

Compelled By Love

2 Corinthians 5:14-20

This is week 2 in our series on evangelism. Last week we looked at the heart of evangelism – that it's light shining into the spiritual darkness of the world so that people who are lost might see the light of Christ and turn to him for salvation. God has been doing this throughout human history, partnering with his people to shine the light. In Christ, we become the light of the world and we are to let our light shine before others so they might be drawn to Christ.

We also talked about how we do this in many ways. It includes sharing the gospel with people when the time is right, but it's much more than that. It involves our entire manner of life. We conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel so that we are different than we used to be and different than those who are living in darkness. And as the Holy Spirit gives us opportunities, we share about why we're different and why we have hope. So evangelism is a lifestyle of being a light in the darkness.

All of us are partners in this and have been given the light. That means anyone can do this, including you. You don't have to be an evangelist or preacher – you just have to let your light shine. Did you let your light shine this week? Did unbelievers notice the difference in you? Could they see Christ in you?

I'm going to assume the answer is yes... sort of. I'm going to assume you lived a life of light this week and you were different than those who are in spiritual darkness. So you let your light shine, but did it make a difference in anyone's life?

I walked out to our garden shed the other night and when I got to the backyard something caught my attention – the lights on our garden fence. We put solar lights up a few weeks ago, and they looked really nice, but I had forgotten about them and didn't notice them. They were shining every night but it made no difference in my life because they weren't where I could see them. A light can shine in the darkness, but if no one's there to see it, what difference does it make?

Something I've noticed about myself and other believers is that after we become Christians and the light starts to shine, a shift starts to take place at the same

time. Our friendships begin to change – they shift from unbelievers to believers. We have less and less in common with unbelievers and more with believers. We don't like some of the things unbelievers say and do and don't feel like putting up with it anymore. They have a different perspective and direction in life that we don't like and may even oppose and there's a natural shift toward disengagement and separation. You might still go to school or work with them and they might see you from a distance, but it isn't enough to make them wonder or have a conversation.

So our light may be shining brighter and brighter, but we're so distant from unbelievers that they can't see it – at least in a way that actually makes a difference in their lives. So part of evangelism and letting your light shine in the darkness is willingly engaging or re-engaging in the lives of unbelievers in a meaningful way – something that most of us don't naturally want to do. It's something I really struggle with. Most of the people I am close to are believers and I have very little close connection with unbelievers, and I am sensing the need to reengage.

And the question for today is: Why should we? One of the answers that probably comes to your mind is: "Because they're going to hell." And that's definitely a compelling reason. The fear and anguish of people going to hell is often what motivates us to let our light shine brightly, especially among our loved ones (maybe even too brightly at times!). But what about everyone else? What about the other unbelievers in our community that we don't really know?

As bad as hell is, it doesn't end up being a great motivator for most of us because we typically don't grieve over people we don't know. Some who have the gift of mercy and compassion may still be motivated, but many Christians are not. And interestingly, when you read through the book of Acts, the anguish of hell doesn't appear to be what motivated the disciples to carry out their gospel ministry. It was something different. And that's what I want us to connect with this morning. There's really one motivation that the disciples and Paul often pointed to as the reason they carried out their calling to be witnesses of Christ. And it's a reason I think we need to embrace if we're going to reengage as well.

I want to look at Paul's example to start with, and a passage he wrote that makes it clear what his motivation was. And then I want to look at a passage that John wrote that makes it clear that we should seek the same motivation.

Paul was one of the most motivated people I know. As you get to know Paul from his writings, you see that he was incredibly zealous to preach the gospel and let his light shine for Christ. Why did he do that? What was behind it? He writes about it often and I want to look at one example from 2 Corinthians. In explaining his ministry as an apostle, here's what he says...

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

This gives us a window into what motivated Paul and there are two parts to it – one built on top of the other. The first is in verses 14-15. He says that the love of Christ controlled him and his team. The Greek word behind “control” also means compel, take over, seize. Paul was seized by the love of Christ, especially the love expressed on the cross. That sacrificial, forgiving, reconciling love compelled and controlled him so that he no longer wanted to live for himself, but for Christ. So he was totally devoted to Christ and it was the love of Christ that compelled him. That was the foundation of who Paul was and what made him tick.

Now on top of that there was something more that motivated him specifically in gospel ministry and he writes about that in verses 18-20. In verse 18 he says that through Christ, God had given him and his team the ministry of reconciliation. In verse 19 he says that God had entrusted to them the message of reconciliation.

And in verse 20 he describes them as ambassadors for Christ. So it's very clear that God had called Paul to be a minister of the gospel.

We read about his calling in Acts 26:15-18 when Paul described it to King Agrippa: *“And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’*

Paul was called by Christ to be a witness and minister of the gospel and he was obedient to that calling, even to the point of great suffering and death. Why would he do that? He did it because Christ called him to – so that's part of it. But the reason he obeyed that calling was because the love of Christ had seized him and controlled him to the point where he willingly devoted his life completely to Jesus.

It was the love of Christ and the calling of Christ that motivated Paul to do what he did. Christ's love motivated him to devote himself completely to Jesus, and the calling of Christ motivated him to be a minister of the gospel. This is the pattern you see in Paul's life throughout the New Testament and it's the same pattern that you see with the other Apostles. The love of Christ compelled them to be fully devoted to him and when he called them to be his witnesses, they obeyed.

I believe we need to have the same motivation as well. The love of Christ must compel us to devote ourselves completely to him so that we willingly obey his calling. John writes about this in 1 John 4:7-11. He calls believers to love one another, which is one of the primary ways we let our light shine, and the reason he gives is the love of God.

Read 1 John 4:7-11.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us,

that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

So John is calling all believers, including us, to love one another, but this applies to loving all people as well – love is central to letting our light shine in the darkness. And the reason John gives for why we ought to do this is because of God’s love for us – the love he demonstrated when he sent his Son to die for us and give us eternal life. It’s knowing and experiencing that love that should compel us to live for him and carry out his calling to love other people.

Why should we reengage with unbelievers so that they can see the light of Christ in us? Because that’s his calling for all of us and because he willingly laid down his life to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. That’s what motivated Paul and the other Apostles and that’s what needs to motivate us as well.

If you find yourself unmotivated, I encourage you to press into the love of Christ that was demonstrated for you on the cross. Immerse yourself in the glorious wonders of the gospel. Remember who you were without Christ and who you’d be if Christ had not let his light shine into your heart. Rejoice in your salvation and the many blessings you have received in Christ. It’s his love for you that will compel you to offer yourself completely to him and carry out his calling in your life. We need to be seized by his love and devote ourselves completely to him.