows that Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth and he begins to see Jesus differently which causes him to see people in a different way. He sees them as what they can become in Christ because Paul knew what he was and what he has become.

So how do you see people? Do you see them as problems? Perhaps that neighborhood dog is barking all the time or the dog is messing up your yard all the time or there is a difficult person at work or those who have different political views than you who are always ranting and raving about their views. Do you see those people as problems or do you see them as someone needing Christ?

How did Paul view people before he was a believer? He saw people at that point in two categories – Jew and Gentile. He was a Jew and to him they were the good guys and Gentiles not so much. After he became a Christian Christ changed his life and again he viewed them in two categories but now it was saved and unsaved. You either know God and you're going to heaven or they are headed for an eternity apart from Him. Because of that, Paul wanted to share Christ with people.

In I Corinthians 9:21 Paul says [21] *To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.* When he is talking about those outside the law here he is talking about Gentiles. His view of Gentiles completely changed and he wanted to win them to Christ where he had formally despised them but now he says he becomes like them. Why? It is to win them so he goes and has a Jim N' Nicks pork sandwich with them where he couldn't have done that before, right? In other words, he is willing to go get involved in their way of living, not to the extent of sinning but adopting some of their ways, learning their ways and figuring out how to relate the Gospel to them.

Paul continues in II Corinthians 5:17 which says [17] *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Some of you can remember even though it may have been many years ago what it was like to be a new Christian and the excitement you had when you realized your sins had been forgiven. It is a fact that more often new Christians are telling people about Jesus and bringing them to church more than those who have been Christians. We want to recapture that. We don't want to say 'well, that's the way I was back then.' We as a congregation want all of us to be talking to people about Christ regularly.

I heard a story recently from Alistair Begg that I feel showed me the value of the preached Word and bringing people to Christ. There was a couple in the church where the woman was a Christian and the man was not but the man would come to church fairly regularly but not every week. He was resistant to becoming a Christian. One day he came up to Alistair and said 'I committed my life to Christ today.' Alistair was really surprised because he had not really preached an evangelistic sermon. In fact, it was a sermon aimed at Christians on Psalm 23. So Alistair said to the man 'What about my sermon made you want to become a Christian today.'

The man said that it was verse 3 of Psalm 23 which says [3] *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* Alistair was still confused so he said 'how did that lead you to Christ?' The man said 'The reason I never wanted to commit my life to Christ was I knew how Christians lived and I thought I could never live up to that. When you read that verse I realized that God is going to lead me in the paths of righteousness for His glory, His Name sake and it's not up to me but He is going to do it. I realize that I can trust Him to do that.' So this man came to Christ.

We never know how God is going to use the preached Word but one thing we do know is that when people come here and Pastor Reeder or Dr. Barker or someone else who is preaching,

people are going to hear the Word clearly taught. So we have opportunities to use events and the preaching here to bring people to Christ.

Let's look at the last things that it means to live for Him and that is our fourth motive which is reconciliation with God. It is the whole idea of living out our calling to be an ambassador. II Corinthians 5:18–19 says *[18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

Through all this that Paul has just been talking about it is saying that God is the Initiator and Source of all these good things. It is not us but God has done it. When it says He has given us a ministry of reconciliation we have to ask is that us reconciling people to people who are angry with each other or is He talking about reconciling people to God? It is the latter, reconciling people to God. God is so concerned to reconcile people to Himself and He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. Who is the 'us' here? It is not just Paul but it is all of His people who have received reconciliation with God and we now have that message to give to other people so that they can be reconciled to God. That is a tremendous privilege to be God's representatives and be able to do that.

It does lead often times to reconciliation with people. Some years ago I had a businessmen's breakfast I ran in Cape Town South Africa and there was a man named Mark who came regularly who wasn't a Christian. One day he actually gave his life to Christ at that meeting. His work was only two blocks away from where the meeting was but what when he left he didn't go to work. Instead he went home to get reconciled to his wife and then he went to work. He came back and told us the story the next day. God changes lives and it is amazing at what He does.

Now let's look at the remaining verse in II Corinthians 5:20 which says *[20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore (beg) you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* Paul says here he is an ambassador or representative for Christ. Did Paul volunteer for the job? No, he was chosen for it. We are also ambassadors for Christ because we have been reconciled. Did we volunteer? No, we were also chosen before the foundations of the world and that's a huge privilege that we have. So it's not an optional thing to be His ambassador. We need to be representing Him.

I want to close by focusing on that phrase 'we are ambassadors' because that is actually a verb. Ambassador in the Greek is a verb. You could literally translate this (but it would be wrong because we don't have this word in English), 'we are ambassadoring for Christ.' Do you see the difference? It's not just that we have the title of an ambassador but we're doing the work of an ambassador. We are representing Christ as we are doing His work. It's one thing to have the title but it's another to do the work.

The United States has had some pretty bad ambassadors who didn't represent us well. We had an ambassador to Great Britain who was such a recluse that he would refuse to answer phone calls or represent the United States in public. He actually left his post and returned home thirteen months before his term ended but the British people didn't even realize he was gone. That was because he wasn't doing his job. He wasn't representing the interest of the United States to Great Britain. So the title is not what is important but are we doing the work of representing Christ to the lost people around us? Are we serving as His ambassadors? That is the whole idea here.

I must tell you that this is not natural for me. It's funny that I'm the one standing here talking because I can clearly remember as a brand new Christian going out for the very first time as a shy, reclusive person and that is really true. I know many do not see preachers that way but many of us are that way. If I walk into a room and don't know people then I will go look at the pictures on the wall or I'll find something to look at on my phone. Cell phones are a wonderful thing for a recluse now. I'm a shy person by nature. I'm not outgoing at all and I don't like going to meet new people.

I was taken out as a new Christian to witness to this guy and I had never seen him before. I was trying to use that little booklet called *The Four Spiritual Laws* but as I took it out of my pocket my hands were shaking and fortunately he was sitting at a table so I just put the booklet on the table so he wouldn't have to see my hands shaking as I tried to talk to him. I know what it's like to be nervous in sharing your faith. I don't have the gift of evangelism or the gift of gab when it comes to talking with strangers.

I remember when I was still learning how to do this I was talking to a student one day and he kept looking out the window. We were sitting in the student center and there was this place where the students walked back and forth during the time classes changed times. I figured he was probably looking for his girlfriend or some other friend and sure enough when I was right in the middle of reading something from *The Four Spiritual Laws*, he just got up and took off. I watched him as he went out and greeted someone and thought 'maybe he is just getting some notes from someone for a class and he'll come back.' No, he and the person he greeted just walked off together. He never said goodbye or anything, he just left right in the middle of me reading. I'm not real smart but I kind of figured out that I didn't connect real well with this guy.

That is one of the things we want to do in this next year as our theme in 'Lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship,' of how to connect with people because those sort of things just don't happen. The work of evangelism is very much needed, even here in the Bible belt but we need to learn how in our current culture to do it most effectively and persuasively. I believe it is done best through conversations in which we first really listen to what other people are saying before we start presenting what we believe. I think that works better in the culture today. Many have a huge amount of ignorance so sometimes we will just launch into a presentation where we think we are sharing the truth but they don't understand it.

Just this past week I was talking to a friend who lives in Dothan, Alabama and she has started a Bible study for some young women who she had met through a ministry similar to Sav-A-Life, a crisis pregnancy ministry. As she started into the Bible study she could tell they weren't catching on so she started asking some questions. Eventually she said led them back to Genesis 1 and when she read the story of Adam and Eve they said 'we have never heard that story before.' This took place right here in Alabama and they had never heard about the story of Adam and Eve. So they don't understand the fall. How can they understand the Gospel? We have to learn to talk to people and figure out what is going on with them – what they know and don't know.

Remember the quote I said at the beginning about that negative quote of what people think of evangelical Christians? That is the kind of attitude people have and so we need to learn how to overcome that, listen and dialogue with them. So I just want to conclude with this quote from the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* written by Isaac Watts;

*Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Your love is so amazing. Work in our hearts and minds as we hear the Word preached here week after week and that we wouldn't take it for granted but that we would be stirred by Your love for us and as a result we would want to live for You in our daily lives, including being Your ambassadors for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

What one word has research found that non-Christians felt most accurately described conservative Christians?

Judgmental

John 3:16

The First Motive—The Fear of the Lord

The Second Motive—Christ's Love for Us

The Third Motive—A new perspective on people

The Fourth Motive—Reconciliation with God

“We are ambassadors for Christ.”

Isaac Watts wrote: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!”