

Preached on 1/14/24 at GBC – Ruston

"Christ's Constraining LOVE, Pt.1"

II Cor.5:12-14

Our Lord declared to those JEWS who were outraged at Him because he healed the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day – *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.”* (Jn.5:39-42) Let me read you a literal translation of Vs.42 – *“but I have known you, that the love of God ye have not in yourselves.”* **WHAT AN INDICTMENT BY OUR LORD!** These JEWS were moral, religious, sincere, **(and in their opinion)** defenders of God’s LAW – *“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.”* (Jn.5:18) Yet according to Christ, **WHO IS GOD** and being God **KNEW ALL THINGS**, declared of them *“ye have not the love of God in you.”* **Think about what Christ’s words MEAN:** Any sinner, no matter how moral, sincere, dedicated, and religious they might be, if they do not have the **“LOVE OF GOD” IN THEM**, they are **LOST**. That being the case, I must ask myself and you should too – **DO I HAVE “THE LOVE OF GOD” IN ME?** I’ll try to make this *“love of God”* clear to you in these next two messages, but let me just simply state this right here – *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son [to be] THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SIN.”* (I Jn.4:10) I’ve said this multiple times throughout this study: Many think this chapter is speaking about **REGENERATION**, getting hung up on **Vs.17** – **QUOTE IT**. In reality, this **WHOLE CHAPTER** is setting forth **RECONCILIATION**. How, or better **ON WHAT BASIS** did God reconcile sinners to Himself? Keep that in the back of your mind as we look at these verses today, and then look at the other verses to follow in later messages.

Let’s pick up with vs.12 – *“For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to [answer] them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.”* To me, this verse looks back to the way Paul begin this whole section of Scripture in **II Cor.4:1,2** – *“Therefore seeing we have this ministry (literally, ‘this ministration’, which is a reference back to II Cor.3) , as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”* Paul had been separated and called by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, and had faithfully fulfilled his responsibility, dogmatically and without compromise, preaching the Gospel to these at Corinth. Unlike the **JUDAIZERS** who came in after Paul departed, Paul **DID NOT** have to *“commend”* himself to them. The word *“commend”* means ‘to place one together by way of introduction’. They **KNEW** who Paul was, and they **KNEW** the message Paul had preached to them – *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”* (I Cor.15:1-4) He had told them in the beginning of this second letter – *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy [our] brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints*

which are in all Achaia: Grace [be] to you and peace from God our Father, and [from] the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”(II Cor.1:1-4) It was because of this Gospel message that Paul and all God’s redeemed suffer tribulation and persecution. Christ told us: “*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*”(Jn.16:33) Christ also told us: “*Blessed [are] they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when [men] shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”(Matt.5:10-12) These false apostles claimed that their message and Paul’s was the same. The difference between the two was that Paul suffered over the Gospel he preached, exactly as the Lord had told him he would and these false apostles didn’t suffer persecution. According to Paul’s words in our text, their desire was to “*glory in appearance, and not in heart.*” These false apostles gloried in outward appearance, in their learning, eloquence, and the applause they received from their hearers. This sounds a whole lot like what Christ said of the Pharisees during His earthly ministry – “*All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, [that] observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay [them] on men’s shoulders; but they [themselves] will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.*”(Matt.23:3-7) Paul and all God’s redeemed glory in ONE THING – CHRIST – “*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*”(I Cor.1:30,31) Listen carefully to Paul’s words in the last part of this verse – “*that ye may have somewhat to [answer] them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.*” Here’s a literal translation – “but we are giving occasion to you of glorifying in our behalf, that ye may have [something] in reference to those glorifying in face and not in heart.” In other words, Paul tells them the Gospel we preach is what vindicates us and exposes the false gospel preached by these false apostles – **Gal.1:8,9.**

This next verse is very interesting – “*For whether we be beside ourselves, [it is] to God: or whether we be sober, [it is] for your cause.*” The Apostle Paul, just like all the apostles and prophets before him, was consumed with the Gospel. It was their calling, their privilege, and their responsibility. Paul told these Corinthian believers, as well as all believers in every generation – “*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching [was] not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*”(I Cor.2:1-5) Paul told them and us: “*For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*”(I Cor.9:16) Paul told the believers at Galatia, as well as all believers – “*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto*

me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”(Gal.6:14,15) When the Spirit moved Paul to use the Greek word translated “we be beside ourselves”, which means ‘out of one’s mind or insane’, he was answering a charge made against him and the Gospel message he proclaimed. When Paul stood before Festus to defend himself and his ministry from the false charges of those JEWS, faithfully and dogmatically declaring the Gospel he had been called to preach, Festus accused him of being out of his mind – “And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.”(Acts 26:24) **HERE’S THE THING:** To Festus, as well as every unregenerate mind, the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ, which declares His blood and righteousness alone as the only hope and cause of salvation, **sounds like madness** – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.” (I Cor.2:14) Isn’t that exactly what the JEWS declared of Christ and His message in **John 10** – “And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?”(Jn.10:21) The original word translated “is mad” means ‘one who so speaks that he seems not to be in his right mind’. **Listen to me:** What Paul states here of himself is the same for all those “born of God”. **Listen to the Apostle John** – “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”; “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.”(I Jn.3:1,13) Christ told the Apostles and us – “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before [it hated] you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”(Jn.15:18,19) Have you ever experienced this from your friends, your family, or your foes? Why does the “world” hate us? The same reason they hated our Lord – “The words which we speak.” But Paul told them that everything he endured for the Gospel’s sake (literally for Christ’s sake), he considered it in this light: “[it is] **TO GOD**” In other words, it was for God’s glory – “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”(I Cor.10:31) Paul wasn’t concerned about his reputation, or the condemnation MEN cast upon him over what they considered **MADNESS**, seeing this Gospel Paul and all God’s elect have been called to declare glorifies God in every attribute of His character as both “a just God and a Savior”, exalts, magnifies, and honors Christ as the **ONLY SAVIOR OF SINNERS**, and allows no flesh to glory in His presence - “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, [yea], and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”(I Cor.1:26-29) Paul didn’t stop there, but wrote next – “or whether we be sober, [it is] **for your cause.**” Let me try and give you a literal translation of this verse – ‘**IF WE** are in our right minds, it is for **YOU.**’ This is **SO SIMPLE** to understand: The glory of God and the good of God’s church were what concerned them in every part of their lives. This was not only true of those at Corinth, but every where Paul preached the Gospel and had brethren under his watchful care and ministry. **Listen to Paul’s words to the brethren at Ephesus** – “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: [And] how I kept back nothing that

was profitable [unto you], but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. **But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.**” (Acts 20:17-24) **Tell me PAUL DIDN'T LOVE THE BRETHREN!** Oh that we might know, understand, and feel a great unbreakable God-like love for all those of like precious faith – “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death.*”(I Jn.3:14) Because I can tell you based on the Scriptures, the **ABSENCE** of this love shows one to be yet dead in trespasses and sin, no matter what they profess – “*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives **for the brethren.***”(I Jn.3:15,16)

That brings us to the verse from which I derived the title of this message – “*For the love of Christ constraineth us.*” Let me just say one thing about this, and we’ll come back and look at in depth in the next message. What holds God’s children together as **ONE**? Listen to Solomon – “*He brought me to the banqueting house, and **his banner over me** [was] **love.***” Christ **LOVES** all those given to Him by the Father, all those He redeemed by His obedience unto death **EQUALLY**, and **listen to me closely**, all those “**LOVED OF GOD**” love one another, seeing they are under the **SAME BANNER**.

I’ll come back and pick up with this in detail later.