
The Constraint Of the Cross

*“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.
For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;
and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves,
but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:13–15).*

One clear message that comes through from the cross of Jesus is that those who are redeemed by it are to live for others. In this passage, Paul said that he and his helpers were somewhat “beside” themselves about working and serving so that others might receive the message of the cross and become mature Christians. He further said that those who have received the cross have died. The old life of sin, selfishness, and commitment to the lifestyle that the world demands has died. Through the cross, the ones who have died have come forth into a new life “so that they . . . no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (v. 15). Cleansed and re-commissioned by the crucified Savior, we live to do His work and will in the world.

Christians have a new inner constraint: Paul said, “The love of Christ controls us.” The KJV and ASV have “constraineth us”; while the NIV has “compels us.” Two great motivations are mentioned in the context of this passage: the terror of the Lord and the love of Christ. Paul first said, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:10a). Then, in verse 14, he said, “For the love of Christ controls us. . . .” Within the apostles and us there should be a twin compulsion to share the gospel with others—the accountability that we must give to God at the end and the irresistible love for us that we see coming down to us from the death of Jesus.

Through a powerful, spiritual appeal, the death of Christ compels us in various and wonderful ways—to love as He has loved (1 John

3:16), to praise God as never before (1 Peter 1:3), to be ever grateful for this great salvation (1 Timothy 1:12–14), to share the good news with others (Ephesians 6:19, 20), and to abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). However, let us concern ourselves in our review of this passage especially with the drive, the motivation, the constraint that the cross puts within us to go to others with the word of the cross.

In the larger context of this passage, Paul asserts that the ministry of reconciliation has been given to us. He said, “. . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us . . .” (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20). Every Christian, as he or she takes up the commission that the apostles have sent on to us, becomes a divine channel through which God’s message of reconciliation is given to others.

To encourage us to do what divine love compels us to do and to polish up our skills in sharing the glorious message of the cross with others, let us think of four choice guidelines for evangelism that we should never forget.

The first challenge is presented in the sentence, “Don’t say no; just go.” Owen Olbricht uses this admonition to inspire his workers in his summer campaigns. It compels us to move into action instead of just thinking or talking about it.

It is easy to excuse ourselves from the service that all of us need to be rendering. Moses

received one of the greatest invitations of all time from God, but instead of agreeing to go, he said no. He offered five excuses to God: "I'm not adequate for the task"; "I'm not sure of my message"; "I do not have any authority"; "I'm not a convincing speaker"; and "I would rather that you send someone else." Read Exodus 3:10—4:17. God answered all of his excuses, and Moses went, but would it not have been better if Moses had at the beginning just said, "Yes, Lord, here I am. Send me"? This is no time for excuses; it's a time to say, "Yes, Lord!"

We know what the need is, what the message is, who the servants are, and what God's commission is. Therefore, let us not say no; let us just go. No one can be saved without obeying the gospel; no one can obey the gospel without understanding it; and not many are going to understand it unless Christians go to them and teach them. Therefore, good reasoning argues that it is best for all concerned if we just go as the Lord has commanded.

The second admonition is the sentence, "Don't guess; they might say yes." This word of encouragement also comes from Owen Olbricht. It is a sentence that reminds us that we should not judge what a person will do before he has had an opportunity to respond.

Who can forget the conversion of Saul? Ananias knew that he had come to Damascus with letters of authority from the high priest to arrest any Christians who might be found in that city. When God asked Ananias to go to him with the message, he was hesitant. Who would not be? He said, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man . . ." (Acts 9:13). God told Ananias that he did not need to worry about him, for he had been prepared by circumstances and by His hand. He would find him ready and waiting for someone to talk to him. Saul's conversion became one of the greatest conversions of all time, but had Ananias been left alone to guess about his response, he would have said, "He is the worst of all prospects. I had better skip him."

Let us make sure that everyone gets an opportunity to come to Christ. Some will say no, but many will say yes. Sometimes the most unlikely candidates for salvation will be open to a study of God's Word and will become Christians.

The third challenge is the sentence, "Don't hesitate, don't wait, you may be too late." Every emergency requires urgency. Time is running out for multitudes of people.

Suppose Philip had hesitated when he was instructed to go down to the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26)? Just imagine him starting out to fulfill the commission that the angel had given him, but getting sidetracked and consuming some of the valuable time that was needed for him to get to the point where the Lord wanted him to be. What would have happened? Would he have intersected with the Ethiopian eunuch as the Lord had planned? God got him to the right place at the right time to speak to the right person, but God needed Philip to be diligent in following His directions. God is working in us "to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13b), but He requires our cooperation, our diligence, and our promptness.

When you see an opportunity, go to it immediately. You may find that you are at the right place at the right time to help a person become a Christian. Let us make "the most" of our time, as Paul said (Ephesians 5:16).

The fourth sentence is the assurance, "Don't worry about making it acceptable; just make it available." We cannot water down or doctor up the message of the cross for worldly hearts. Everyone away from Christ needs to hear the unadorned way of salvation that God has provided.

We know that some will reject the message, but this fact should not discourage us. Paul said, "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22–24).

We do not seek to impress people with our wisdom and clever use of words. "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5a). We do not go to anyone "with superiority of speech or of wisdom," proclaiming the testimony of God. We have determined to know nothing among the people "except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." This is our goal because we want their faith to rest in God's power and plan and not in the wisdom of

men and this earth. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–5.

Christians are the means, the human instruments that God has chosen to use to preach the message of the cross. He has put this wonderful “treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Let us go, believing in others, in ourselves, and in God’s message. Let us go quickly, for the hands of the clock are never still. Let us give to others the precious story of God’s love, letting God constrain them with the red, royal blood of Jesus.

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“And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard’ (Acts 4:18–20).