

**Text: II Corinthians 5:11-14**

**Title: “Be the Bridge ... Compelled by Love”**

**SERMON BUMPER** - We state our mission as a church in these terms: We exist to know, follow and share Jesus Christ ... to have a hunger to know Christ more intimately, the faith to follow Christ more fully and a passion to share Christ with others more fearlessly. And for the next four weeks I want to focus on the last phrase of our mission ... to share Christ fearlessly.

Let's open our Bibles to II Corinthians 5:11. If this part of the Bible is new to you, II Corinthians is one of a number of letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in the ancient Greek city of Corinth. Paul planted the church but over the years some teachers had come to Corinth who were critical of Paul as an apostle of Christ. One of Paul's purposes in writing this letter is to defend his ministry and his motivation. This is a heavy passage and over the next four weeks we'll see what God has to say to us from His Word about our mission as a church and as individual believers. **Read II Corinthians 5:11-21.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last month we watched one of the most amazing scenes unfold over in Thailand. Twelve boys on a soccer team and their coach had gone to explore a popular cave in Thailand. Heavy rains began to fall and the boys and their coach were trapped in the cave ... for 18 days. With all the flooding in the caves rescuers feared they would not be able to get to the team before they suffocated or drowned. A massive rescue effort was organized with highly trained teams from all over the world. But the heroes were the elite members of the Thailand Navy Seals. They did what seemed to be impossible. In the course of the rescue one of the Navy divers died. And for nearly three weeks the whole world watched as experts from all over the world put aside political and cultural differences to work together to rescue those twelve boys and their coach.

As I watched that drama unfold I thought: Those twelve players and their coach were doomed inside that dark cave with no hope of escape unless someone came to rescue them. People risked their lives to crawl into a cave to save a young soccer team. People without Christ are trapped in a dark cave of lostness with no hope of escape. Our great Savior Jesus Christ died to rescue them. And He has entrusted to us as His followers the task of taking that life-saving message to people who are far from God ... “the ministry of reconciliation.” He's called us to “be the bridge” He uses to rescue people who are far from God.

**2 Corinthians 5:14a - For Christ's love compels us ...**

The word “love” here is not just *sentiment*; it’s *sacrifice*. This love isn’t just a thought or a feeling. It is expressed with action. When we understand and experience Christ’s love in a personal way it (He) begins to shape our lifestyle and every decision we make. Christ’s love becomes a way of life for us.

The word “compels” means to be constrained or controlled. The love of Christ becomes such a powerful force in my life that it controls, restrains and compels every part of my life. I’m hemmed in by Christ, like a river is hemmed in by its two banks. Yes, technically speaking, I still have a choice as to what I do with my life. But realistically, Christ’s love is so strong it has control of me. I can only go one direction. And so Paul says...

**2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:**

Let me break this down with three statements that flow from these verses. They have to do with the motivation that compels and drives us to share Christ with others.

**1. OUR LOVE FOR GOD COMPELS US TO ACT.**

Paul’s motives are being questioned. Some think he’s in the ministry for selfish motives. No! His lifestyle is driven, first, by his love for God. He knows that God is vitally aware of how all believers live out their lives. And there’s a day coming when he (along with all believers) will give an account for the way they have lived their lives.

**2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

So the Bible teaches us here and in other places that one day all believers will appear before what is called in v.10 the “judgment seat of Christ.” This is different from the Day of Judgment spoken of in Revelation when every person who has ever lived will stand before God to be judged based on whether they have received or rejected Christ. What Paul is talking about here in v.10 is different. This is a time when believers will receive rewards based upon their service to Christ, including what we’ve done to share the Gospel with others.

**2 Corinthians 5:11a - Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.**

This reality puts an element of “fear” in us. But it’s not like being afraid of God Himself. The perfect love we have experienced in Christ casts out that kind of fear. This is reverence for God. It is the fear of doing anything that would disgrace or discredit the Lord whom we love.

So knowing that one day I will give an account for what I’ve done with my life adds a sense of urgency to the way I live today. Because my Lord has taught me to share the Good News with others, and because I love the Lord and desire to please Him in every way, I try to persuade men.”

**ILLUSTRATION** – To try to “persuade” someone is to try to “convince” them to believe or act in a certain way. It’s like trying to get our small kids to jump into the pool for the first time. They have their little floaties on and you know it will hold them up. They will be perfectly safe. And you know that once they experience the water it will open up a lifetime of delight. And you also know that unless they learn to swim the water can be a very dangerous place. So you stand in the pool and try to persuade them (convince them) to “jump.” People without Christ have no idea the delight that is ahead for them in Christ. And neither do they understand the eternal peril they are in apart from Christ. And we know that Jesus will completely save them. We don’t coerce or manipulate others to receive Christ. We don’t twist their arm till they give in. But we still try to persuade them.

Some of Paul’s critics claimed he was crazy.

**2 Corinthians 5:13a - If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God...**

Paul is just saying here, “Corinthians, I want you to know my heart. I’m doing this for the sake of God. I love God. And if you think I’m crazy, that’s OK.”

Our love for God will compel us to act. But also...

**2. OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS COMPELS US TO ACT.**

**2 Corinthians 5:13 - If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.**

To be the bridge God uses to bring others to Himself might expose us to criticism. When we try to persuade others to trust Christ with their lives some will think we're nuts. Paul is saying, "Listen, whether you think I'm crazy or not, in my right mind or not, reasonable or not, my life is lived for the sake of my love for God and my love for you.

**QUOTE:** The great preacher of the 1700s, George Whitefield once said: "I am willing to go to prison or death for you; but I am not willing to go to heaven without you. The love of Jesus Christ constrains me to lift up my voice like a trumpet." Another great preacher of the 1800s, Charles Spurgeon, said it this way: "If sinners be (condemned), at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and un-prayed for."

But Paul has a higher, more all-consuming impulse in mind here. You see *my* love for God and *my* love for others isn't always very reliable. I have to be compelled, constrained by something more powerful than *my* love for God and *my* love for others.

### **3. GOD'S LOVE FOR US COMPELS US TO ACT.**

We are fond of talking about the impact of God's love upon nonbelievers ... John 3:16, etc. But here Paul has in mind the impact that God's love in Christ has upon believers. "Christ's love compels us..." Look at it again.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:14 - For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.**

The amazing movement of God toward us in Christ overwhelms us and compels us. We'll come back to this next week, but just taste it here for a moment:

**"One died for all..."** - Because all of us were dead in our sin, Christ took our sin upon Himself. He became sin for us, in our place, and took the sentence that we deserved. So our sins are covered and forgiven. **"And therefore all died..."** - I'm identified with Christ in His death. The old man is dead ... gone forever. Why? Why did Christ do this?

#### **2 Corinthians 5:15 - And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.**

Christ died and rose again for us so that we would no longer live for ourselves. He took on the Cross in order to deliver us from selfish living. If we're not careful we can settle into the mindset that the Christian life is all about me. Church is all about me, about us. And let's face it. Our church has spent a lot of time over the past couple of years focused on ourselves. And we needed to do that to get healthy as a church. We've been turned inward; it's time we get turned outward and be the bridge God uses to bring others to Himself in our city and the world beyond.

**Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

As you think about your life in Christ, here's the way it works. When you put your trust in Christ you trust that He died *for you*, and then by faith you died *with Him*. Your old self is gone. Now you live *for Him* because He lives *through you*. Your life is different because Christ loved you and gave Himself for you. Christ's mission becomes your mission.

Another one of the great leaders of the early church was the Apostle Peter. After Jesus's death and resurrection Peter became a key leader in the church in Jerusalem. Acts 10 tells us that one day Peter was praying. He was hungry and as he prayed he had a vision where a big bedsheet was lowered from heaven. On this sheet were all kinds of animals. Peter hears a voice say to him, "Kill these animals and feed yourself." There's just one problem. These animals were all animals that Jews considered "unclean," so they were not supposed to eat them. But Peter hears the voice from heaven say, "There's your lunch." Peter knows it's the Lord and he replies, "Lord, I will not. I'm a strict Jew and I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

**Acts 10:15 - The voice spoke to him ... "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."**

Hmmm. Wonder what that means. This happened three times. What Peter didn't know was that at that very moment God was also working in the heart of man named Cornelius who was a Gentile soldier in a different town. Cornelius had a hunger to know how he could be saved. The same day that Peter had his vision Cornelius also had a vision. And he was told to go look for a man named Peter who was staying at a certain man's house. He will answer all the questions you have about how you can be right with God. So Cornelius sent some of his men to invite Peter to come to speak to his whole household.

Meanwhile Peter has awakened from his strange dream where the Lord told him not to call unclean what God has made clean. Now there's a knock on the door and it's Cornelius's men saying, "Cornelius requests that you come and speak to him about Christ." One problem: Cornelius is a Gentile. Just like Jews don't eat the meat of certain unclean animals, they don't associate with certain "unclean" people called Gentiles. But Peter has heard from the Lord on this. He's on the same page with the Lord Jesus now. So he goes to Cornelius and tells them about Jesus and the whole household came to Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon them just like He came upon the Jewish believers who trusted Christ. This was a huge turning point for Peter and for the early church when they got their vision adjusted to catch the vision of God for people everywhere who need Christ.

Does that need to happen for you? Does that need to happen for our church? So God's "to do" list becomes our "to do" list.  
Hear it again...

**2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:**

If you didn't know Jesus, humanly speaking, what chance would you have of being saved if all church people witnessed like you do? Thank God somebody loved you enough to be the bridge ... to try to persuade you to receive Christ. Now you go and be the bridge.