

LIVING FOR CHRIST
2 Corinthians 5:14, 15

Intro: Our text is one which the opponents of particular redemption bring up to show, they think, that the death of Christ was universal in its intent and purpose--that Christ died for all men without exception. We might think for three reasons:

1) That there are other passages which clearly teach that He died for the elect, for the purpose of securing their salvation.

But there are two other reasons:

2) The context.

3) A careful examination of the text itself.

In the context we can see that the Apostle Paul was clearly speaking of the people of God. Note the use of "we" and "our" in the first 13 verses. (Read.)

This leaves no doubt but that he was speaking about the people of God.

As far as the text is concerned, Paul's whole point has to do with the obligation, the responsibility, that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ puts every believer, "not henceforth to live unto themselves, but unto Him Who died for them" (particular redemption), "and rose again."

Paul was saying that "the love of Christ constraineth us," those of us who belong to the Lord. If he died for all (of us--understood), then all for whom he died, died with Him. There are many results following from the death of Christ, but one of them is that "they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Not until we get to the end of the verse does Paul mention the resurrection. The death of Christ without the resurrection of Christ would have been an incomplete work. Paul made that very clear in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ died, but did not rise again, then we are the most pitiable people on earth. We have no hope. We are still in our sins. Those who died in the faith are gone, and gone forever. Paul said these things in 1 Corinthians 15.

But He not only died, died in our place so that it can be said that we died in Him, but He arose from the dead, and now we live in Him. This is the message of the NT which is repeated over and over in many different places, different ways, and by different writers.

The word "constraineth" is a most interesting word. A. T. Robertson pointed out in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 5

found in his series, Word Pictures in the New Testament, IV, p. 230, that the Greek word translated, "constraineth," is actually an "old and common verb" in the Greek language. It appears many times in the NT. It is translated "to press the ears together (Acts 7:57), to press on every side (Luke 8:45), to hold fast (Luke 22:63), to hold oneself to (Acts 18:5), to be pressed (passive, Luke 12:50; Phil. 1:23)" (Ibid.).

I was particularly interested in the translation that Dr. Robertson mentioned first, "to press the ears together." It is translated that way in Acts 7:57 where we read that, as Stephen was being stoned, he cried out saying that he saw heaven opened and the Lord Jesus was standing at the right hand of God. Then we are told that the people "cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord."

They pressed their ears flat against their heads because they didn't want to hear any more that Stephen had to say. Now obviously Paul was not saying that. He was not saying that the love of Christ shuts our ears so that we do not learn the implications of the Cross. In fact, he was saying just the opposite. He was saying that "the love of Christ" makes certain that we get the message. How, then, can we explain this word, "constraineth."

The other translations suggest that the love of Christ holds us, it presses us, it hems us in on every side. So that pressing the ears together would describe what a parent, for example, does to his child when he wants him to listen, to pay attention to what he is saying. Did your parents ever do this to you. You or I have shown by our behavior that we weren't listening to our parents. Perhaps our parents had told us something that we were not to do, but we did it anyway. And so our parents sit down with us, grasp us by the head, one hand on one side of our head, and the other hand on the other, holding our heads so that we are looking them straight in the face, as they tell us again what they want us to do, or not to do.

This is what the love of God does to us, which is the same as saying, "This is what God does to us when we demonstrate by our behavior that we have not gotten what He has tried to tell us before. He won't let us continue on ignoring the message. It is too important. If the Lord died for us, and we died in Him, then it must follow that being raised with Him, we owe our lives to Him. This is another way of saying, as you have heard me say many times before, a child of God, one who has really been saved, cannot go on living after he is saved the same way he did before he was saved.

Now let us consider the two ways of life.

I. LIFE BEFORE SALVATION (2 Cor. 5:15).

We lived unto ourselves. We did what we wanted to do. We had our own goals, our own agenda. We objected if anyone stood in our way. There was a basic selfishness behind all that we did.

Now if you remember what Paul had to say to this church in 1 Corinthians, you know that this was basically their problem. They were a divided church, divided in four ways. They were guided by human wisdom. They were carnal. Paul said that they walked as men. There evidently was a lot of work done by them which was no more than "wood, hay, and stubble." They tolerated gross sin among their members. They were suing each other in the courts of law. There were many other things that they were doing which God disapproved of, but what was the worst was the way they had corrupted the observance of the Lord's Supper. As a result, many of them were weak and sickly, and many had died. It is amazing that the church had continued to survive. Obviously many of them had never learned that they were still basically living unto themselves.

But now let us look at what they should have been doing.

II. LIFE AFTER SALVATION (2 Cor. 5:15).

The two ways of life, before salvation and after, are described in this verse in the phrases, "unto themselves" (which is before salvation), and, "unto Him" (after salvation)--"unto Him Who died for them, and rose again."

The difference hinges upon the expression, "that they which live." Sometimes people get into the church who are not spiritually alive. If that is the case, it is not surprising that they continue to live unto themselves. They can't do anything else. They are really not interested in living unto the Lord, and, in addition, they are incapable of it. But the only way a true Christian can live so as to please God is to live unto Christ, which means to live for Christ. It is no longer right for a Christian to be mainly concerned about his own interests, what he is going to get out of things, or what is going to please himself. A Christian is concerned about what is pleasing to the Lord. We are here to seek the interests, the concerns, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me give you some illustrations of what Paul was talking about.

III. ILLUSTRATIONS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE UNTO CHRIST.

A. The Apostle Paul himself.

We would be very disappointed, and we should be, if we were to discover that Paul was preaching something which he did not practice. And we should be. But you will not find that to be the case. If anyone was drastically changed in his way of living after he was saved in contrast with what he was before he was saved, it was the Apostle Paul.

Please turn with me to Phil. 3. Here we have an illustration of what it meant to Saul of Tarsus to live unto himself, and the change that the Lord brought into his life.

To live for Christ to the Apostle Paul meant first and foremost, knowing Christ. He never turned away from this.

Let me give you another illustration, also from Philipians.

B. Timothy.

Look at Paul's commendation of Timothy in Philipians 2, verses 19 through 22. And here we can see another very important part of what it means to live for Christ. It means that we seek the spiritual blessing of the people of God we have around us, the lives we are in a position to influence.

Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice were living unto Christ as they poured the Word of God into their son and grandson. Paul credited them with teaching Timothy the Holy Scriptures, and he told Timothy not to depart from what he had learned at home. They may not have actually seen Timothy saved, but how it must have rejoiced their hearts when they saw him come to Christ under the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Parents are living for Christ as you pray for your children. And don't stop praying when they are grown and married with children of their own. This is living for Christ.

There are many other examples in Scripture: Sarah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, John the Baptist, the Apostle John, and many, many others. If you read Christian biography you have become acquainted with others whose main business in life was to live for the Lord.

But there is One Example Who is the greatest of all:

C. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His relationship with His Father while He was here on earth.

Many times the Lord said something like we have recorded for us in John 6:38:

For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.

And what could be a better example of living unto God than the words of our Lord when He said, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29).

This calls for humility, perfectly displayed in the life of our Lord Jesus. It calls for surrender, which we see at its greatest moment in the Garden of Gethsemane. It calls for faithfulness when the Lord refused to let even His disciples stand in the way of doing the Father's will, and drinking of the cup which the Father had given Him to drink.

To live for Christ for us means doing what He wants us to do. And it also means not doing the things that He doesn't want us to do. It means being what He wants us to be. It means that when we find that our way is not His way, we choose His way. When we seek to know His will and it is different from what we wanted, or what we thought it would be, we choose His will. The Lord Jesus Christ is not only our Savior, but He is our Lord. Living for Him, living unto Him, means recognizing His authority over us in every area of our lives.

But what did it mean in the context of what Paul was saying in 2 Corinthians 5? What was the need of the Corinthian church at this point?

IV. "AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST" (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

Paul had pointed out to the Corinthian believers many things that were wrong in their lives, and in their fellowship. At this point he was ready to turn their eyes and hearts in a new direction, to show them one aspect of seeking the things of Christ which had been neglected because of all of the inner difficulties which they had. He turned their thoughts to the world, and God's will for them concerning the people of the world.

He, of course, was speaking of his own ministry, but he was speaking of theirs as well. They were "ambassadors for Christ" with a message of reconciliation to God.

In a sense, Paul was preaching the Gospel to the church. In 2 Cor. 13:5 he would tell them to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" In the words of the Apostle John it is easy to with, but not of.

In another sense, however, Paul was calling upon them to join him in his ministry. They would not go where he would go, but as believers they were to spread the same message with the same passion that he was spreading it. When we, first, by our lives, and then by our words, spread the message of salvation, we are living for Christ, living unto Christ. The Lord has left us here following our salvation to do two things:

- 1) To grow--with all that that means.
- 2) To go--to take the message of salvation to those who do not know the Lord. It is not unusual in these days to find people in our own country who have never heard the Gospel. Some have heard, but have not believed. We don't know how God will work, but that is His business, not ours. Our task is to spread the message, and then to pray that the Lord will use it in accomplishing His purposes.

Concl: In 1 Cor. 6:19, 20 Paul had told the Corinthians Christians what their responsibility was to God. It was another way of saying why we are to live for Christ, and not for ourselves. (Read.)

What a precious thing it is to be able to say we belong to the Lord! But it goes along with that for us to know that because we belong to Him, because He has purchased us for Himself at such an awful price, we are to live for Him, to do His will, to make His concerns our concerns. I have only touched upon a little of what is involved, but He will teach us more and more about what it means as we walk with Him, learn of Him, and see in His Word what it means to live for Him.