

Title: The Only True Constraint

Text: 2 Cor 5: 12-17

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Place: SGBC, meeting at Pompton Lakes for the baptism of Kevin DeRitter

2 Corinthians 5: 12: We commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. 13: For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. 14: For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15: And 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;

Only Two Religions

There are two kinds of religion in this world, only two: grace and works.

Those under works are those in verse 12 who “glory in appearance, and not in heart.” Opposite, those saved by God’s grace are those who believe on Christ and, as verse 14 says, are “constrained” in heart “by the love of Christ” for us.

Those saved by God’s grace, verse 16, “know no man,” even Christ, “after the flesh.” We once only had a carnal understanding of Christ. But now we worship God in spirit and truth, putting no confidence in the flesh. Opposite, those who are yet trying to save themselves by their works know Christ only after the flesh, with a carnal understanding. So they judge one another by outward appearance.

True believers saved by God’s grace are, verse 17, “in Christ.” We have been made “a new creature” by God. Therefore, “old things” (we will see what those old things are) “are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (we will see what those new things are.) Those in works religion are not in Christ, not created new. So they worship according to the old things, minding those old things, the things of the flesh.

Who makes the man of grace to differ from the man of works? Who gets the glory for this difference? Only God, verse 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.”

The Heart Alone

I am about to make one of the most important statements that can be made concerning true worship of God: Before God, the the heart is the single most important thing.

1 Samuel 16:7:...the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Proverbs 23:7: For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he....

The true believer believes on Christ in spirit and in truth, trusting he is complete in Christ—made the righteousness of God in him.

Romans 14: 23:...whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Hebrews 11:6: But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The true believer does everything from one motive. It is the one and only constraint of the heart that God accepts. That is our subject: The Only True Constraint.

Here is the point of the whole message: The only true constraint which is pleasing to God is the constraint of Christ's love for us—"For the love of Christ constraineth us."

Listen to this:

Galatians 5:6: For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing,

Righteousness is not by our obedience. God looks to Christ, not his people, to uphold the righteousness of the law.

Galatians 5: 6:...nor uncircumcision;

A man may not even have the law, yet be accepted of God—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham. Here is what matters before God.

Galatians 5: 6:...but faith which worketh by love.

You see, if believe Christ—I have attained unto the righteousness of God. I have come to the end for which the law was given, Christ himself—the righteousness of God. And if I live, constrained by Christ's love for me—I am led of the Spirit of Christ, under the rule of Christ himself. This is true salvation. This is the only constraint God creates and the only constraint God accepts.

Works Religion

First, to be vainly religious, to be in works religion, is to be constrained by anything other than the love of Christ—**1 Corinthians 5: 12: For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.**

Paul is giving believers at Corinth an answer to give to the false preachers, who were criticizing Paul for using one method and means of salvation. The false preachers claimed to preach faith in Christ, but they brought believers back under the old covenant law, glorying in outward appearance of obedience, not in the heart. Like men from Judea who came telling true believers that except they keep the law, they could not be saved. (Acts 15: 1, 5, 7-11)

Paul's method was to use the means God ordained. He preached Christ and him crucified, asked God the Holy Spirit to bless the message and he waited on God to work obedience in heart. That is what God teaches his true preachers to do in the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37: 1-14. The only way a sinner will know God has done the work is when this means only is used. This is how the sinner's faith will be brought to stand in the power of God, rather than in the wisdom of men. (1 Cor 2: 1-5)

So the false preachers criticized Paul saying he is "Beside himself." They said Paul was too fanatical, too committed to this one means. Or they would say he was "too sober". They accused him of being too

dogmatic, to singular to preach Christ alone. Paul said tell them, **2 Corinthians 5: 13: For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.**

Paul used the law lawfully, as God purposed, to declare all men guilty and shut us up to Christ.

1 Corinthians 2: 4: And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

In Galatians 6, we find a description of will-workers with their constraint of law contrasted with the true preacher sent of God.

Galatians 6: 12: As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised;

They constrain you to obey the law. You can add any of the constraints men use in our day: church covenants, probation, they use the Lord's Table as tool for discipline, pay stubs to make men tithe, and so on.

Galatians 6: 12:...only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

False preachers will not simply preach Christ and him crucified because they refuse to suffer with Christ for preaching that message.

Galatians 6: 13: For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law;

To God, the law is kept only in perfect righteousness, without sin. So no sinner has ever kept the law ourselves. In all this talk about keeping the law, the Holy Spirit says, they don't keep it themselves. Why then do they constrain men to do so?

Galatians 6: 13...but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

Next, listen to a man constrained by the love of Christ—this is the apostle Paul.

Galatians 6: 14: But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16: And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Did you catch that word “as many as walk according to this rule.” The one thing that matters before God is a “new creation”—a God-given new heart, God-given faith in Christ, a walk constrained only by the love of Christ for us. This is the believer's rule of life: faith which works by love. Paul said, “as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”

We are all here this morning. But before God, some are really here and some are not. Some have this new heart created by God, faith in Christ, you are complete in Christ, so you are constrained by Christ's love for you, by what Christ has done for you. You travelled a great distance because you really want to worship your Redeemer. You know the only way for your flesh to be mortified is to hear the gospel of Christ's faithfulness and love toward you. Others are here outwardly in appearance. I am glad you are here. Yet, something other than Christ constrains you. In your heart, you really do not want to be here and before God, you are not really here.

Ezekiel 33:31: And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

Isaiah 29:13: Wherefore the Lord said,...this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

What would happen if all the constraints that preachers and churches use were taken off their people? There would either be only a handful left or God would cause a true revival.

But it does not matter how outwardly faithful a man appears. He can be baptized, join the church, be in every church service, make great sacrifices, obey the law outwardly but if the heart is not made new, if he is not resting in Christ by faith and constrained only by the love of Christ, God will not accept him. It all profits the man nothing.

The Believer's Constraint

The believer's constraint of Christ's love come from a spiritual understanding in the heart of what Christ accomplished for us by his death—**2 Corinthians 5:14: For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:**

Christ's love for his people is not a sentimental love. Christ's love saves. Otherwise, what does the love of God have to do with salvation?

For instance, I love my children. If I had power I would keep them out of hell and give them a true heart to believe and follow Christ. I do not have that power. But God does. Those God loves he loves everlastingly and God draws all those he loves to faith in Christ. So God will not lose one whom he loves or else his love is meaningless.

Jeremiah 31:3:...Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Spiritual Judgment

Paul says, **2 Corinthians 5: 14: Because we thus judge.** We have this judgment—this spiritual discernment—only by God giving us a new heart. We did not have this judgment by nature. All men come into the world dead in trespasses and in sins. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us true judgment. (1 Cor 2: 9-15)

Then Were All Dead

Here is what believers now understand—**2 Corinthian 5:14: that if one died for all, then were all dead:**

It is true, that all those for whom Christ died, were all dead in sins. But that is not what the text declares. The text is teaching that concerning all things that must die, when Christ died, then all died. Be sure to get that statement. "All" includes three things. These are the "old things" that must die and pass away before all things become new. Now read the verse again, "The love of Christ constraineth us. Because we thus judge that when Christ died for all"—for all these things—"then"—right then—"were all dead." It is why Christ cried, "It is finished;" it is why God was satisfied by his one offering; it is why God raised him from the dead; it is why all for whom Christ died must be given spiritual life and faith in Christ.

Preacher, can you show me what these three things are in the scriptures? I would never expect you to believe if I could not. It must be in the word of God for us to believe. Let me ask you a question, "If I can show you this and it gives God all the glory and man none, will you believe on Christ?" You will only if God shows you.

The Old Man of Sin Died

This is before God, get that, this is before God.

First, when Christ died for all the sin of all his people, then, before God, were all the old men of sin of each of his people dead

Romans 6: 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. 7: For he that is dead is freed from sin.

This is what is meant in:

Hebrews 1:3:...when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

When born of the Holy Spirit, God teaches the new heart to thus judge—

Romans 6: 11: Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ's People Died to the Law

Secondly, when Christ died under the justice of the law for all his people, then, before God, were all his people dead to the law.

Romans 7: 4: Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ;

When born of the Holy Spirit, he teaches us to be married, not to the law, but instead,

Romans 7: 4:...that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Christ had to do this for his people because of sin—our sin.

Romans 7: 5: For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

The Law Dead to Christ's People

Three, when Christ died for all his people, then, before God, was all the law dead to all his people.

Romans 7: 6: But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held;

This is what is meant in:

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

When born of the Holy Spirit, God teaches us...

Romans 7: 6:...that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Because of the sin of his people, because of the weakness of our flesh, as the Representative Head of all his people, Christ gave the law holiness of nature, which is the saints' sanctification in Christ; Christ gave the law obedience of life, which is the saints righteousness; and Christ gave the law sufferings of death, which is the saints justification from the penalty of the law. So all for whom Christ died, must be born of God, because Christ accomplished this for them, the demands nothing more of them. They must be brought to faith in Christ.

Therefore, if Christ be in you, before God, we have full expiation of sin—sin is purged, our old man of sin is dead; we have complete pardon—we are dead to the law, the law is satisfied; and we have eternal redemption from the law—the law is dead to us because Christ purchased us, ransomed us, redeemed us from the law—Christ makes us free indeed.

No Condemnation

Now, Paul picks back up with this thought again in Romans 8.

Romans 8: 1: There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

In context, both those who walk after flesh and those who walk after Spirit speak of religious folks. Those that “walk after the flesh” are constrained by law and glory in appearance. Those that “walk after the Spirit” live by faith in Christ and walk constrained only by the love of Christ for us. How do we do so?

Romans 8: 2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death....

We are under a new law—grace—faith which works by love.

A Great Contrast

Drop to verse 5. He contrasts the difference between religious folks constrained by law and believers constrained by the love of Christ.

Romans 8: 5: For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh;

They mind the law and their fleshly obedience to it and glory in appearance

Romans 8: 5:...but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

Our affections are set on things above, where Christ sits at God's right hand. We are dead: our body of sin, dead to the law and the law is dead to us. And our life is hid with Christ in God. (Col 3: 1-5) It is by hearing the faithfulness of Christ in the gospel, constantly, that the Holy Spirit mortifies our flesh by constraining us to the obedience of faith by the love of Christ for us.

Romans 8: 6: For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7: Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. [see he is speaking of minding the law] 8: So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Work Wrought In Us

Romans 8: 9: But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you....10: And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin...

The whole body of the law—also called “the body of Moses”—is dead to the believer because sin has been condemned in the flesh by Christ for us.

Romans 8: 10:...but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Brethren, here is how we are a new creature, how old things are passed away and all things become new. If Christ be in you, you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. The body of the law is dead to you because Christ has put away your sin, but the Spirit is life in you because of righteousness. Oh, brethren, it means we have eternal life, we are the sons of God, we are the righteousness of Christ by Christ making us so in him by his great love for us. Also, he will do the same for our mortal bodies in resurrection. (Rom 8: 23)

Living Unto Christ, Not the Flesh

Romans 8: 12: Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

Remember, the law is like a dead husband to the believer. “that ye should be married to another,”—not to the law—“even to Christ who is raised from the dead” to serve in newness of spirit. Our text says, **2 Cor 5: 15:...that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.**

Imagine if you were married to a woman whose first husband died. You provided all for her better than her first husband. Yet, she her mind and affection is set on her first husband, she tries to keep his rules, rather than living unto you who has set her free from his yoke. Would you be happy? No. Our old husband is the law. He is dead to us. Now we are married to Christ our new Husband and must live only unto him.

Romans 8: 13: For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:

If we lose sight of Christ, we die, proving we never knew Christ. Believer, if you are dead with Christ, Christ nailed the law which was against us, to his cross. Our life is risen with him. So why as though living in this world, would you be brought into subjection to the law, as men insist upon by their commandments and their doctrines. Paul said it makes a fair show in the flesh in will-worship. But that show is lust of the flesh, so it does nothing to mortify the deeds of the flesh. You will die that way. (Col 2: 20-22)

Romans 8: 13:...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

By the Spirit blessing the gospel, setting our affection on Christ our Righteousness, he makes us treat these bodies as dead, as they are before God. When the flesh is mortified then you neither glory in any good in you nor doubt your salvation when we see your awful sin. Thus we have life and peace only in Christ Jesus. (Col 3: 1-4)

Romans 8: 14: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15: For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; [see the context is speaking of bondage of the law. Believers are not to go back under the rule of law] but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

New Creatures in Christ

2 Corinthians 5: 14: 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:

We do not glory in appearance: we put no confidence in the flesh: we overlook shortcomings in our brethren, we rejoice in mercy rather than judgment.

2 Corinthians 5: 16:...yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh,

Some literally knew Christ after the flesh. It did them no good. Those now who only know him by a carnal understanding, continue trying to keep the law, it does them no good.

2 Corinthians 5: 16:...yet now henceforth know we him no more.

That is, henceforth, we know Christ no more after the flesh. We now worship Christ in spirit and in truth.

2 Corinthians 5: 17: Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;

What are the old things which are now passed away to the believer? Our old man of sin, our old curse of the law, and our old marriage to the law are all passed away. We yet see our sin but faith believes God thus we reckon things to be as God says they really are.

2 Corinthians 5: 17:...behold, all things are become new.

Paul put it this way in Philippians 3: 3: We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Who do we glorify for this work being accomplished for us and in us?

2 Corinthians 5: 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;

Be Ye Reconciled to God

First, to you who do not believe, “be ye reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5: 20) Believe on Christ and walk constrained only by his love. You will only do so if God creates you a new through this gospel.

Secondly, to you who claim to believe Christ but are yet constrained by men, unlawfully using the law, “Be ye reconciled to God.” Turn from the law, cease from your works, believe on Christ and do all from the motivation of his love.

Lastly, believer, never let your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. (2 Cor 1: 12; 11: 3) Constantly hear this gospel of Christ’s faithfulness and love to us. This is the only way the flesh is

mortified through the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 1: 21) When the flesh is mortified then you neither glory in any good in you nor doubt your salvation when we see your awful sin. You look to Christ alone.

1 John 4:17: Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Amen!