

**Text:** 2 Corinthians 5:11-15

**Title:** Compelled to Live for the Lord

**Truth:** Future judgment and Christ's love compels us to live for Him.

**Date/Location:** March 1, 2026 at FBC (rewrite of March and April 2006)

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## **Review and Question About Rewards**

God and His word give us sound warrant to thoroughly believe in things that are presently unseen. Such faith keeps us serving the Lord despite great difficulties which show the power of salvation is in God (4:7-12). Unseen though His power may be, its effects are easily observed. That faith keeps us speaking despite opposition because we believe that all Christians will be resurrected from the grave (4:13-15)—another unseen thing. That faith carries us through the degradation of our bodies, the afflictions of life, and the depressing things we observe around us (4:16-18). That faith causes us to anticipate a future heavenly body in which we will forever live (5:1-5). That faith also causes us to see, however afar off it might be, that though we be absent from our bodies, we will be at home with the Lord Jesus. And, that faith drives us to want to please the Lord because not only has He saved us, and will raise us, and we will be with Him, but also He will judge us (5:6-10). Our faith in the Lord Jesus should cause us to be both eager to be with Christ in our resurrection bodies, but also to make it our life goal to be pleasing to the Lord since He will judge us.

I was asked a question after last week's message about the nature of the rewards granted at the judgment seat. Rewards are not equal to salvation because salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Some people are saved in the very last moments of their lives and have no time to store up treasure in heaven. They will have very few if any rewards, but they will enjoy eternal life with God. Others of us are alive for a long time after we are blessed with faith in Jesus and so have the opportunity to accrue some good works in God's vineyard through the proverbial heat of the day (Matthew 20:12). Despite this difference, both alike—the thief on the cross and the longest-serving minister of the gospel—will experience heaven's joys.

Where the difference between these two types of people comes in is at the judgment for rewards. The rewards consist of various privileges like the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21), positions of authority (Luke 19:19, 2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 20:6) and judgment (1 Cor. 6:3), and praise from God like “well done, faithful one” (Matthew 25:23, Luke 19:17). Good works done in obedience to God by faith in love will be rewarded. Pre-salvation sins are not an issue at this judgment. Post-salvation sins are not an issue at this judgment. But how you used your life after you were saved *is* an issue at the judgment seat of Christ. Did you run well (Phil. 2:16)? Did you waste your life? Did you serve Christ or self? Did you love others or self?

## Introduction

I start today with another caution about how we read the Bible. It is easy to read over difficult-to-grasp verses and focus on ones easier to understand. As a result, you can have a sort of Bible myopia or tunnel vision that focuses your attention on one piece of the text, and you think you understand it, but it is out of its context to some extent. I try to be careful about this in my study, but it is not easy.

In 2 Corinthians 5:11-15, verses 11b-13 are quite difficult. Even verse 14 with its “love of Christ” makes us wonder, does “the love of Christ” mean “my love for Christ” or “Christ’s love for me”?

Verses 14-15 are somewhat less difficult because they speak about Jesus dying for all, and all dying, and not living for ourselves but living for the Lord. We can understand those words, but may end up focusing there without understanding the prior three verses.

Then, we can fall into yet another trap which has to do with how we interpret “all” in verses 14-15. A huge debate has been ongoing for centuries on whether this means 100% of humanity or 100% of people who will be saved. I have wrestled with that question myself, but to get hyper-focused on it misses the larger point of the section.

I say none of this to cause you despair about reading and studying the Bible. Instead, I say it as a caution and as an encouragement to do the harder working of thinking through what you are reading. It

will benefit your soul. Let us see what profit this portion of Scripture offers us.

*Because Paul faces judgment, he fears the Lord, and Christ's love compels him to live for the Lord by persuading people to be saved.*

## I. Fear of God Urges Us to Persuade People, v. 11a

A. **Fear of the Lord.** *Terror* is not the best translation. What Paul is talking about is not an intimidating or horror kind of terror. It is a deep reverence and respect for God. *Terror* does not fit because our love for God, and His love for us, modulates the terror-factor down to a reverential fear (1 John 4:18).

The problem with saying this is that it causes people to relax too much and take a no-care or low-care stance about the things of God. But: it remains true that it is fearful to fall into the hands of God (Heb. 10:31) because God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). We live in the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31) and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10, Prov. 1:7). See passages like Eccl. 12:13, Luke 23:40, the message of the angel in Rev. 14:7. There are over 40 references to the fear of the Lord in Scripture.

The problem today is not about the definition of the fear of the Lord—it is that there is little that even approximates the fear of God. If people realized that they face God's judgment they would fear God and they would not be doing all the sinful things they do. We would not be living in pride and instead would be humble. We would not hate one another—made in the image of God—and instead, would care for others. We would not abort, or euthanize, or be adulterers, or liars, or murderers, or idolaters. Instead, we would fear God and keep His commandments. Our world would be an infinitely better place. We wait for Heaven, where everyone *will* fear God.

*Because we too face judgment, we should fear the Lord, and His love should compel us to live for Him by persuading people to be saved.*

B. What did Paul **persuade** people about? One interpreter focused attention on Paul persuading others that he was a genuine apostle. That, I believe, is too man-focused to be true in the big picture, but it is true that Paul wanted the Corinthians to see that he was a

servant of Christ, so that they would understand him to be bringing the gospel of Christ and the word of God.

What Paul was really persuading people about is their **need** to be reconciled to God, and the **way** that is available for that reconciliation. And how did he go about that? Personal evangelism. Church planting. Preaching.

And so for us: Personal evangelism. Work in your local church. Help start new churches, send missionaries, translate the Bible, teach a children's Sunday school class. Talk to people about the Lord and talk to the Lord about people. No work and no pastime and no hobby is better or more important than that!

## II. Serving the Lord May Seem Weird to Others, 11a-13

- A. The middle verses of our segment of text, from 11b-13 are a bit hard to understand. I think what Paul is saying is that since he is so focused on the gospel and so committed and convinced of it, he seems strange to the Corinthians and to other observers. Think of Acts 26:24 where Governor Festus called out that Paul was insane.
- B. God knew his heart (v. 11b) and Paul hoped the Corinthians would also understand in their hearts what he was all about. I observed that Paul talks about being understood to their *conscience*. This is not a matter of statistics, five-star reviews, number of wins and losses, third-down conversion rate, and similar numeric metrics. It is about knowing a *person*. You know the person, his heart and character, so that even if he messes up, you do not throw him out. You know that she is serious about the Lord, that she really believes in Him despite her struggles in life.
- C. Some of the Corinthians' misunderstanding of Paul arises from his hope in the Lord, his fear of the Lord, and his laser focus on serving the Lord. This makes him different. They might take his confidence as self-commendatory, as arrogance, maybe even as anger. "How can you know all that?"

"Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these

things?" <sup>57</sup> So they were offended at Him (Matt. 13:54-57, see also Luke 6:42).

- D. Verse 12: Paul says he is *not* commending himself. He hopes instead that the Corinthians will do the commending for him, instead of focusing on those who boast in themselves in terms of external appearances. They have the rhetoric, or the statistics, but they do not have the heart inside.
- E. Verse 13: If the Corinthians think Paul is crazy (“beside ourselves”) they can just figure that he is a bit odd for God, a bit of a religious nut in the sense that he is so dedicated to his calling that he does not live like other people. On the other hand, if they judge him to be of sound mind, he is that way for *them*. Paul was deeply moved by his devotion to God because he took continual abuse like stoning and lashes and shipwrecks and imprisonment.

*Because we face judgment, we should fear the Lord, and His love should compel us to live for Him by persuading people to be saved—and keep doing that even if people think we are weird.*

- F. That kind of weird will not seem so weird in a little while. I suspect that people thought Noah was off his rocker. But after the rains came, they did not think that anymore. There are many modern illustrations of people’s thoughts about a subject changing, but not before they mocked the change agent. A man named Alfred Wegener proposed that the continents move slightly. Geologists thought the idea was preposterous. He died in 1930 but was vindicated in the 1960s when continental drift or plate tectonics was discovered. Galileo believed our solar system was centered about the sun (heliocentrism) instead of about the earth. He was condemned by the Catholic church to imprisonment and then house arrest until his death. Later scientific discoveries vindicated him, and the Catholic church admitted its error in 1992, 359 years later. As a final example, consider Ignaz Semmelweis. He faced a problem at the Vienna General Hospital in 1847 because maternal mortality had risen from a historical rate of about 1% to 7.5% due to childbed fever. That happened because medical students and OB docs were assigned to do autopsies as well as their OB duties. Midwives were not assigned those extra duties and had much

lower rates of maternal death. He instituted one change that reduced mortality dramatically. Despite the improvement, he was ignored or even ridiculed. The change? Mandatory hand washing! He used a chlorinated lime solution which he believed removed the odor of death, not yet knowing the germ theory of disease from 20+ years later, that the hand-washing was actually removing microbes and the chlorine was killing them.

- G. It may seem weird to others that you give a significant portion of your income to the Lord's work. Or that you attend weekly services. Or that you read an ancient book and pray to an invisible deity. Or that you try to persuade them to believe in Jesus. But in 50 to 100 years, it will not seem so strange to them when you are with God living in utter peace and prosperity. It already does not seem strange to us because we enjoy walking with God and being forgiven and knowing His love and care in this difficult world.

### **III. Christ's Love Compels Us to Live for Him, v. 14-15**

- A. Serving God and serving others was Paul's life because of the love that Christ showed to him. It was the impulse that urged him on despite afflictions, and people thinking he was crazy.
- B. While we do love Christ, it is His love for us that is the impetus for our love in return (1 John 4:19) and it seems a better fit here that Paul's careful consideration is based on the fact that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20).
- C. What drove Paul's life was a carefully considered judgment of which he was convinced:
1. First, that Christ died for all. We can discuss another time the extent of the all for whom Christ died, and the all who died, and the "those who live." So that we avoid missing the salient point we press on to the clearly stated purpose of this death.
  2. Second, Christ's death results in Christians dying in connection with their old life and becoming what they were not before, forgiven children of God, sons of light, children of righteousness.

3. Third, He died for all with this explicit purpose: that you and I should not live any longer for ourselves, but for Jesus who died and rose again.

D. To focus on that last point, consider some other texts that explain the purpose of Christ's death:

To cause us to live for righteousness – 1 Peter 2:24

To give us everlasting life – John 3:16-17

To bring us to God – 1 Peter 3:18

To reconcile us to God – Col. 1:20

To save us from judgment – Romans 5:8-9

To make us righteous before God – 2 Cor. 5:21

To release us from the fear and bondage of death – Hebrews 2:15

To redeem us from lawless deeds – Titus 2:14

To take away our sins – John 1:29

To purify us and make us zealous for good works – Titus 2:14

To forgive our sins and put away our sin – Ephesians 1:7, Heb. 9:26

## **Conclusion**

*We should fear the Lord, and His love should compel us to live for Him by persuading people to be saved.*

Are you willing to live for Jesus despite what other people think of you? I think we should refocus today on persuading people to follow Jesus with us: living like we believe in following Jesus, and telling others, because He loved us and gave Himself for us, and because we will see Him at judgment.

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