

What is Your Motivation?

Let's pray:

Lord, we do rejoice to be together in Your presence, to think of You as our Sanctifier, to think of You who has sanctified us and brought us into that place of not being ashamed to call us brethren. Lord, it is beyond our imagination to be called Your brother. And Lord, we are thankful how You desire to share Your heart with us continually. As we come to Your Word this morning, we look to You to speak to us, to enlighten us, to continue to equip us for the days and times that we are living in. In Your precious name. Amen.

One of the things that has been on my heart recently in light of the Lord's soon return is the way evil is intensifying. Everything around us is just intensifying. Persecution is increasing of varying degrees. Humanism is spreading unchecked. We see all throughout the world it is just instability. Everything that can be shaken is being shaken. The financial world and every aspect of the world that you want to look at, there is no security to be found anywhere. As I was thinking about this, we want to be able to keep going on because there are so many things that might discourage us. There is a spirit of discouragement in this day and time. So it brought me back to this little simple question: What is my motivation? Actually, what is my ambition? What is my ambition in life? When you are really captured by an ambition, you do want to continue to be pressing on. Therefore, one of the things that we need related with ambition is motivation. What is this motivation? Motivation is that driving force that really keeps us on the go, and the question I have within my own heart is, what is my motivation, and what am I really living for?

Ambition

At times we can think ambition is not a Christian word. Somebody says, "You are ambitious." Somehow it can come across in a negative sense. But actually the word ambitious or ambition is a neutral word. It depends on what your ambition is all about, what you are ambitious for. Sometimes in Christianity we say, "That person is ambitious." That means they are just doing it in the flesh. No, they can be ambitious for the Lord.

The Scriptures give us a couple of examples of positive ambition, which is ambition for the Lord, and some negative ambition. So, we see in II Corinthians 5:9 where Paul is writing to those in Corinth. Before this he has been dwelling on this matter of his present dwelling, his future dwelling, walking by faith not by sight. He had that desire to be with the Lord, instead he was still here in this earthly body.

Verse 5:9: "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be well pleasing to Him."

What a precious testimony! This was Paul's heart, and as he continues with this thought of being well pleasing to the Lord, in some ways it can sound like a contrast to us.

Verses 10-11a: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord."

As we think about being ambitious and well pleasing, the very next thought is being before the Judgment seat of Christ. To me this is showing us that Paul had something within his heart that did not make him fear or draw back from the seriousness of the judgment seat of Christ. Sometimes when we talk about the judgment seat of Christ, we want to shrink back, but we will all have to appear there. There are interpretations as to when that will occur, but I am not going to get off on that today.

Paul had a confidence, an assurance within him, as he looked forward to the judgment seat of Christ; he had that ambition to be pleasing to the Lord. Now that is a kind of positive ambition of pleasing the Lord. From a negative point of view you can look in the epistle of James.

James says in James 3:14: "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

Now this section of James is dealing with wisdom; there is a wisdom from above and there is a wisdom from below. And I appreciated this verse because it even amplifies selfish ambition. It is all about self, and he puts in there also that little phrase, "in your heart." We can see it putting this in a context the verse before this, he is speaking from a wisdom from above.

Verse 13-14: "But who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

This wisdom from ourselves can capture our heart, and it is interesting, for you are lying against the truth. Don't you see that in the days we are living in? There is a truth that is there, but mankind himself is saying, "Nope, that is not true." But it is true; everything about Christ is true.

James continues in this section speaking of this natural wisdom in James 3:15-16: "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. But where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder, and every evil thing."

You can just see the chaos that self brings about, that ambition to glorify self. You see a great contrast here because the fruit of this is disorder and evil things because it is not from above. It is natural, it is even classified as demonic. We see in these few verses here, and there are some others too. This whole issue of ambition can be positive or negative.

What is ambition? I went to the dictionary and other sources such as Google and others to try to come up with something simple on this matter of ambition. "Ambition is a desire to act in love, to honor and satisfy someone. It is a desire, that aim, that goal, that purpose in life to really honor and satisfy someone." So the big question is, who are we desiring to honor or satisfy? And it is actually a pretty simple question because there is only two answers. You are either going to honor yourself or you are going to honor the Lord. And it is interesting, as we go through this life, these can actually look outwardly very similar. Even our service within the assembly, teaching a class, serving in the group, preparing a meal, sharing a message on Sunday morning, going to the meetings. All these can outwardly appear the same. It can be the Lord, praise God if we are desiring to honor Him. It can be of self, that so-called religious self where we love to have that place of preeminence that loves to get the self-glory, self-honor. Or it may be done just out of a

duty or obligation, a wrong perspective. That is why in a wonderful way, whenever we are serving, we should always be asking the Lord to search our hearts: “Lord, why am I doing this? What is the real issue? What is the real desire within me? And Lord, if necessary adjust me. Change me and conform me to Your image.”

Motivation

What is necessary for ambition to be realized? If you have an ambition, what is needed for it to get realized is motivation. And motivation is the fire or the power in us which makes us willing to act to achieve our ambition. In other words, we are willing to pay the price whatever the cost. That is the thing that motivates us.

I remember when I first went away after high school to the university, my vision, my ambition was to be a dentist. But I soon found out that I did not have the motivation to go through organic chemistry. I did not have the motivation to do some of those science classes and other things like that. But lo and behold, I ended up getting into accounting, and for some reason accounting clicked. Now there is one thing in common about most everybody that majors in accounting; nobody goes to the university to study accounting as their first choice. Accounting is usually your second or third choice because it is not that glamorous. But it is a great career, and there is not any unemployed accountants. My whole vision changed, and I love accounting. I know I am a little weird, but I loved accounting, and I could study and stay up all night because I was motivated. I was going to pass that CPA exam, and I was going on. I actually finished college second in my class. I missed first place by one tenth of a point. One girl, Qunita Ledderberry was just a little bit ahead.

Ambition and Motivation Together

As we go through life, our vision and our objective in life change, but we are driven by something. Do we know what is driving us? Do we know what our ambition is? Do we know what our motivation is? Because ambition and motivation go together. You really cannot have one without the other in life. You can, but you are not going to amount to much because ambition without motivation you will just be a dreamer. You have all these dreams and this great ambition: “I am going to do this; I am going to do that.” But if you do not have motivation, that fire within to do it, you will just dream all about it.

On the other hand, if you have motivation without any ambition, you are just going to burn out because you are always going to be doing something, doing this, doing that. You do not know where you are going, but you are doing and doing and you get burned out.

It is in our Christian life also. We can have this ambition to be pleasing to God, but are we captured by Him in such a way that He is our motivation to really go on and press through regardless of what the cost is? And this is a beautiful testimony we see in Paul’s life, and we will be referring to him quite often today.

So we ask again: what is our ambition? It is to be well-pleasing to the Lord. That is it. What pleases the Father the most? We know that is His Son. Whenever we think of the things of ambition or motivation, it always brings us back to Christ, to be well-pleasing to the Lord so that the life of His Son can be seen and expressed in us and through us. The testimony of Christ is our

life, and that was Paul's testimony. That is the life we are to live—the reality of Him expressed through us, being that living testimony. And what we are doing is so that He receives the glory and honor—not ourselves, but that He would be honored; He would be glorified. That is this whole matter of ambition.

Vision

Let me ask another question. Where does ambition come from? Ambition comes from vision. Now that is not just a religious answer. Some people get so tired of hearing about vision this or vision that. I am not giving a religious answer. In the world too, if you look at all the psychobabble stuff, it boils down to having vision. You have a vision, a desire or something you want to be, that is out there, and that captures you. We see how in that the Lord is giving us such a vision to be pressing on.

We have to ask the question, “What vision is it that governs our life?” Sometimes ones are governed by a vision of sports because they love sports. Now I love sports, but I was never great enough to focus on one. Therefore, I was mediocre in all of them, but never good at one. I love sports, but I never pursued it. Some people love arts, some people do business, some people do E games, some people like to be influencers. I was looking around to see if there are any influencers here today, but I am not sure. Some people's ambition is their family; “we are going to have the greatest family, we are going to have this or that.” We can go on and on, but all of those really end up being self-satisfying.

After I finished the university, I started to work for one of the largest accounting firms, and John and I actually worked together for the same firm. I loved accounting, and I had a vision of being a CPA. I was pressing on, I was working and moving up in the chain of command in the firm. I was involved in their Health Care Practice and one of their national instructors. Then it came time for me to be a partner, and they said, “To be a partner you are going to have to transfer offices.” This had been my goal for years, maybe seven or eight years, that I was there. The vision was right there, but then they said I would have to change office.

There was something else going on in my life about that same time. As I was looking around where to change offices, the cities that they had for me to transfer to, we did not know of any like-minded brethren there. I knew that there would be plenty of Christians in whatever city we would go to, but there was not any like-minded brethren. Because my over all vision was beginning to change, I was gaining something of a vision of God's heart and purpose. So, I ended up leaving that firm and going into business with another person, and it was quite a change. That was probably the point in transition in life where business was not my endgame. I had a desire to serve the Lord. I did not understand a lot about it. I would hear these messages on God's eternal purpose, and I knew all of it was right, but I knew there was something about it that God was after. It was more than just about me. It was about Him. We were meeting here at the time, so I resigned from that company, and I went in business for myself.

Vision of God's Heart and Purpose

We talk about this vision of God's heart and purpose a lot. What is it? It is not just a phrase that we like to repeat. Now we can fall into a trap of having our own vocabulary—God's eternal

purpose, Heavenly Vision, and things like that. There is a reality of those, but they are far more than a phrase. This vision captured me at that point in time, but I was not fully captured because it is a process that we have to go through. But it changed my whole perspective of life. What used to be important was no longer important. When the Lord captures our heart with something of His heart and purpose for us, it is a revolutionary thing. It is an experience that all of a sudden we cannot really explain, but there is a reality to it. So I am thankful how that occurred within my heart in my life. It also impacts our motivation because when we see something of His heart, our ambition and motivation begins to change. We are not to live for ourselves, but unto Him who lived and died for us. We say that motivation is the power to really achieve our ambition. So, we have to ask ourselves, "What is our motivation?"

Christ Our Motivation

I was thinking that within Christianity in general, there is a lot of different things that people get motivated by. There is not just one thing, although it should be only one thing. It should be Christ as our motivation. In our whole process of life, we get motivated by many different things. I was thinking of a few of them. What is your motivation? Is your motivation just to escape going to hell. A lot of people get saved so they will not have to go to hell: "We are Christian now, and we can relax because we do not have to go to hell." Is your motivation to escape the great tribulation? "I am going to be a good Christian so I do not have to go through the great tribulation." That can be a very good motivating factor within our life, but is that *the* motivation? We can also want to avoid persecution. There are certain aspects of the gospel that is preached in much of Christianity that says, "If you really want the Lord, you are going to prosper, you are going to have a happy life, you are going to have a good life. God wants you to be happy." That can really motivate a lot of people. "Hey, I am not going to have any problems. I can come to the Lord, just be happy in life and enjoy because it is all about me. He loved me and died for me." There is a very me-focused aspect of it. We see all these various things that we can do to escape and avoid.

There is also rewards. "Oh, man, I am looking forward to the judgment seat of Christ so I can get *my* reward. My motivation is my reward that He is going to give to *me*." Or, maybe our motivation is the prosperity gospel which is very popular. "Oh, He wants me to prosper, He is going to bless me, He is going to give me everything in life," and that is our motivation to keep going on. Or, our motivation may be to go to conferences, enjoy meetings together or find a spouse. I know within here this never occurs, but in some places young people actually go to conferences looking for a spouse, and that is their motivation. They have young people's gatherings, but nobody here would ever do that. These brethren are so spiritual, they would never think about that. We have the family conference coming up possibly, and there will be young people there, but what is their motivation? They want to find a spouse; "oh yeah, the teaching is good too." We can see all of these things, but as you look at them, what is the focus on? The focus is on *us*, what I get or what I do not get, what I can get out of. It is all about *me*.

As we continue on, there can be other motivations that are good. Maybe our motivation can be a particular interpretation of His return. "Oh, I am going to really enter into this." But maybe it all works out in a little different way. Do we become disillusioned? Maybe we hold on to a

certain teaching, a certain doctrine, a certain practice, and the Lord works in a way that we did not expect as he talks about in Habakkuk and does something we do not expect. Are we going to become disillusioned? Sometimes a motivation can be for the praises of man, the fear of man, please man; that is what I want to do. But man is pretty fickle; they will praise you one day and curse you the next day.

It is sad if you look around Christianity today and see how many disillusioned believers there are because they have had their eyes on a man, and that man failed them. It can be sexual immorality, either straight or gay, it can be financial immorality. There are many different things, and it really takes a toll on ones if they are looking at man. We can be respectful. We obviously respect ones, but what a problem we can run into.

Maybe your motivation is to share the gospel. You may be driven by your heart for the lost, and that is a great motivation. But what is it that should drive us despite of any and all opposition that we face? What is it that really keeps us going on in spite of the disappointments, in spite of the rejections, in spite of being let down? What is it that keeps us going on?

Christ's Love Constraining Us

I appreciate a quote by Hudson Taylor who started the China Inland Mission. As he was interviewing different volunteers and ones that wanted to go over there, he would always ask them: "What is your motivation? Why do you want to go?" And ones would inevitably say, "I have a heart for the lost; I want to preach the gospel. I see all of these thousands and thousands of ones in China without the gospel and going to hell." And that was good, and he would encourage them in that way, but then he takes them a step further. And Hudson Taylor tells them, "The only motive that will enable you to remain true to Him is Christ's love constraining you." His love will keep you faithful in every situation even unto death. If your motivation is simply other than Christ and His love, there will come a point in time where it will fail us, but He never fails us; He never disappoints us. He carries us through all the way triumphantly. And this is because Paul knew something of this being constrained by the love of Christ. That is why he could mention earlier about that ambition and looking forward to the judgment seat of Christ because he did not fear it because he knew of the love of Christ. He was not afraid of the judgment seat of Christ.

It is a serious thing, and what is our perspective of that? I am not going to get into all of the things of the judgment seat of Christ today, but simply to say that if we have a fear of it, if we are dreading that judgment seat of Christ, we need to go back and ask the Lord to show us more and more of the love of Christ, to enter into more and more of the greater reality of His love.

The verses where we were sharing about the love of Christ in II Corinthians is followed by these verses in chapter 5:9-10:

"For the love of Christ controls/constrains us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died."

This is a precious testimony here, that the love of Christ is constraining us. So what is our response? As Paul writes this, what is his response? His response is:

“and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

This love of Christ so motivated Paul that he lived this verse. This was not a theoretical verse, this was not just a teaching verse, but he said, putting his name in there: “I am no longer going to live for myself, but I am going to live for Christ who died and rose again on my behalf.”

It is a vital question for every one of us as far as what is motivating us in this life. What really is the Lord doing? Paul speaks here of the love of Christ, and let’s just clarify that for a second. This is not Paul’s love for Christ. Now our love which was precious at the table this morning. We were singing and praying about pouring our love out on Him, and we do because we love Him, and we want to pour it out on Him. But Paul is not speaking of that because our love has limitations. Our love eventually will come up short when we get pressed in by something. Peter got pressed in, and his love came up short. We might think at times that we love Christ so much that nothing can cause us to deny Him or go on with Him, but we just do not know ourselves.

I remember when I was in the service during the Vietnam war. We had to all go through some basic prisoner-of-war training for what happens when you are captured. It is amazing how not that much torture, not that much intense pressure, whether it is psychological or physical, can make you change your mind pretty quick. It is easy to sit in a chair here on Sunday morning and say, “I will never do what Peter did.” But if we get in the fire of battle, we do not know. That is why our hope and our confidence is not on our love for Him but on His love for us. That is the preciousness of it, and that is what we are thankful for.

The Love of Christ

So, what is this love of Christ that we are talking about? What is this love of Christ that we want to be keeping us? Sometimes when we think of the love of Christ, we can look at it as elementary. We think of the children’s song: “Jesus loves me this I know.” But it is actually very profound, very fundamental and essential within this life. I always remember what Brother Kaung said when he would talk about the love of Christ. He said, “We can never define the love of Christ because when we define it, we end up confining it, we end up limiting it. But we can describe it.” This is what we often see in the Scriptures, and we can see descriptions of the love of Christ being lived out in various lives. When I think of the love of Christ, I think of that love that left the splendor of heaven to come to a fallen world, leaving all that splendor, emptying Himself of all that He had and all who He was, and came to this earth to rescue fallen man, even taking on the form of a slave, a bondsman. That is the description of the love of Christ. If you look upon His life, we see the pathway of the love of Christ because He went from Bethlehem. This is a beautiful picture to me of how that love will carry us through the mountains and valleys of life. It is a precious thing because whatever we go through, He has been through it. When we think of Him being born in Bethlehem and the humility of that, being humbled to that point. When we find ourselves in a place of being humbled, the place of humility, that love identifies with us. He knows what we are going through, and He understands us in a very wonderful way.

In the same way, He went on to Nazareth and those hidden years in His life. When we go through thinking we are overlooked, we are being hidden, and nobody appreciates us, we realize

that we have the love of Christ, the love of One who has been there and can carry us through. Just as He was carried through by the love of His Father, His love carries us through whatever trials we are going through, and we will be facing them more and more.

When they go on to Judea, those He came to received Him not. It is really hard in our life, particularly with believers, to be rejected. How do you handle rejection? We cannot handle it ourselves. When we think of rejection, what do we want to do? "Revenge! I will get even." And we never forget. But no, He loved them to the uttermost. So we find ourselves in times of rejection and have feelings that we cannot deal with, we are thankful that there is a Life within us that can identify with that and can carry us through all of that.

Then He goes to Gethsemane. And there are those situations in life where we have to say, "Not my will. Lord, I want to do this, but I know You do not want me to, but I can't. And I am going to pray, "Not my will but Your will be done." He has been there, and when we have to go through that process, as we see later on at Calvary and His death, that dying daily, saying 'no' to ourself and yes to Him. We have a living One within us who loves us so much and identifies with us that that love can carry us through every situation that we are in.

Praise God, He goes on from Calvary to the throne, and that is the victory. And I am thankful that we do not have to wait and experience His victory until that throne. We can experience the victory of the love of Christ every day in our hearts and lives as we allow Him to come forth, as we say 'no' to ourself and 'yes' to Him. That victory comes forth, and the circumstance that we were in does not change a bit. Maybe we were rejected; they are still rejecting us, but we have victory over it. Maybe we have been humiliated and humbled, but we have a victory over it. Whatever situation we find ourself in, as we have been having to die, what is going to happen? "I cannot live anymore." Have a victory over it. So praise God for that! That love of Christ is controlling, constraining us.

Controlled and Constrained by the Love of Christ

As you look at this word "control" or "constrain," it has a two-fold meaning. There are two aspects to it. The first aspect, "controlled by the love of Christ" means that it restrains you; it holds you back. It is like the reins on a horse when you are holding him back so it does not run wild. As you are holding that horse, and you want it to go left or right, a gee and a haw will direct it. You city folk do not know what that is. It is restraining us from going our own way. Another brother described it as being hemmed in on both sides, restraining you from going either way. Like when you are on a road or a path and the guardrails, the fence, the row of shrubs, keeps you from going off the path. The blessing of it is that it is restraining us from our own self-will and self-desire which will lead to self-destruction. Self will lie to us and say, "This is the way to pleasure and glory," but actually the truth of the matter is that it is a way to self-destruction. It is sad when we see ones from the outside who are self-destructing, they are destroying themselves because of their own self-love and desires. They are killing themselves. But praise God, we have this Life within us that can restrain us, that can say 'no' to this in very simple practical ways.

There are times when you go out, maybe in a store or on-line shopping or looking for something, and you see something that you want, but all of a sudden this little voice in you says,

“Don’t get that.” “It is not going to hurt me to get this. I only have fifteen other pairs of shoes. One more pair is not going to hurt.” But it says, “No, don’t get it.” Do we listen to that little voice that is saying “No, you do not need that right now, just keep going on.”

There is this matter of how we spend our time or the careers that we get into which can restrain us and put us in a different way. I know one brother who was considering his career, and he wanted to be a doctor. First, he thought about being a surgeon, but this voice in him was telling him that if you become a surgeon you will not have as much time for the brethren or be able to be involved in the assembly, so he chose to be a dermatologist. He gave up a pretty significant salary cut, but he saw something beyond. It was the love of Christ restraining him from going the way that he wanted instead of going in the way of the Lord, and the Lord has blessed that.

Also, not only does this love of Christ restrain us, but it governs us. It is a governing power in our lives: “For me to live is Christ.” There is that little chorus that says, “No rival throne survives, and I serve only You.” This is what governed Paul’s life; there were no rivals in his life. And this is what is governing our lives.

One of the most blatant descriptions of this to me is like a mother with a child in an emergency. There is a love within that mother that when that child is going through an emergency, the mother does not sit there and count the cost; the mother acts. We have seen the stories of a mother running into a fiery building to rescue her child or a mother running out in front of a car to save her child, the mother attacking a bear to save her child, all these various things. She does not even think about it. That is the mother’s instinct in caring for a child. And the Lord wants to govern us in such a way that for us to live is His life within us.

What governs our life? What determines how we spend our time? What determines each day how we spend our time in His Word, in prayer or in fellowship with one another? In all of these things we see that there is a governing power in us. So praise God, this love of Christ is not only restraining us, “not I but Christ,” but it is also governing, leading us. It is kind of a dual way of His working to guide us through to enjoy the victory that we have in Him.

In three of Paul’s letters he uses this little phrase, “the love of Christ.” He used it in Romans, II Corinthians and Ephesians, and in each particular time he used it, it had a certain aspect. There was a specific emphasis on it. In Romans he is speaking of the security of the love of Christ. In II Corinthians he speaks of the sufficiency of the love of Christ. In Ephesians he speaks of the supremacy of the love of Christ.

Romans 8:35: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword.” That is the security we have there in the love of Christ.

II Corinthians 5:14: “For the love of Christ controls/constrains us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.” In Corinthians we see the all sufficiency of the love of Christ.

In Ephesians 3 he speaks of the supremacy of the love of Christ.

Verse 19: “To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.” Praise God for that!

The Security Of the Love Of Christ

As we look at these three aspects in a little more detail, we can see the fulness and the impact that these have. As far as within the security of the love of Christ we just read Romans 8:35 and started a beautiful paragraph there, but we do not have time to go through the full paragraph, but if you look toward the end of it, he continues. After he talked about nothing separating us from the love of Christ, the tribulation, distress, persecution, and so on, he says, "I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels or principalities or any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He says, "I am convinced," and some translations say, "persuaded," and that word means "I have reached a conclusion based on my experience. I have been through something, I have experienced this, and I have found that the love of Christ was my security in the midst of tribulation, in the midst of distress, in the midst of shipwreck." Paul was not just talking theoretically here. If you look at his life, he said, "The love of Christ was my security when I was getting beaten. The love of Christ was my security from ones who betrayed me. The love of Christ held me on and on through every situation. That does not mean he did not have any problems because the Lord in His own mysterious way uses the pressures and challenges of life as it says in Psalm 4:1: "In pressure Thou hast enlarged me." Enlargement there means that it enlarges more of Christ in us. We are decreasing and He is increasing. There is an absolute security that we have, and it is very real.

As I was thinking about this and trying to think of an example, it came to me as I look around this room. There are ones in this room that have been through things that were way beyond themselves, but because they allowed the Lord to keep them and go through it, they know something of the security of the love of Christ now that they would not have known if they had not gone through it. We could share many wonderful testimonies, but I will pick on one. The security of the love of Christ carried William through some surgeries recently and all that he is still going through, and Judith. I can just look at so many faces and see how that love of Christ carried you through, and the way we know as brothers and sisters that He carried you through is because we see the fruit of it. We see the evidence in your life. We know it was a hard situation, we know that it was beyond yourself, but praise God, you called upon Him, and you know of His faithfulness in a way you did not know before. Praise God!

You know, there are certain times when we think about the security of the love of Christ, and ones will ask, "How about sin?" That is why Romans 5:8 means so much to me. "But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners." He did not wait for us to get straightened out. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Sin does not separate us from the love of Christ. It can hinder our fellowship with Him until we get some things straightened, but sin does not separate us from the love of Christ. God so loved the whole world He gave His Son. While we were yet sinners, He died for us. That love of Christ is there. It does not give us the freedom to sin, but if we fall into sin, all of a sudden God does not love you. It is sad when I hear someone say that. It is a tragedy, it is blasphemy, but God loves every sinner, and has a yearning that they would come to Him. And we can have that security.

As Paul went through these things, he was captured by this love, and he knew the arms of God holding him and keeping him in a wonderful way. One of the challenges that we have is being

in the body of Christ. The body of Christ is a great blessing, but one of the challenges we have is when our brethren let us down. And it is not a matter of if they let us down, but the brethren are going to hurt us. The brethren are going to disappoint us. But there is a wonderful testimony there of Paul because Paul had poured out his life for so many, but he testifies in II Timothy, "At my first offense, no one supported me. All deserted me, but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." Praise God! Even though all the brethren let us down, all our brethren disappoint us, all our brethren desert us, the Lord stands with us. The love of Christ is a secure love. Now we do not ever want to be in that place with the brethren like that, but just picture your worst situation.

I remember Dorothy Hall, a dear sister, when you are going through any trials or troubles, she would say, "Okay, what is the worst thing that can happen?" And you picture the worst thing: "All the brethren betray me." She said, "Yes, but the Lord stands with you." We think it is the end of the world, but He is there with us.

There is a hymn written by George Mattheson, "Oh Love that Will not Let Me Go, I rest my weary soul in Thee." We know the story about George Matteson, who at the age of twenty was studying to be a minister in the Church of Scotland. He started going blind, and once his fiancée discovered that he was going blind, she left him. But his sister gave up marriage to take care of him and read the Bible to him. He went through seminary, he graduated and got his doctorate. He then became a pastor in the Church of Scotland. His sister read all the various books to him, and he would take it all in, writing down his answers for tests, and many things like that. It was through the love of his sister that he was really able to continue. She truly denied herself.

About fifteen years later, one of his other sisters was getting married in another city, but he did not go to the wedding. Because of the way of his fiancée, weddings were not a big thing on his list. So he did not go to the wedding. He sat at home that night his sister was getting married, and he was grieving over what had happened to him. But then he started thinking of the love of Christ. It says that he wrote that hymn "O Love that Will Not Let Me Go;" it took him less than ten minutes to write it. He did not make any revisions to it, as it says in his biography. He just wrote it all down. It just flowed out because he saw the security in the love of Christ that would never let him go.

We need to know this security, particularly in these days because it tells us in Hebrews that everything that can be shaken is going to be shaken, so that which cannot be shaken will remain. We do not want to be naïve to think that we are not going to be shaken, but praise God, we have a security in the love of Christ that will hold us through all the shakings. Every day we have little questions. The enemy is there every day to try to bring in a question or doubt about the love of Christ. "Does He really love you as He lets this happen? No, you see humanism attacking the love of Christ. How can bad things happen to good people? You can go down that road of destruction, but we see that there is a security we have in Him, and that is our hope and confidence.

The Sufficiency of the Love of Christ

Then it brings us to the second aspect of how Paul uses the love of Christ. In II Corinthians this word sufficiency or adequacy, depending on the translation you have, is used numerous times. I have just picked two verses here.

II Corinthians 3:5: “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to count anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”

This is Paul’s personal testimony. All throughout II Corinthians he is testifying of that all-sufficiency in every circumstance that he finds himself in.

We need to know the sufficiency of Christ. I mentioned a little bit earlier in my testimony how I had to leave a big accounting firm and to start with another individual. We were self-employed, which meant you have to do all these personality tests and all the things they want you to do in your work. I am somebody who would never be self-employed. I should work for a big company, a big corporation, who will tell me what to do, and I would do it. But I ended up being self-employed, and through that I am learning more and more of the sufficiency of Christ. In the situations that are beyond me, I am thankful they are not beyond Him. A lot of self-employed people have to go out and get business, but I am not a salesman. However, the Lord at different times would bring ones through word of mouth or different hospitals or clients would just call. I am so thankful for that provision I have in Him which has enabled me to be self-employed over forty years now. I hate that word, “self-employed”, because it should be “employed by the Lord,” or “working alone” or something like that. It is too much focus on self, but you get the picture. God uses whatever situation we are in in life to reveal more of Himself to us.

One of my favorite verses of Paul’s testimony is in II Corinthians 9:8:

“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound unto every good work.”

Just look at the absolutes here. God is able to make *all grace abound* unto you, that you having *always all sufficiency in everything* may *abound* unto every good work. The most educated lawyer in the world could not find a loophole in this verse. He has covered it wonderfully, but we try to find loopholes about His all sufficiency. But praise God in the way He has equipped us truly with His all-sufficient love.

We are familiar too with Paul’s wonderful testimony in II Corinthians 12:9: “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.’”

That is Paul’s personal testimony, the very word that God said to him. How do you know something is sufficient? It is just like in security, things are tested and proven; you know the sufficiency of Him. The dam is able to stand up during a flood or an airplane in a storm. You know that plane is going to fly because Jerry has been on the test runs. Your house will stand up during a hurricane. The high tech automobiles now have driver assist to keep you in the lanes, drivers assist to make you stop, and self-driving. How do you come to know that sufficiency? How do you

start to believe? Do you just automatically get in that car, turn it on and let it go? You test it, you try to change lanes, you try to get closer to another car to see if the brakes work. You test that thing until it proves itself to you. Then you begin to get a little more comfortable, but don't ever get too comfortable; it is just an automobile. But we see with the Lord we would be very comfortable because He is sufficient.

One of the ways that He shows the sufficiency of His love in all situations to us again, it is through the brethren. Sometimes we think Paul was so spiritual that he did not need anybody. No, in II Corinthians he wrote that he was depressed. He was concerned about what was going on in Corinth, and he said, "But the Lord sent Titus to comfort me in my depression, and Titus came to him (see II Corinthians 7:6). Another time in Romans 16 he testified that Priscilla and Aquila had risked their lives for him (see verse 4). They were willing to take the risk for him.

When Paul was in prison, Onesiphorus went and ministered to him, "for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains" (II Timothy 1:16b) Paul was testifying of how Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his chains; he had searched him out (see II Timothy 1:16b).

And if Paul needed this encouragement, strengthening, relationship with brethren, how much more do we? Sometimes our pride can get in our way, and we are afraid to ask for help or pray to have somebody come alongside. May we see the preciousness of the reality there is in Christ.

Do we know of the Lord being sufficient? Where do we look for our satisfaction? Do we look for it somewhere else? Or are we looking at in the Lord? May it be a greater reality to us.

The Supremacy of the Love of Christ

Finally, we come to the supremacy of the love of Christ. We read Ephesians 3:19 about supremacy, but if you look at the verses before in Ephesians 3:17 this is the context.

"So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth."

Notice, "comprehending with all the saints." For us to enter into the fulness of the supremacy of the love of Christ, we need to be with all the saints. There is a fulness there, and we need all the brethren.

Verse 17: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts." The Lord is after our heart because that is the vessel of love. And this is what God is after, that we could really come to know the supremacy of the love of Christ, not just in our head but in our heart. What was that supreme manifestation of the love of Christ in Ephesians? The supreme manifestation was when He died for us. He loved us and gave Himself for us. "He loved the church and gave Himself for her." And his "agape" love in the letter to the church in Ephesus is used numerous times, more than many of the other epistles. It is because His love is the key to the revelation of God's heart and purpose. We will never fully understand God's heart and purpose unless we know something of His love. His love opens an understanding to His purpose for us. It is beyond just the individual; it is for the whole

church. That is why He prayed for the eyes of our hearts to be opened, and we see that He wants us to come into the reality of knowing this in a wonderful way.

As we come to the end and see this whole matter of the love of Christ capturing us, going back to the beginning of what is our ambition or our motivation, we see that He is our ambition or we would desire that He be our ambition, that we would desire that He would be our motivation. And because of His imminent return, we need to take seriously these days we are living in because we will appear before that judgment seat. We want to be found well-pleasing to Him; that is our ambition. And would we be awakened. There is such a lull among believers today, not recognizing the times we are living in. May we really be awakened to see all that He has for us. And in that being awakened, may we be redeeming the time, making the most of every opportunity, getting our priorities straight, that He would become our priority, that we would have that fuller and greater revelation of His love. Not only just learning some words that begin with 's', but allowing the reality, knowing the security of the love of Christ, and the sufficiency of the love of Christ and the supremacy of the love of Christ both individually and corporately. The time is at hand, and we need to really be those that are allowing Him to be searching our hearts because we do want this all to be done for His glory and for His honor, and we will no longer be living for ourselves but for Him who has loved us and died for us. We are thankful that He has called us unto Himself, and we are thankful how He has made every provision for us in Christ Jesus, and we are thankful that we have the love of Christ that will never let us go.

May we pray:

Lord, we do thank You for the goodness and the greatness of the life that we have in You. We thank You for Your love, Lord. We are thankful as we remembered You at Your table how You went to Calvary, and we are thankful, Lord, that that love is very living, real and alive today within each of our hearts. Lord, where we have rival thrones in our hearts, show us more of Yourself. Where we are distracted by things and desiring things of this world, show us more of Yourself. As we see You, as we behold Your beauty, know Your glory, know of Your love that will never let us go, Lord, we could lean onto Your everlasting arms in a fuller and greater way. We thank You, Lord, that You first loved us, and we do respond in our own limited way of telling You how much we love You, and we look forward day by day of experiencing and seeing and knowing more and more of the reality of the love of Christ controlling and leading us onto the glory, unto Yourself. We commit ourselves into Your hands. Amen.