

Controlled, Changed, and Called by Christ's Love

By Matthew Black, Pastor

Text: 2 Corinthians 5

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Introduction: Open your Bibles to **2 Corinthians 5**. What controls you? What do you live for? What is it that drives you? Paul said—"The love of Christ constrains me. It controls me. It drives me. We would say it in our day, "Christ's love for me grips me!" Paul then goes on to say how he knows Christ loves him. If you are born again then the love of Christ controls you and it grips you and changes you and calls you to a ministry. This is what our passage in **2 Corinthians 5:14-21** says. Let's stand as we read this passage in God's Word.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 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. 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. 17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18 And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 To wit, 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. 20 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. 21 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."

Christ's love controls us.

Christ's love changes us.

Christ's love calls us to a ministry of reconciliation.

The Love of Christ constrains us. It is not my love for Christ, but His love for me. It controls me. It has a power that seizes me.

In the beginning chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul describes the deep hardship and trials he had been through while preaching the Gospel (1:8-10; 4:8-12). Paul says there were times he even despaired of his life (1:8). What was it that moved him to press ahead?

Verse 14a, "For the love of Christ constraineth us". The word "constrain" here means to be controlled by, to "be gripped by"¹ to be "laid hold of".² The idea here is that the realization

¹Friberg, Timothy ; Friberg, Barbara ; Miller, Neva F.: *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Books, 2000 (Baker's Greek New Testament Library 4), S. 367

²Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G4912

of Christ's love for us moves us and actually controls us. The realization lays hold of us and grips our soul and causes us to obey Christ.

Paul then describes how exactly the love of Christ controls us.

- I. Christ's love **controls** (grips, seizes) us. Christ's love controls me when I consider that He **DIED** for me. Christ's death is my death. My penalty is paid. This is Paul's point. Christ's death was **substitutionary**. I know Christ loves me and all his elect because He died for them all. We are all united to Him in His death. **Verse 14**, "if one died for all, then were all dead [LITERALLY "ALL HAVE DIED"]". God looks at us in Christ and reckons Christ's death to be our death.

A. What is it that proves Christ's love? Answer: His death.

Explanation: If you are in Christ, you are set free from eternal death in hell! Gehenna will not be your eternal home. You will never be burned in hell for one moment even though you deserve it for all eternity. Why? Because Christ took your hell. He died your death. When Christ took hell on the Cross, it was your hell. You are united to Him in His death. Paul says, Christ's love for me constrains me, controls me, grips me. That is because He took my death and hell on Calvary.

Illustration: It is as if I am sentenced to the electric chair, and I sit down to go to my death, and the foreman of the prison stops me and says, "Wait! Your death penalty has already been carried out on another. You are free to go!"

- B. Christ died for ALL. Who are the ALL? They are ALL who "HAVED DIED" in Him. All who are united to His death. The "all" are the same as the "world" in verse 19, which says, "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". Is everyone in the world reconciled to God and have their sins imputed to Christ? No. Therefore, the world, and all in this passage is referring to the world of sinners who believe on Christ. All who are in Christ are reconciled to Him by His death and resurrection.

1. **John 6:37**, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Verse 14, "if one died for all, then were all dead [LITERALLY "ALL HAVE DIED"]". If one died IN PLACE OF all, then all have legally received their just death penalty in God's eyes. The "all" is referring to those who "were dead" as a result of Christ dying. Who of all humanity became dead when Christ died? All believers.

2. **Romans 6:5**, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; 6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin".

3. **Galatians 2:20**, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me".

In other words, all who are in union with Christ have **already received their eternally death penalty through Christ's death**. It's just as the old hymn teaches us:

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

Christ's love controls me when I consider that His death is my death. He died in my place. Why would He take my death and give me life? Because He LOVES me!

Are you controlled by Christ's love? Is the fact that Christ loves you the center of your universe? Why would He love me? Because that's the kind of God Christ is! He loves unworthy sinners. There is nothing you can do to earn His love. There is no work that He requires. It is an absolutely free gift to all who believe.

Are you gripped each moment with Christ's love? Does Christ's love overwhelm you and drive you?

II. Secondly, Christ's love **changes** us.

A. He transforms our **Love**. Christ radically changes our desires, or love. Christ died so that we would no longer be ruled by our depraved desires but be ruled by Him. We died with Him so that we could LIVE in HIM! Paul says in **verse 15**, "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". Christ's desires are my desires. He lives in me! I no longer love and live for myself, but I now love and live for Christ who lives in me.

Christ's love for us is the most powerful force for obedient living. It makes us want to live for Him in obedience.

Illustration: When I was in college I was to spend a summer evangelizing in Philadelphia. I had just a couple weeks in Chicago to see Jill before I left. I didn't have to be convinced to pursue her while I was home. Her parents had certain rules when we were together. They were always close by, but I did not need a lot of motivation to spend time with Jill.

The moment she said, "Would you like to come over?" I did not need a lot of convincing. I thought of her beautiful smile, her dark hair, blue eyes. My answer was always "of course!" Because she is beautiful to me. She makes my world stop. Her love seizes me.

Application: When Christ says "follow me", because of the new birth, we are in awe of His beauty. We are in awe that He would condescend to love us. If we are convinced of Christ's beauty, that he would die on our behalf, then far from that being a door to license, it is the pathway to obedience. When we perceive the beauty of the grace of God in Christ, it moves us to follow Christ. If love for Christ fills our heart, then we easily leave all others and follow Christ. When He says "Do you want to follow me?" Our answer will be "Of course!"

Titus 2:11-12, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world". It is God's grace that teaches us to say "NO" to ungodly lusts. It is love for Christ that will keep us pure and holy.

Christ's love controls me! His love grips me! ***I died in Him!***
Christ's love changes me! ***He lives in me!***

In other words, I am not only united to Christ in His death, I am united to Christ in His resurrection. Paul says in **Colossians 3:3**, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Christ's very presence within me controls me. He quickens me. He makes me live. As Paul said in **Galatians 2:20**, "Christ liveth in me!"

Christ's presence within me transforms my LOVE. We no longer "live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (**verse 15**). He transforms my love, my desires. We live for Him who died for us. And because of this, our whole perspective on life is changed. Paul says, "Wherefore" or in other words, Because of Christ dying for us and living in us, something happens. What is it?

B. Secondly, we see that Christ transforms our **Look**—our perspective. Our worldview changes dramatically. Look at **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". The word to "know" means to "perceive" or to "evaluate".

1. When we come to know Christ our view of **people** changes. Paul no longer evaluates people according to external, temporary, earthly standards. In other words, in this world, Bill Gates is different than the man who collects Bill Gates' garbage as we measure them according to earthly standards. Gates is a millionaire. The garbage man is not. They differ in wealth, social standing, and their ability to help themselves. Gates has the clear advantage. But as believers, we no longer judge people according to earthly standards. Having become Christians, we know there is no difference between Bill Gates and Bill Gates' garbage man. They are both sinners in need of a Savior. Neither have a standing with God. Bill Gates' riches, social standing, and abilities and intellect will not help him with Christ. Bill Gates and all men need Christ!

2. When we come to know Christ our view of **Christ** changes. Paul also says he evaluates Christ differently now that he is saved. **Verse 16b**, "yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more". Saul the Pharisee viewed Jesus differently than Paul the Apostle. He no longer viewed Christ as simply a Jewish rabbi that was turning people away from Judaism. Now He viewed Him as the God of the whole world and the only Saviour, God in human flesh.

So Christ transforms our Love and our Look.

C. Thirdly we see that Christ transforms our **Life**. **Verse 17**, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new". John MacArthur explains this so well: "The transformation wrought by the new birth is not only an instantaneous miracle, but also a lifelong process of sanctification. For those so transformed, everything changes".³ The verb tense in these are important. The past perfect tense describes something that began in the past and continues to the present. This verse literally says, "old things are passed away and keep passing away and all things are new and keep becoming new". This is called sanctification.

³ John MacArthur. *New Testament Commentary—2 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 196.

Christ promises to sanctify us. Sanctification is the inevitable result of the new birth.

We are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience" (**1 Peter 1:2**). Charles Spurgeon said, "Those whom free grace chooses, free grace cleanses. We are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy: and being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness".⁴

A Christian longs to be holy. Why is that? God has ordained it to be so and secured their holiness by sealing their soul with the divine impression of the *Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14). He has made sure that sanctification would occur through regeneration, which gives the person a new nature that longs for holiness. Old things are passing away! All things are become new! We are a new creation!

Ephesians 2:10 likewise says that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". We are Christ's masterpiece, and as such, we are constantly being stripped of the old habits, old desires, and the old way of living, and being changed to walk in the good works which were ordained for us. God plants new desires, new plans and new values in us with the new birth.

According to **Romans 8:29**, all who God "foreknew" and "called" and "justified" (i.e. all true Christians) are predestined to live in some measure of holiness and blamelessness, being "conformed to the image of God's Son". If you are called, you are not simply called to be forgiven of your past sins, but you are called to forsake your present sins and *follow Christ*, thereby being *conformed to His image*. Old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new. You are new, a new creation. You are becoming more and more like Christ.

Verse 17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new".

Conclusion: I know Christ loves me. His love controls me. It seizes and grips me!

1. I know Christ loves me because He took my death (substitution, propitiation) v. 14
2. I know Christ loves me because He gave me new desire (regeneration) v. 15
3. I know Christ loves me because He gave me new vision v. 16 (illumination)
4. I know Christ loves me because He changed me and He is changing me into His image v. 17 (sanctification). I'm a new creation in Christ!
5. Tonight we are going to see that we can know Christ loves us because He gave us a new ministry v. 18-21 (reconciliation)

LORD'S SUPPER

III. Christ's love **calls** us to the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 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

⁴ Charles Spurgeon. *Exploring the Mind and Heart of the Prince of Preachers* (Oswego, IL: Fox River Press, 2005), 228.

again. 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. 17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18 And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 To wit, 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. 20 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. 21 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."

Christ's love controls us.

Christ's love changes us.

Christ's love calls us to ministry of reconciling people with God.

A. Let's look at the **Participants**

1. First we consider **Believers**—those who are reconciled to God are called to the ministry of reconciliation. "And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation".

The word "reconciled" implies that God was at one point our enemy, and we were His enemy. God was provoked and offended at our sin. We were hostile toward God, constantly transgressing His law and falling short of His perfect standard of righteousness ("dead in trespasses and sins", **Ephesians 2:2**).

Yet God loves us and reconciles us to Himself. He restores us to a favorable standing in Christ. We are declared righteous through Christ's death. God replaces fury with friendship. We who were His enemies are now called "friends of God".

We could never remove God's wrath toward us. Left to ourselves, we would forever be God's enemy. But now we can testify that "We love him, because he first loved us" (**1 John 4:19**).

2. The next participant we are going to consider are the sinners in "**the world**".

Look at **verse 19**, "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling **the world** unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". There has been much debate about the term "**the world**". We know that it cannot refer to the entire human family because this world of sinners is one whom God is reconciling to Himself. We know that the majority of people in the world today remain alienated from God. Many, if not most will die in this state of alienation and suffer the eternal wrath of God.

In context, when we see that God is reconciling the world to himself, we must understand it to mean "sinners united to Christ". How do we know this? Because the world that He is "reconciling...unto himself" is *not having their trespasses imputed unto them* ("not imputing their trespasses unto them"). This phrase does not and cannot apply to every individual without exception in the world. The Bible is clear that God will condemn the world through Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10 tells us there's coming a day when "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking

vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe..."

So there are those in the world who are unreconciled and they will remain in this lost condition throughout all eternity.

3. The next participant is **God** Himself in Christ. God is personally reconciling people in the world. **verse 19**, "To wit, that **God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.**" God is in Christ He reconciles us "unto Himself". He draws us to Himself. Christ is the Lamb slain for us from the foundation of the world. Christ pleads for His elect day and night with His blood. The Spirit responds to the blood of Christ and speaks to our hearts when we hear the Gospel preached. He invites us to be reconciled to Him:

Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Jesus says in **Matthew 11:28**, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

B. Now we see the **Process** in this ministry of reconciliation. It's a process of imputation. This reconciliation is **paid for!** **verse 19**, "To wit, 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.**" The word "impute" is an accounting term. God does not charge our sin to our account. Instead He charges it to Christ's account, and therefore we are debt free!

We could never pay the price of sin except by our eternal condemnation. The price is infinitely high and can only be paid for either by us eternally in hell, or by Jesus' infinite death on the Cross! Because of Christ's death, the world of sinners are now reconciled to God by Christ. All believers are no longer under God's wrath, but are now His friends, His very own sons and daughters!

C. The **Preachers** of reconciliation. **Verse 20**, "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."

God first made the apostles the ministers of reconciliation, and now he makes us ambassadors' for Christ! Christ has made everyone an evangelist.

Jesus said in **John 20:21**, "as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I *you*".

An ambassador is a messenger for the king. We dare not change the message. If I am sent by the King with the King's message. I dare not add or subtract from it. The Gospel needs no improvement or creativity. To change the King's message is an act of treason.

It is the message of the Gospel that reconciles God to men. **Romans 1:16**, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

D. We see the **Plea** for reconciliation. Christ is in us and we pray in His place, in His stead, "be ye reconciled to God" (**verse 20**). This verse shows that there must be a personal appeal to the lost.

Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

It is not this appeal alone that brings men the new birth, but truly the Word of God in conjunction with the Spirit of God is what softens the heart.

It is as Ezekiel goes out into the valley of dry bones and commands the dry bones to live.

Ezekiel knew that the only thing that could raise the dead was the Word of God. This is what he is told by God himself. Turn to **Ezekiel 37:1-14**, "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry [ROTTING]. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. 4 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but *there was* no breath in them. 9 Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army". I'm saying to you, be an Ezekiel and give the Word of the Lord to dry bones, dead in trespasses and sins. Say to the Lord, breath on these dry bones, breath of God!

This is a description of the conversion of a great number in Israel. Conversion is the same today. The proclamation of the Word of God will bring life. There is nothing but dry bones. There is no blood or marrow in the bones. They are dead. There was no persuasion, no technique that could bring these bones to life. He could only evangelize them! The only thing he could do was to speak the Word of the Lord to them.

But God can make dead bones live through the power of the Word of God. **Romans 10:17**, "So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Christ tells us in **Luke 14:29**, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled".

E. Finally we see the **Price** for Reconciliation. **Verse 21**, "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."

1. The price was planned to be paid before time began. God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin. God made this happen. All this is from God (verse 18). Christ of course went to the Cross voluntarily, but we must understand that both the Father and the Son had an eternal covenant before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:3-6, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

2. The price had to be paid by someone who has nothing to pay himself, someone who is **infinite** and **sinless**.

God will not accept your righteousness if you had any, because you've got to pay for your own sin. Our substitute needs to be sinless.

Illustration: In the OT, you had to bring a lamb without spot and blemish! That is Jesus! He is the "*Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*".

God will not accept your righteousness if you had any, because you've got to pay for your own sin. Our substitute needs to be sinless.

Illustration: In the OT, you had to bring a lamb without spot and blemish! That is Jesus! He is the "*Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*".

3. Christ had to take the **infinite** cost of sin. How could Christ suffer an infinite hell in six hours on the Cross? Because He was an infinite being. He was God. He was the only one who could do it.

Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Verse 10, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities."

4. Christ had to be human and perfectly fulfill the law. **Verse 21**, "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." Christ was the only one who could take away our sin because He is the only one who perfectly kept the Law. He was the only one who could impute a perfect record to our account!

Conclusion: Christ's love controls us. Christ's love changes us. Christ's love calls us to ministry of reconciling people with God. Let's be busy about the ministry God has called us to being seized, changed, and called by the love of Christ to a ministry of reconciliation.