

“What Love is This”?

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 Title: “The Love of God as a Motivation”
 Text: 2 Corinthians 5:12-15
 Theme: For the love of Christ controls us

To the dying:

If we knew we were going to die today, is this subject matter worthy of our attention, effort, and energy? Absolutely. Knowing that God loves you unconditionally sustains us in life and calms us in death.

If I were speaking to a person who was on their death bed, once the assurance of their salvation had been established, I would communicate to them the immeasurable love of God.

Why am I teaching this?

We are often blind to our own selfishness. We must see Christ in order that we might have a better picture of what the love of God looks like. If we loved biblically, we would not be at war with others.

The grace of God liberates His people, and it is the love of God that controls His people. We no longer have to serve God out of fear or favor, but out of love.

¹² “We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; ¹⁵ 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 Cor. 5:12-15)

This is a rich text that establishes the motive of Paul as to why He did what He did. It is a response to his accusers. In this study, we will consider “the love of God as a motivation.”

What motivates you? What keeps you going when times get tough? What gets you out of bed in the morning? Some might be motivated by the desire for more money; others might be motivated by the fear of being fired from their job should they choose not to show up. Everyone is motivated by something or someone. Children will typically obey their parents, initially out of fear of punishment or an expression of disappointment. As parents, we are always desirous of seeing them move from obeying out of fear to obeying out of love.

The verse that contains our idea of love being a motivator is 2 Corinthians 5:14. It speaks of the love of Christ controlling us. What is it about the love of God that controls us?

The word “control” means “to hold together.” It carries the idea of “compressing,” as one would their ears (Acts 7:57) or to “siege” a city (Luke 19:43) or “arresting” a prisoner (Luke 22:63).” It comes to imply a preoccupation with. Those who had been taken with various diseases and torments are described as being under their control (Matt. 4:24). When someone is being controlled by “a great fever” (Luke 4:38), or with “great fear” (Luke 8:37), they are under the control of something else.

“Constraineth us—with irresistible power *limits* us to the one great object to the exclusion of other considerations. The *Greek* implies *to compress forcibly* the energies into one channel.” Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (jfb.xi.viii.vi) — Jamieson, Robert (1802-1880)

ILLUSTRATION:

The contrast is between a shotgun blast and that of a rifle. A shotgun blast is spread over a wider area and a rifle concentrates the power into a very narrow area.

What is the danger?

Because we live in a performance based acceptance pattern in our relationships, we are often motivated by a fear of rejection rather than the love from unconditional acceptance. This contrast taints everything we do and say.

With this thought in mind, Paul’s statement concerning the love of God controlling him strongly suggests that Paul found the love of God to be that which “pressed” him. God’s love held him in siege. He was arrested like a prisoner by the love of God. It is this love that held him captive. It became something that preoccupied his waking moments. As we continue to think about the love of God, there are four aspects of this love of which we are the recipients. The four aspects that follow answer the question as to “What is it about His love that compels us toward a singular focus?”

I would like to use four stories found inside of Luke’s Gospel to present four reasons as to why the love of God is so compelling.

- I. The love of God controls us because it is without condition (Luke 10:25-37).

The story of the Good Samaritan is a story of selfless love. The Samaritans and the Jews were like historic Germany and the Jews, or the Palestinians and the Jews. There was very little, if any, love lost between these two ethnic groups. This thought is clearly seen in passages like Matthew 10:5; John 4:9; and 8:48.

“These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, “Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans” (Matt. 10:5).

“The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?’ (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9).

“The Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?’” (John 8:48).

And yet, it was the despised Samaritan who loved unconditionally the fallen Jew. He did what was necessary to insure the safety and well-being of his fallen neighbor.

What exactly does the thought of “without condition” mean? For something to be unconditional it means it is without outside motivation. There was nothing to be gained by the Samaritan in his selfless actions towards the fallen Jew. The action is not determined or influenced by someone or something else outside of the person carrying out the action. When we understand that God’s love for us is unconditional, we will be freed from ever serving God out of fear, merit, or bondage. The unconditional love of God frees us to serve Him because we get to, not because we have to.

What moves you to do what must be done?

This brings us to our second point inside of our current idea.

- II. The love of God controls us because it is without requirement (Luke 15:11-32).

“Before interpreting these parables it is necessary to notice carefully the background of the teaching the publicans and sinners flock to Christ (v. 1); the self-righteous Pharisees criticize (v. 2). The Lord Jesus answers them with three parables, each of which emphasizes the joy over one lost but now found (vv. 7, 10, 32).” (G. Gocleman Luck, Luke: The Gospel of the Son of Man, [Moody Press, 1960]102, 103)

The story of the prodigal son is deeply moving. The story contains two aspects or movements. One is made up of the lost son who left and was found, and the other is made up of the lost son who never left but remained lost. Inside of the story is the moving account of the lost son who left and returned to his father and the father’s response (vv. 20-24). The father embraced his son without requirement. The lost son who left descended into the pit of feeding pigs.

“For a Jew no occupation could have been more distasteful. A rabbinic saying runs, ‘Cursed be the man who would breed swine’ (Baba Kamma 82b). The young

man must have been in desperate straits even to consider this job.” (Leon Morris, Luke, rev. ed. TNTC, [IVP, 1999], 264)

He was ceremonial unclean and fully defiled, yet his father embraced him without requirement.

“He saw him while he was still at a distance, he had compassion, he ran (which was striking in an elderly Oriental) and he kissed him. This last verb may mean ‘kissed him many times’ or ‘kissed him tenderly.’” (Leon Morris, Luke, rev. ed. TNTC, [IVP, 1999], 265)

“Without requirement” means God’s love for us does not demand a response from us. There is nothing mandated by God from us for Him to love us. Our inability to measure up to the statements of the New Testament does not restrict God from loving us. There is nothing He needs from us in order for Him to love us. God is not waiting for us to reach the next level or advance to the next base in order for Him to love us. He loves us unconditionally and without requirement. Because I know He loves me without requirement, I am free to love Him without guilt. In the devotional book, Jesus Calling by Sarah Young, the reading for December 26th speaks to this idea directly. She writes her book as if Jesus is speaking directly to you.

“I am the gift that continuously gives – bounteously, with no strings attached. Unconditional Love is such a radical concept that even My most devoted followers fail to grasp it fully. Absolutely nothing in heaven or on earth can cause Me to stop living you. You may *feel* more loved when you are performing according to your expectations. But My Love for you is perfect; therefore it is not subject to variation. What *does* vary is your awareness of My loving Presence.

When you are dissatisfied with your behavior, you tend to feel unworthy of My Love. You may unconsciously punish yourself by withdrawing from Me and attributing the distance between us to My displeasure. Instead of returning to Me and receiving My love, you attempt to earn My approval by trying harder. All the while, I am aching to hold you in *My everlasting arms*, to enfold you in My Love. When you are feeling unworthy or unloved, come to Me. Then ask for receptivity to *My unfailing Love*.”

I cannot say it any better. This brings us to our third point inside of our current idea.

III. The love of God controls us because it is without reward (Luke 17:11-19).

The story of the ten lepers healed is again a story of contrasts. The one leper who returned to give thanks was a despised Samaritan (v. 16). Although

gratitude for blessings bestowed and favors granted should be a natural response and fully expected, in their absence God will still be glorified.

God will be glorified because of who He is and what He has done. It is impossible for God not to receive the glory that is His. God's love for us is never contingent on our love for Him. It is His love for us that makes possible our love for Him. The lavish outpouring of God's love for us is often overlooked and unconfirmed. If God waited for our expressions of gratitude before He graced us with His unconditional love, then we would be spiritual paupers.

It is the grace of God that liberates His people and it is the love of God that controls His people. We no longer have to serve God out of fear or favor, but out of love. Love is the greatest motivation for any selfless act.

This brings us to our fourth, and final, point inside of our current idea.

IV. The love of God controls us because it is without limit (Luke 19:1-10).

“The story of Zacchaeus stands in marked contrast to that of the rich young ruler. Coming so soon after the emphatic statement about the difficulty of the salvation of the rich (18:24f). This incident must be seen as a striking manifestation of God's grace (18:27).” (Leon Morris, Luke, rev. ed. TNTC, [IVP, 1999], 297)

Zacchaeus was a despised tax-collector. Zacchaeus was despised not because of his ethnicity but because of his patriotism. He betrayed his fellow countrymen by selling his countrymen into the hands of the loathed Roman oppressors. In our passage Jesus takes the initiative to seek out Zacchaeus. It is a wonderful story showing the limitless nature of God's love for His people regardless of their ethnicity or vocation.

Because the source of His love is rooted in who He is, it is a love that depends only on itself for its existence and preservation. The love of God for His people is infinite in its magnitude. There is never a time or place where the love of God is not operative and directed toward His people. His love is constantly overflowing our man-made limitations and boundaries. It is always bubbling over and gushing out.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the NEXT STEP?)

What is fascinating and equally sad is the responses of those who see Jesus love the unlovely and extend grace to the undeserving.

- In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Jewish audience would have been deeply insulted.
- In the lost sons, the Pharisees and the scribes would grumble (15:2).

- In the story of the ten lepers healed, the Jewish audience would have been offended that only the Samaritan returned thanks.
- In the story of Zaccheus, many within the crowd grumbled and said, “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” (19:7).

Do we not often catch ourselves insulted or offended or grumbling at how God and whom God chooses to love? How often have we made our love conditional? This is what we are fighting against.

If this is true, then how should we now live?

First, who is it that you do not love unconditionally?

Perhaps there is someone in your immediate family who has wronged you and now your love for them has been stunted. Perhaps someone at work has done something to you that had alienated them from you. Now is the time to put aside your differences and love that individual unconditionally.

Second, what standards have you erected/built that must be met before you love?

This is nowhere more seen than in marriage and parenting. As spouses, we have a tendency to give out love only as it is merited. As parents, we expect our children to conform to our personal standards and preferences, and unless that conformity is forthcoming we withhold acceptance. This is tragic and will only lead to heartache and misery. We are to love without requirement.

There is a real danger here. If we are not careful, we will only love those from whom we can get something back. Reciprocal love is a lethal love.

Third, is your love given only when met with a similar expression in response to it?

Friend, we love because God first loved us. His love for us is not waiting for a response from us and our love for others must be similarly driven.

Finally, where and when do you draw the line in loving others?

Because God loves us there is no one who falls outside of our ability to love them. Everyone, everywhere at all times is loveable. Who is it that you cannot love? That is the person you must pray for and move toward in gestures of unconditional love.

May we be known as a fellowship of Christ-exalting, neighbor-loving people.