

Weekly Reflection – “Controlling Love”

What is it that is controlling your life? What controls the decisions you make? Where you go? What you do? How you use your time, resources, money? Where you live? Where you work? How you work? How you parent? How you do marriage or singleness? What controls the way you treat other people? Something controls all of your decisions. What is it?

The Apostle Paul

- How would you describe the way Paul lived his life?
- ***“Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 ESV***
- My question is how do we explain his life?
- What was controlling the decisions he was making?
- Paul was making decisions to live this way; real, practical everyday decisions that led to this lifestyle. What was it that was so great it caused Paul to live his life this way?

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 - For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; “and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

“For the love of Christ controls us.” What does “control” mean? This word is the idea of pressing together and propelling forward into one channel. Like a cattle shoot, it starts out wide and slowly narrows pushing and constraining the cattle to go one way. Charles Spurgeon, “The love of Christ had pressed Paul’s energies into one force, turned them into one channel, and then driven them forward with a wonderful force, till he and his fellows had become a mighty power for good, ever active and energetic.” Being controlled by the love of Jesus means no longer living for yourself but living for Jesus. Paul had to do what he did in ministry, because he received so much love from Jesus that it compelled him, pushed him, constrained him to live for Jesus and not himself.

How do we become controlled?

What needs to happen if you and I are going to live lives controlled by the love of Jesus? What needs to happen if you and I are no longer going to live for ourselves but for Jesus who died for us? How do you become controlled by something? Example: Someone is controlled by alcohol. How does that happen? How do you become controlled by alcohol? Not by knowing about it or hearing about it, but by consuming. So how do you become controlled by the love of Jesus? Not by simply knowing about it or just hearing about it, but by experiencing it personally. By consuming His love.

How do you stay controlled? How does someone stay controlled to alcohol? By continually using it. Alcohol does not control you if you are no longer consuming it. How do you stay controlled by the love of

Jesus? You must continually be living in it and personally experiencing it. Could it be that too often we try to live our Christian lives based on an experience of Jesus's love for us we had in the past? Before you can be controlled by the love of Jesus you must be continuously experiencing the love of Jesus for you.

How do we experience the love of Jesus?

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:14-19 ESV) “Strengthened with power through his Spirit...” The source of our experience of God's love is the Holy Spirit. ***“and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5 ESV)*** We can't manufacture the love of Jesus; we receive the love as a gift through the Holy Spirit.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8 ESV) Start by asking. Prayer. Ask God to pour His love into your heart through the Holy Spirit. Then seek His love. Slow down and look for it. Hurry quenches the Holy Spirit. Where should we look? We look in the Word of God and see how Jesus has loved us. We see what He has done to demonstrate that love. We see what He has done so that He can love us. Finally, we knock. This is faith. Faith is action. If we have faith to knock on the door it will be opened. What is this knocking? I think it is trusting and obeying. Faith is action and obedience. ***“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” (John 15:10 ESV)*** The purpose of obedience is not to earn the love of Jesus. Obedience helps you live in and experience the love of Jesus. Obedience places you in the water falls of Christ's love for you. The key to knowing and experiencing the love that God has for us is asking in prayer, seeing it revealed in the Word of God, being obedient to the Word of God, and experiencing it by the Holy Spirit. All of these are utterly crucial. Reading from the Word of God cannot take the place of the Holy Spirit in your life. And the Holy Spirit will not do the work apart from hearing and obeying the Word of God.

It will cost you to be loved.

Have you ever considered that living in the love of Jesus for you could be costly to you? Paul said, “the love of Christ controls us.” In other words, because Paul was living in the love of Jesus for him it was causing him to live a certain way. He was constrained to live a certain way. The love of Jesus for him was controlling and dictating how he lived. The love of Jesus became Paul's master, he was no longer free to live for himself, the love of Jesus ordered him to live for Jesus and Jesus's mission. Is it possible that we could hold Jesus at arms length because we are afraid of what it could cost to fully live in His love for us?

So, I ask you, “Do you want to live in and personally experience the love of Jesus in such a way that it controls you?” Do you believe that God can, will, and desires to pour out His love and make you know His love so that it will control your life? Are you willing to surrender your life to be loved by God in such a way that you will no longer live for yourself?

Pray: I bow my knees before You Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of Your glory You will grant me to be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ will dwell in my heart through faith – that I, being rooted and

grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that I will be filled with all the fullness of You God. Now to You Father who is able to do far more abundantly than all that I ask or think, according to the power at work within me, to You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.