

## Loving Christ and Revelation 2:1-7

### Receiving Salvation

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Early in last week's sermon I gave a simple illustration (which Mr. Armstrong used) to show how works fit into God's purpose for us without salvation being earned. The Worldwide Church of God was accused time and time again of being a church that promoted salvation by works, and that certainly was not true.

Mr. Armstrong understood what he was talking about in that area, and he encouraged us to work hard at what we were doing. He certainly understood, and I know I understood from his teaching that he was not teaching (in any way) that salvation was earned, because meeting a condition does not change the character of the proposition that God makes to us. A gift is still a gift even though a condition has to be met.

Now suppose we alter the illustration somewhat to make it more realistic. Instead of merely having to walk across a room to get a gift, we instead have to walk much farther than that. In addition to that, we have to overcome many obstacles before receiving the gift.

Now has it changed anything because the condition became more difficult? No. Nothing has changed. Even though meeting the condition has become more difficult, the gift is still freely given. A gift cannot be bought. It cannot be bartered. It cannot be worked for, or it is no longer a gift. Salvation—the receiving of eternal life—cannot be bought or earned.

I hope this will help you to understand, if nothing else will help you to understand. Salvation, which literally means *deliverance*—deliverance from what we are, deliverance from the flesh, deliverance from the world, deliverance from captivity to Satan, and the giving of eternal life to go with that deliverance—cannot be bought. It is impossible to be earned. It is something that *must* be given. Now how do I know that? There is *no way* that anybody can *work* himself out of death. God is under no obligation to give us eternal life *until* we come under the blood of Jesus Christ, which in turn has been freely given. It is an act of love on His part, and then God is obligated, but *only* if we meet the condition. The major condition is that once repentance and faith have taken place, we must remain loyal.

Last week we began an examination of the letter to Ephesus that appears in Revelation 2, especially as it pertains to *love* and *works*. The question is this: What are the works that Christ is concerned about? Remember, He said, "I know your works." Since love is a major part of the message to that church, how does love fit in to *our* response so that we can do the works that Christ is concerned about?

Along the way during the sermon we touched upon whether one is required to keep the Ten Commandments, and we took a swift trip through the book of Ephesians. We did that, because it is in the book of Ephesians where Paul writes, "By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God [Ephesians 2:8]." The book of Ephesians also says,

despite the fact we are saved by grace through faith, that we are "created unto good works [Ephesians 2:10]." Paul makes it very clear that just because we are saved by grace, it does not exclude the fact God is doing what He is doing so that we will produce the right kind of works.

We then turned to Ephesians 4 and read a number of scriptures in which the Apostle Paul, even though he never directly said "Keep the commandments," yet gave us ethical instruction in verse after verse where he said: "Don't fornicate," which is the Seventh Commandment. "Don't commit adultery," which is the Seventh Commandment. He said, "Don't lie." "Tell the truth to one another." "Don't break the Ninth Commandment." That's the way it's worded. Rather than him say, "You have to keep the commandments," he gives the ethical advice, and the ethical advice is "Keep the commandments." It's very clear to see, just in that one book, the way the Bible approaches the doing of works.

Even though Paul said those things—that the keeping of the commandments cannot save a person, it cannot earn a person's salvation—yet it is part and parcel of God's overall purpose of reproducing Himself in us because the commandments express the fundamental way *He* lives. That's the best way to live life. He lives keeping His own commandments, and so He tells us that He wants us to live the way He lives, and so we have to keep His commandments. In addition to that, a multitude of other benefits come on any person and society itself if a person determines, sets his will, and lives that way.

One of the conditions we were talking about is that we remain loyal to our Redeemer after He forgives our sins. It is in this area of loyalty that the analogy of God being married to Israel, and eventually married to the Church in the making of the New Covenant, begins to make its impact in terms of teaching us our responsibility in the area of works and loyalty. We saw a very strong implication regarding works right in the context of Revelation 2, verses 2 and 7. I'm going to read those to you.

Revelation 2:2 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

The implication here is that the works of which Christ is concerned are the works of overcoming—overcoming human nature; or as John put it in I John 2, overcoming "the lust of the flesh, the lust of eyes, and the pride of life," where he breaks this overcoming human nature into three specific segments. In addition to that is the work of overcoming the persecutions, the deceits and persuasions of Satan, and overcoming the influences of the world.

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Jesus Christ also had to overcome. He had to overcome the same influences and pulls that we have to overcome. He lived in the world. The influence of the world is here. He lived with Satan alive and well, and so He had to overcome the influences of Satan the Devil and his persecutions and his deceits. In addition to that there were the influences of human nature all around Him. They were part of Him, but He never once gave in to their influences. He overcame them. We are to do as He did. I think that shows very clearly that the works that He's concerned about are the works of overcoming, and the keeping of the commandments ~~encompass~~ *encompassed* with overcoming.

Paul said, "Let him who stole steal no more." One who is in the habit of stealing has to overcome the impulse and influence that he has within his own character of stealing. One who has been in the habit of lying has to overcome the habit that is ingrained within him to exaggerate or not quite tell the truth, and so he keeps the commandments and overcomes that influence while he is doing it.

Using God's love is hard work. It is hard work because there is a constant downward pull in these three areas: the self, the world, and Satan. The influence to go that way is always there. It is constant.

I believe that it was no accident, no coincidence at all, that Christ placed the message to Ephesus first in order, and that its subject is *love* in context with *overcoming*. Remember what Christ said in John 14:15: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." It takes the love of God to keep the commandments in the spirit, in their intent, and it is love working and active *when* they are kept. I John 5:3 says: "This is the love of God, that you keep His commandments." So when we keep His commandments we are expressing love. It is working. It is in action.

If a person's love for Christ (which is keeping the commandments) diminishes, what happens? If the love for Christ diminishes, doesn't that imply then the love for keeping the commandments will be less frequent? It will begin to diminish. The right works will begin to diminish. We're beginning to see the connection between love and right works. If the love is there, the right works will be produced. If a person loses his love for Christ altogether, that person is in bad trouble. I mean, it is "Goodbye Christianity." It is "Sayonara." That is it. That is the end.

Turn now to John 21 as we continue to make this connection between the love for Christ, and producing the right works.

John 21:15-17 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He [Peter] said to Him, "Yes, Lord: You know that I love You." He [Jesus] said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord: You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things: You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

This situation is really interesting, at least partly because of when it occurred. This happened after Christ's resurrection. It happened in that period of time amounting to forty days between His resurrection and His ascension to heaven. It was an important period of time. He didn't have much time to be with them bodily, in person. There are many things He could have said to Peter. He could have asked him, when we consider that Peter was going to be the physical leader of the church under Christ, "Peter, do you believe Me?" He could have said, "Peter, are you converted?" He could have said, "Peter, are you ready to preach the gospel?" He could have said, "Peter, will you obey Me?" He didn't ask any of those questions. He said, "Peter, do you *love* Me?"

Undoubtedly, to love, and eventually to be able to love as God loves, must be life's greatest privilege. There is no, let's say, created life on earth among the animals in which we know that there is any kind of love. They might get together in social units as apes and chimpanzees do, but there is nothing like love in anybody except humans, who are in the image of God. But love has another side to it. Even though it is life's greatest privilege, to be able to give one's self in love, it also gives to us humans life's greatest responsibilities. On the one side there is privilege—the privilege of being able to tap into it and use it, and receive life's greatest blessings, but on the other hand it is probably the most difficult of all privileges to do, because it brings the greatest responsibilities, and love *always* involves sacrifice.

Now look at Peter. Peter's love for Christ cost him his life. According to the legends, Peter was crucified upside down. He died a martyr's death because of his love for Christ. But even beyond that, in one sense Peter never had a life that was his own, because the rest of his life was spent serving that One he loved in serving Christ's people. Some of those things, especially the giving of Peter's life, was not what Jesus had in mind at the time He asked this question, though He does kind of touch on that at the end of the chapter.

We're all familiar with some of the most important aspects of Christianity, and I think that Paul summarizes them as well as anybody in I Corinthians 13. At the very end he says: "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." A person's faith might be weak, and his hope might be vague, but if he loves Christ, though all might not be well in his life, he is still on the right track, and there is every reason to believe that this person is going to make it into the Kingdom of God.

Now faith, hope, and love are inseparable parts of true Christianity. Christianity begins with faith. Faith is Christianity's foundation, and it is stirred by hope; but love is Christianity's aim, and Paul says (and I'm sure God agrees) it is the *greatest* of the three.

Turn now to I Corinthians 16:22. I want you to see a verse that lets us know how important this love for Christ is. This is the same apostle who said that "love is the greatest."

I Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!

The word of God pronounces a curse on anybody who doesn't love Christ. Remember what I said, that if our love for Christ is lost, "That's all she wrote." "Sayonara." "Goodbye." That

person will not be in the kingdom of God. Even if our love for Christ is weak, we're going to make it, but it's got to be there because it is the most important of these attributes. It is the only attribute that God has which He identifies Himself with personally: "God *is* love." It doesn't say "God is faith," "God is hope," or anything else. It says, "God is love."

Let's look at another one in John 8:42. This is the place where Jesus had this dialogue with the Jews. It begins with, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They said that they were free, that they were never in bondage to anyone, and the reason is that they were Abraham's sons, and therefore they were free.

John 8:37-38 Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

What they were doing was not the works of Abraham. Abraham never tried to kill Christ.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me."

They saw themselves as the sons of God merely because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. But Jesus rejects that by saying the proof that they are the sons of God is whether they love Him. Now if it held true for the Jews, it also holds true for us. Though most of us are sons of Abraham racially because we're part of the tribes of Israel, it suits us just the way it suited the Jews. So Abraham is our father, but unless we have the love of God, God is not our spiritual Father. The proof of that is we will love Christ. His own advice: "If you love Me, keep the commandments."

These people were getting ready to kill Him. The Sixth Commandments says, "You shall do no murder." That's not proof they were the sons of God. If there is no love of Christ, there is no sonship of God. Is that clear? That is very clear. Is it beginning to make sense why He started with Ephesus, and why the subject is love? It is because love is going to produce the right works. That's why. If the other churches are going to have the right works, it's going to begin because they love Christ. It is the same with Ephesus as well.

Back in John 21, Jesus commanded Peter to "Feed My sheep." I think that we would all agree that feeding Christ's sheep is a good work. I think the implication from this section is that a minister's first responsibility (*any minister*, including one as great as an apostle in rank, position, authority, and responsibility, and we might say *the apostle* who was going to be *the first human leader of the Church of God*), in terms of service, is *to feed the flock*—those Christ died for. And so even an apostle's first responsibility is to spend himself for the sake of the flock, not preach the gospel. I can say with all conviction Mr. Armstrong did that. I don't think there was ever a Church of God in any period of time in the history of the Church of God that was better fed than it was under Herbert Armstrong. There was a constant stream of

material ~~meaty~~ material—coming out of Pasadena until Mr. Armstrong's death.

Jesus also said that "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends [John 15:13]." In the very next verse we find out who the friends are. The friends are those who are obeying Christ, and so the friends are the brethren. "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for the brethren." The only difference between these two verses—between John 21:15-17 and John 15 where Jesus made that statement—is the word "brethren" or "friends," and "sheep." "Greater love has no man than to feed the sheep."

There is an interesting distinction here in John 21 in the term "feed my sheep." The first and third—the one in verse 15 and the one in verse 17—mean only to take the sheep to pasture; that is, to make sure they have food to eat. In most Bibles they have translated the word "feed" to "tend." What the word "tend" means is the total guardianship of the sheep. It's not merely feeding them, but the responsibility is expanded to include everything that might occur in the care of the sheep. So that admonition is sandwiched in between merely feeding.

A question I think that must be asked is: Would Peter do what Christ asked ["Feed My sheep."] if Peter didn't love Christ? What I am proposing to you is that there is a direct connection between doing the right *kind* of work. To Peter, his responsibility was "Feed My sheep." That's the right kind of a work. Laying down your life for your brother, for your friend. Feeding the sheep. That's the right kind of a work. It's directly connected to loving Christ.

*The* love that Jesus used in His message to the church in Ephesus is agape. The love He begins His three questions with in John 21 is agape. "Peter, do you *agapo* Me?" The love that He uses in the third question is *philio*. We're going to compare these two. The *agape* love is broader in application than the *philio* love. Agape embraces judgment and the deliberate offence of the *will* as a manner of principle or duty with or without an affectionate feeling.

Now get this distinction. The *agape* love involves judgment. That is, it involves evaluating a situation as to whether or not you want to do it, whether or not it is right to do it. It embraces judgment and the deliberate offence of the will. You evaluate a situation and how you are going to handle it, and then you decide it would be love to do such and such and so and so, and then you set your will to do it, like loving your enemy, which requires a lot of judgment. It requires a great deal of the deliberate setting of the will to carry it out. That's the *agape* love.

The *agape* love doesn't necessarily have to have an affectionate feeling attached to it. Hopefully it does. Now this can be the kind of love when one is performing a duty, an obligation, but it can, and most frequently does, include the feeling of affection as well. However, *philio* expresses family affection. It has nothing to do with the will at all. *Philio* love comes without you asking for it, because you love your family members. It is present there simply because you are members of a certain family. It expresses family affection. It is a personal attachment as a matter of sentiment or feeling.

I want you to notice that Christ made *sure* when He asked Peter these questions that He used *both* of them! He used both the love that involves duty, obligation, and response, because one has evaluated and deliberately set one's will to show this love even though the good feeling is not there, and also the family affection feeling. What we find from this is that both the love that God has for us, and the love that He wants us to have for Him, is a beautiful combination

of *both* of them.

I think that Christ put these two together in His questions to Peter in a deliberate move to help us see what our relationship with God has to be like, because there are going to be many times, that even though we are attached to God because we are His children, we're not going to like what it is He is telling us to do. We have to come to see, through right knowledge, analysis and evaluation and the study of His word, that something He is telling us to do in a certain situation is right and good, but we don't feel like doing it. In those cases we have to deliberately set our will to do it, and that's love. On the other hand, He also wants us to have toward Him, and toward others, a warm, affectionate, sentimental feeling of attachment.

Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

The word "hate" here is not an absolute term. It's a relative term. What He is doing is establishing a comparison. He's saying, "You have to love Me *more* than mother, father, wife, children, brother, sister." We have to put Christ *first*. We have to love Him more than the others. I want you to think of what He said to Peter. What was the first question? He said, "Do you love (*agape*) Me more than these?" Who were the "these"? It was very likely the other disciples who were with Him. "Do you love Me more than your friends?"

Do you begin to see that what Christ said to Peter He is also saying to you and me? The standard is exactly the same. Though you and I may not have the responsibility of feeding the sheep, yet Christ has to be our first concern in life, and God expects us not only to be concerned, but to love Him with deep family affection.

What I have been leading to is this: If our love begins to wane, we will gradually cease doing good works. The reason is because there is little to motivate us to intimate communion with Christ. There is little to motivate us to joy, to loyalty. Do you remember those four things that marriage must have in it that I gave to you last week? What will then happen? We will gradually become a spiritual harlot by committing idolatry. Our love, our devotion will be given to something else other than to Christ.

Faith is the substance (the foundation) of Christianity. Hope provides us with a great goal toward which to aim our efforts, but love is the mainspring of good works. You need to think of that in terms of your feelings for other people. You do good things for them because you love them. It's the same principle with Christ. We're not talking about anything that's weird or far out, or odd. He said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Are we supposed to keep the commandments? Absolutely!

I think that if you will reason with me a little bit, you will know that works emanating from faith, and emanating from hope, are certainly there, but I think that you will agree with me that they tend to be fitful and spasmodic, and they are done most frequently out of a joyless duty. It is love that enables a person to continue in patient well-doing, in unwearied persevering labor even when nobody else even sees it, like in a successful marriage between two humans.

Now seeing that this love then is so important, the next natural question is, "Where does this love for Christ come from?" The answer to that is also basic, and it is part of our human experience, at least in analogy. That is, it comes about by the same basic process love is developed in human beings. Think about this. There was a time when two people who marry didn't even know one another, but somehow and in some way they are introduced, and a relationship begins. At first they are merely acquaintances. Then they go dating and a friendship begins to grow. As the two know each other more deeply and personally, the friendship begins to blossom into a more passionate feeling, and eventually to the place where marriage takes place *because* the two want the relationship to continue to grow.

What began as two strangers grows to where the two are friends, mates, and lovers, with their union becoming more and more intimate until they become one. Does that sound familiar? It is almost an exact parallel with what is going on between us and Jesus Christ and the Father.

Turn now to Ephesians 2:11-14. This is right after Paul said, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." Remember that this book was written to a congregation that was predominately Gentile. However, it did have some Israelites (most notably Jews) within it. The Jews and the Gentiles historically were never able to get along. There were reasons on both sides. What this book does is address the question of, "How can two very diverse people get along with one another?"

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision [the Jews] made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, ... [you were strangers from the God of Israel]

The Gentiles were strangers from the God of Israel. The Jews had at least a little bit of advantage there, but it wasn't much of an advantage because they were strangers from the God of the Bible too! They didn't know Him. They thought they did, but we just read a place in John 8 which says very clearly they didn't know God. Here they were, getting ready to kill God's Son, and they were saying they were sons of God through Abraham. Jesus said, "Ridiculous!" and so they picked up stones to try to stone Him. The Jews did not really have a working relationship with God at all. They had *vague* understanding of Him.

Ephesians 2:12-14 That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us.

Let's add another scripture to this.

I John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Now think of the pattern. It is God who takes the initiative when we are absolute and total strangers from one another. Does not Romans 3:10 say, "There is none that seeks after God. No, not one"? Nobody knows what to look for. Everybody has his own conception of God, but the God of the Bible has to reveal Himself; otherwise there would never be an acquaintanceship. So God introduces Himself through a *calling*, as the Bible says it, and a relationship begins. It grows as we become more aware of who He really is, and we become aware of the depth and completeness of His love for us. "We love Him because He first loved us." We begin to run into scriptures like, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, ...."

There is a reaction to us in that. We begin to come under a sense of obligation to this One who has loved us, and still loves us. He loved us when we were enemies. He set His will. He deliberated on it. He evaluated us. Even though we were enemies, according to Romans 5, He called us. And so the *agape* love that is part and parcel of Him came out in a calling, and He began to introduce Himself to us in a sense that we began to see that this One died for our sins. We begin to feel a sense of obligation, but that sense of obligation does not stand by itself. We begin to feel a deep sense of appreciation. Not merely obligation, but appreciation. The appreciation rises in us because we begin to recognize what *we are* in comparison to Him.

We begin to realize that this One lived sinlessly for 33-1/2 years, and we can hardly go through a day without sinning. And so the combination of a sense of appreciation and awe—a realization of One living thirty-three and one-half years and never even sinning one time, of One who overcame the world, human nature, and Satan completely and totally, conquered sin, conquered death—and here we are, so weak. But He offers us life. He says, "If you'll just submit to Me for your own good, I will wipe away your sins. The debt will be paid."

We begin to realize that a sense of obligation grows, along with the sense of appreciation. You see, the attachment is getting closer and closer, and we eventually get to the place where we see and say, "I want to spend the rest of my life with this Person, and I want to continue to grow with Him." And so we enter into a covenant, which is a marriage agreement. The time is coming when God, in the analogy, shows us that we are going to marry Christ. But in the meantime we have to get ourselves ready so that when we do marry Him the differences between us will be ironed out.

So what is it that is motivating us to conform to Him and His requirements for marriage? It's the combination of obligation (*agape*) and affection growing out of appreciation and thanksgiving for what we owe Him. And so we are led to a complete desire to surrender to Him and to give our lives to Him, and our time and energies to Him, to conform to everything and anything He wants until we become so intimate with Him that we are one. Read this with me in John 17:20. Read Jesus' own prayer! There aren't many of them in the Bible.

John 17:20-23 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. [That's you and me!] that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made

perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me [the Witness], and have loved them as You have loved Me.

The witness grows out of what we are talking about here. The love that we have for Christ is partly given in that it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit [Romans 5: 5] and is partly generated by our being led by the Holy Spirit to recognize the holiness of His character and the desire to emulate Him. It leads us to a deep sense of thankfulness for what He has redeemed us from and opened to us.

A summary: We love Him largely for all He has done for us.

He suffered and died for us. He lived a perfect life for us. He gave up the majesty of His office at the right hand of God in order to do all of this. He had more at stake than any human being ever had, and He did this in order to redeem us from a guilt and the power and the consequences of sin. He's called us by His spirit, opening to us a great deal of knowledge about ourselves and what we are. He's led us to repentance, given us faith and hope, and He is working in us right now to bring us to holiness. He has freed us from captivity to the flesh, to the world, and to Satan. He has given us light instead of darkness, peace instead of guilt, hope instead of uncertainty, and life instead of death.

Suppose you were in prison for a debt that you could not pay? First degree murder is a debt that you cannot pay for, except with your life. But whatever the debt is, someone comes along and pays the debt, supplies you with fresh capital for a new start, and then makes you part of his family. Would you feel gratitude for that? Would you feel gratitude if you were a soldier, and your position was overrun by the enemy and you were trapped, when a friend, knowing you were trapped, broke through the enemy's line and rescued you and you alone? Would you feel gratitude if someone grabbed you by the hair and rescued you from drowning in a watery grave?

Every one of these situations actually falls short of describing our precarious spiritual condition in relation to God and surviving the grave. But inadequate as they are, they do at least give us a sense from where some of our love for Christ arises. Perhaps if we don't have much feeling for Christ we need to go back and deeply study the New Testament, especially from that perspective in order to recapture some of the feeling and the sense of obligation because of our indebtedness to Him.

I want you to listen to this passage by the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5:13-15. Paul is defending himself here because he's been accused of things of which he is not guilty. Mostly it's a matter of these people feeling he has taken too much on himself.

II Corinthians 5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God.

Let me put that into modern English and paraphrase it. He says, "If I am judged as a madman." A simple and blunt statement. These people were saying, "Paul is crazy! Don't follow him." Paul said, "I'm doing it for God."

II Corinthians 5:13-15 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God;

[I'm doing it for God.] or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One [Christ] died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live [you and me] should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Paul is saying that he cannot live life for himself. The all-important and compelling reason he does what he does is because of Christ's love for him [verse 14]. So powerful is the influence of Christ's love for him, Paul says that he has no recourse but to live his life in service to others—the Church. ("I am of sound mind for you.")

Think about Peter. "Peter, do you love Me?" What is going to be the impelling force that's going to drive Peter? It's love, and Peter is going to be motivated, impelled, first of all because of his recognition of the love of Christ for him. "We love Him because He first loved us."

The word "constrains" in verse 14 means "compulsive." It's translated in some modern Bibles as "controls." Paul is saying, "The love of Christ *controls* me." It doesn't mean though that it takes over and works his mind. He meant that the love of Christ is so great in him that it just *drives* him to set his will and go in the direction that Christ wanted him to go. Another way of putting this is, "Christ's love *urges* me to go in this direction." Remember Paul said in the book of Ephesians, "Don't resist the influences of the spirit."

We love Him because He first loved us, and our love is nothing more than a response to His love for and in us. If we lose the recognition of His love for us, we lose all incentive to respond to Him, and the work gradually diminishes and eventually stops.

I mentioned that I would briefly explain this phrase—*then all died*. Paul means all Christians. Remember, he is writing to a Christian church, and he means, "All who are Christians have died to sin in Christ." "The wages of sin is death." How is death pictured? In your baptism you are buried, and so you are dead to sin. You are covered, first of all, by the blood of Christ, and then in order to impress it on your mind (and on mine), you are then buried in a watery grave. But you don't stay in that grave, do you? You come up out of the water in a resurrection that is a type of Christ's resurrection to spiritual life. This is a death that all must go through before they can truly live, and so you will find a phrase like this: "Apart from Christ, we are ~~dead~~ sin."

The key here is "dead *in* sin." The reason for that is because we are living a life of sin, but "in Christ, we are dead *to* sin." In other words, those *dead to sin* stop living the self-centered life. Listen to this explanation seated back in here to what Paul is saying. Those who are "dead to sin" stop living the self-centered life that brings on the death penalty. They no longer live unto themselves. The love of Christ *impels* them to respond to His love in love to Him, and to others. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." It all goes together.

Why then was a life of self-pleasing impossible for Paul? It was because of the supreme example of the life and the death of Christ. He was driven by his sense of obligation, by his sense of appreciation and thankfulness to emulate, to be at one, and to strive with all of his being to live the kind of life that Christ lived—in giving himself in service to the church.

I'm going to paraphrase Christ's advice to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2: "Renew your devotion to Me." He said, "Go back to the first works. You have left your first love. Renew your earlier devotion to Me."

Devotion is the sense in which the word "love" (*agape*) in Revelation 2 is being used. Devotion literally means *to vow completely*. Remember, when you were baptized that was the outward show that you had vowed to give your life to God, and so "devotion" is *to vow completely*. You are totally surrendered. We are beginning to see what the problem to the Ephesians was. Their devotion—their complete dedication—was slipping away.

Devotion is a deep and ardent affection, a feeling. It's synonym is *attentiveness, dedication, commitment, earnestness*, but all with a feeling of affection. It's not something done out of a sense of obligation only, but there is a warm feeling, a passionate desire to do it. "Go back to your earlier devotion." It's not something that is merely being done because one is dutiful. I'm going to give you some antonyms so you can see it from that angle, and see if these aren't familiar. The antonyms (the opposites of the word devotion) are: indifference, negligent, unconcerned, disregard, infidelity, and faithlessness.

Now what had happened to these people, and why? I think I'm going to answer that question next week. I will begin my sermon next week, God willing, picking up on this point. Maybe you can study into it, do some thinking about it, and see if you can determine what had happened to the Ephesian Church, and why. We are already beginning to see what happened. They lost their love. They lost their sense of devotion, but more importantly, why did it occur? I bring this up because it is something that is very *real* to those of us living in the end-time. It is something that everyone of us faces, and we are going to have to deal with it. Indeed, maybe we are dealing with it now, and maybe not too well.