

"Controlled"

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

May the cross of Christ lead you to grieve over the evil of your sins, but may that same cross fill you with joy, relief, and comfort that also your own personal sins there found full and complete forgiveness. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

"Control" is a much bigger deal than most realize. Human beings crave it, from little on. Parents can relate to how quickly their children transition from absolutely helpless to *"I can do it myself."* It seems to be hardwired in us. In fact once you start looking, the longing for control appears everywhere in life. As a Christian, you have a definite advantage here. As a child of God, you also have a need for control in your life, but you recognize, and find profound comfort, in the fact that *God* is in control, both in your life and in the universe as a whole. And he's capable. King David was a man's man, extraordinarily capable, but he recognized his Lord as the only reliable source of Godly strength and control: ***"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth."*** ^{ESV}(Psalm 121:1-2). What David added there at the end is important. The God in whom we entrust ourselves is the Creator-God, the Maker of heaven and earth. We can trust him to dictate the course of our lives because he is all-wise, all-powerful, everywhere present.

What happens when God is removed? The need for control remains, but now there is a vacuum. There is a reason unbelievers generally campaign for ever more government. The removal of God from their lives creates a vacuum that will be filled with...*something*. Humanism claims that man and fill the role of God. A significant number of those who reject God look for, long for, every greater control from their government. It explains why so many of the godless insist on imposing their will on all. It explains, at least in part, the championing of something as evil as abortion. Women carrying children are terrified by the thought that they are not in control of their own bodies, or, more specifically, that they are not in control of the life growing within them.

Mankind has a universal need for at least the perception of control in their lives.

Control plays a critical role also in the life of the child of God. We are taught both the source of that control and its effect in our text for this

morning. That text is found in the Book of Second Corinthians, the 5th Chapter:

^{ESV} ***2 Corinthians 5:14-21*** ***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. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

This is God's Word. It therefore represents the power of God both to create and preserve saving faith in our hearts. Through God's Word we also gain an understanding of the need for divine control in every aspect of our lives. That our God would so bless each of us this morning by the power of these his words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

You'll see it every once in awhile if you watch sports – a player missing badly. Basketball players occasionally throw up airballs, soccer players kick at a ball that is no longer there, baseball players screw themselves into the ground swinging wildly at a pitch that was nothing like what they expected. So too several English translations miss badly at the word we find in our text correctly translated as ***"controls."*** They missed so badly, in fact, that they ended up translating it as ***"compels,"*** which is pretty much the *opposite* of the word used here by the Holy Spirit. *Compels* means to "drive forward." The word the Holy Spirit used here means ***"to hold together."*** The King James Version, by the way, got it right with ***"constraineth,"*** which is a perfectly good (albeit antiquated) word from the Latin which literally means ***"to tie or bind together."*** The unfortunate miss by some translations has created misunderstandings we won't get into this morning, but our ESV translation got it right. There's a good reason we focus on this word this morning.

Last week, you may recall, we studied what God's Word has to say about "self-control." We were reminded that "self" does not do the controlling. It is rather "self" (our natural, sinful flesh) that needs to be controlled. We expand on that study this morning, in part, by looking at the *source* of that control. In other words, if "self" does not do the controlling, what does?

The first sentence of our text identifies the source of the control we need as the love that Christ has for us. It says, literally: "*The love that Christ has for us holds us together.*" I'm sure you know what it means to "hold together." You've probably used the expression, or at least heard it used. In times of stress, someone might say something like, "*I'm barely holding it together right now,*" or "*You need to get it together.*" The implication is that something has run amuck, or is in danger of running amuck, and needs to be brought under control.

Fair disclosure. While it is true that the phrase "the love of Christ" could grammatically refer either to "the love Christ has for us" or "the love we have for Christ," the latter is ruled out primarily by the context, but also by simple Godly reason. In fact, the idea that *our love for Christ* is both what holds us together and drives us forward has taken some Christians to very dark places with catastrophic results. That misunderstanding again relies on "self" to do the controlling. In other words, I will be "held together" only as long as I feel this love for Christ in my heart. What then happens when hard times dampen your enthusiasm? What happens when the inevitable difficulties of life dull your affection for the God who seems to have abandoned you, or seems, for whatever reason, to be punishing you?

Christianity doesn't work like that. God never puts anything like that on man. He never puts our eternal future into such a leaky vessel as our own thoughts or emotions. Only God himself can carry that load. Foolish and doomed is the man who trusts himself for any part of his salvation. Do we love Christ? Certainly, although inconsistently. Yet that love is both created and sustained only by his preceding love for us. ^{ESV}(1 John 4:19) "***We love because he first loved us.***"

But that's just the "Godly reason" for understanding this passage as the Holy Spirit intended. The context is even more definitive. Notice first the "*because*" in our text – "***For the love of Christ controls us, because...***" That "*because*" introduces God's explanation of just why the love that Christ has for us holds us together. Note that it points to two things, the first *cause* and the second *effect*. Note also that the cause has nothing to do with how we feel. It points to something outside of ourselves – the accomplished fact of what Christ has already done for us: "***One has died***

for all." This is the heart of the gospel, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with how we feel about Jesus. It has everything to do with what Jesus has already done for us – with Jesus' love for us.

That is the singular, historical fact that never changes. It never waxes and wanes as do our fickle human emotions. We routinely do not love Jesus as we should, but that never affects or changes either what he has already done for us or his unchanging and enduring love for us. *That* is the solid ground on which our faith can rest securely. That is the singular truth that can and does *hold us together* regardless of our circumstances or feelings – the love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross when he died to provide us with forgiveness and eternal life. That is the controlling power in our lives.

If you read the larger context of this Letter from Paul to the Christians in Corinth, you will note that in this section he is explaining to the Corinthians why he and his fellow workers are persisting in the very ministry that has caused them so much hardship, grief, and persecution. His answer can be summarized with a single sentence: "*We persist because there is no other way.*" That is, in fact, exactly how the love that Christ has for us *controls* us, how it locks us down and binds us to the work of sharing the message of Christ crucified for sinners. ^{ESV}(Acts 4:12) "***There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men¹ by which we must be saved.***"

You will recall that we said that the "*because*" in our text introduces two parts. The first revealed to us the cause, or why Jesus' love for us "*holds us together.*" The second part of the explanation tells of the effect: "***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.***"

It's obviously important that we don't confuse cause and effect. Remember the old story about the rooster that came to believe that because the sun rose every time he crowed, it was his crowing that caused the sun to rise? Obviously infinitely more important that we don't confuse cause and effect here.

Jesus doesn't love us because, or only if, we carry out his will in our lives. His love for us came first. That love for us is always therefore the cause of whatever good thing follows. This is emphasized and reemphasized in our text. In verse 15: "***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.***" First he died, then we live for him.

In verse 17: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”** Again, first we are brought to faith in what Jesus has done, and then we become a new creation. Finally in verse 18: **“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”** Yet again, Christ Jesus first **“reconciled us to himself,”** and only thereafter **“gave us the ministry of reconciliation”** – which means that he entrusted us with the work of sharing the message of Christ’s loving sacrifice with others, but only *after* he first reconciled us to himself by his death on the cross.

All of which further explains why it is the love that Christ first demonstrated for us that controls also each of us. As it did Paul, so also it binds each of us to the work he has commissioned us as our life’s work. It is Christ’s work that binds us to our work, not how we are feeling or how our day is going.

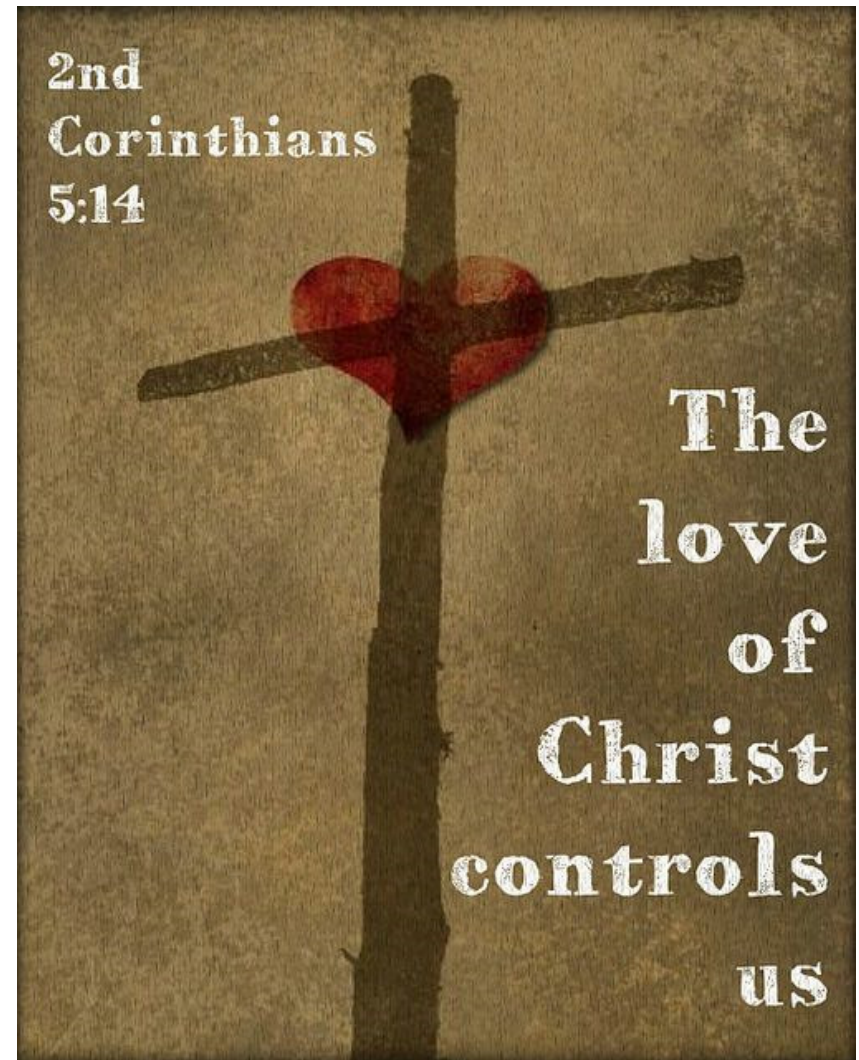
If we are truly honest with ourselves, we need this control in our lives. We need something perfect, holy, and objective (something outside of ourselves) to bind us to what God himself has identified as our purpose in life. Yet that control is anything but oppressive or disagreeable. It is not only what we need to beat our old Adam into submission moment by moment every day of our lives, it is what we need to recognize the amazing, vital, divine purpose of our entire existence. Hear again the incredible job description identified for us by Paul in our text: **“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”**

Finally, just so we could not possibly miss what it is that Jesus did for us, Paul leaves us with one of the greatest gospel summaries found anywhere in God’s Word: **For our sake he (God the Father) made him (Jesus Christ) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Let this be the controlling power in your life, as well as that which provides you with perfect, divine guidance. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 12:1-6** You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. ² "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." ³ ¶ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵ "Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. ⁶ Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

ESV **Luke 15:2, 11-17, 20-24** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ ¶ So he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

ESV **2 Corinthians 5:14-21** 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. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.



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The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 30, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 178 (*Stanzas 1-2, 5*) (*Blue Hymnal*)
"O Worship the King"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. (*Blue Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 12:1-6) Lent is that season of the church year where we focus in particular on our sinfulness and marvel at the fact that God punished his own Son in our place. Jesus paid for what you and I had done wrong. Pray for the kind of heart that appreciates and thrills to such news. Our Old Testament lesson pointed God's people forward to the events we now celebrate as complete and certain.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (*Blue Hymnal Page 58*)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 15:2, 11-17, 20-24) Our Gospel reading is the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. Though it is certainly comforting to know that we have a God who considers our sin-debt to have been paid in full by His Son, and who is always ready and willing to call back to his side those who have wandered, we pray this morning that he would prevent us from ever leaving his side in the first place.

The Baptism Hymn – 618 (*Blue Hymnal*)
"See This Wonder in the Making"

The Confession of Faith -
The Apostolic Creed (*Blue Hymnal page 5*)

The Baptism of Gideon Samuel James Loeb

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 296 (*Blue Hymnal*)
"In Silent Pain the Eternal Son"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)
"Controlled"

The Offertory – (*Blue Hymnal page 7*)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 436
"Not What My Hands Have Done"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 193 (*Blue Hymnal*)
"Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (40) Wednesday (19)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Paul Krause has returned the call to Faith of St. Louis, MO. Pastor Thomas Schuetze has returned the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA. Pastor Paul Tiefel has announced his pending retirement in mid-August.

Lenten Services – The second to the last of our Midweek Lenten Services is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7:00 pm.

Congratulations! – Preston and Grace Loeb welcomed their son Gideon into the world on Thursday. Gideon is scheduled to be reborn through the waters of baptism during the service this morning. Praise God!

Church Picture Reminder – Members of the Women's Fellowship are preparing Easter "Care Baskets" for our shut-ins. One of the items to be included is a picture of the congregation (their church family). The plan is to take that picture next Sunday after the worship service.

New Hymnal – This morning is our second service with the new *O Sing of Christ* hymnal. All of the information on the hymn boards refers to hymns and page numbers in the blue hymnal. See the sheet on the mailbox table if you would like to order additional copies for home use. Please also note on that sheet if you have already taken a copy (or copies) home with you so that we know how many more to order.