



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Lent 4**

March 27, 2022

## What Do You Think of Jesus?

### 2 Corinthians 5:14–21

*<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> 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.*

*<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

What do you think of Jesus? Do you think of Jesus? Do you consider His love for you? Our text says that Christ's love controls us. "Constrain" is a better translation. The love of Christ binds us to move in a certain direction; it *compels* us, encourages us, motivates us, to live and act in a particular way. Why? Because we've become convinced that One has died for all, which is just as though all had died.

What does this mean for us? Why, first of all, was it necessary that One die for all? Why do all need to die?

In Romans 3:23 Paul says: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." *All* have sinned. *All* have fallen short of God's glory. You might say, "But pastor, I'm a good person. In fact, I'm better than most. I don't cheat, I don't lie, I don't steal. Why, I follow all Ten Commandments to the letter. I don't break any of them." First of all, I'd like to have a chat with the rest of your family. If you can't see your faults, they'll point them out for you! Secondly, it doesn't really matter. Remember the rich young man (Mat. 19:16ff). He claimed to have kept the Commandments since childhood. Jesus explained that he may have kept the *letter*, but not the *spirit* of the Law. He loved his stuff too much. Jesus said, "Go, sell everything you have, give to the poor, and come, follow me." The young man couldn't do it. He thought he had it all sorted out, but he learned something about himself that day. You could be the most perfect human being who ever walked the earth and still not measure up in the eyes of God.

In Romans 5:12 we read: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man (meaning Adam), and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all



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sinned.” Beloved, we’re guilty of sin because we’ve *inherited* it, not simply because we’ve committed sins – although there’s not one of us who hasn’t. If you recall, the Catechism teaches that there are two kinds of sin: *natural* sin and *actual* sin. Natural – or original – sin is the condition of sin in which we were born; actual sins are the ones we commit, either by commission (something we do) or by omission (something we neglect to do). You might ask, “Pastor, how can you say we’re sinful if we don’t commit any sins?” Well . . . that’s not me, that’s God. Psalm 51:5 says: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

So, we’re all sinners, like it or not. Sin came into the world through Adam and we inherit it from conception. But why does that mean death? This, too, is the teaching of Scripture. In Romans 6:23 we read: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” The wages of sin is death. That’s the pay that comes with the job. You work for the devil, you get the devil’s wages. And we all do. This is why all had to die. If we’ve all sinned – and we have – and the wages of sin is death – then all must die.

However, One has died for all, therefore all have died. Jesus died for all. That means you. That means me. That means all of us. He died so that we would not have to receive the wages of sin.

Glory be to God! What a happy ending! Or is it? People still die; even Christians die. How can we die if Christ has already died in our place? The death of which Paul writes is not mere temporal death. Verse 19 of our text tells us that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.” There’s something worse than the death of your body, and that’s the death of your soul which results in permanent separation from God.

To be sinful is to be separated from God. This means to be without His comfort, without His protection, without His care, without His ears to hear our prayers, without the cloak of righteousness Christ gives to those who believe in Him. Without that cloak, we stand before God naked in our sin. That is our natural condition before God, the condition in which we were conceived and born. This can make the thought of Judgment Day a little frightening . . . but it doesn’t need to be. Christians actually look forward to the day we stand before God, because we know that Christ has covered our sin with His own blood. But those who don’t belong to Him, those who die without faith in Him, will find themselves standing before almighty God with nothing to cover them but their shame. And they will retreat into the bowels of hell in relief!

Thank God, this is not necessary. You don’t have to stand before God naked in your sin. God has reconciled the world to Himself through His Son, Jesus. Through faith in Him, we become His own. Our sins are no longer counted against us; they’re covered by His death and resurrection.

You see, as verse 21 declares, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.” So personal is the attachment of sin on our lives that God speaks of us as though we were the very thing. We are sin



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personified. So, Christ not only takes our sin upon Himself, He *becomes* our sin. And He not only gives us His righteousness, He *makes* us His righteousness. Luther called this the blessed exchange. God exchanges sin for righteousness. He takes what is not His – our sin – and gives us what is not ours – His righteousness. And He considers that an equitable trade! I'm not sure I would agree. In fact, I'm sure I wouldn't. I've never considered myself the prize in God's box of Cracker Jack. But, the thing is, He does. And His opinion is the one that matters. He considered each of us worth dying for.

So, what do you think of *Him*? What do you think of Jesus? Do you consider His love for you? The beginning of this text says that His love constrains us, compels us. We've answered the why. Next, we ask the what. What does Christ's love compel us to *do*?

Verse 15 says that "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." So the question boils down to this: Jesus considered me worth dying for. Do I consider Him worth *living* for?

What does it mean to live for Christ? This is the very question that eventually thrust me into the seminary. I thought, "What better way to live for Christ than to commit my life to Him through the full-time ministry of the Word?" And this has been my life for more than 30 years. It may not be the answer to that question for you, but it might be. New men are desperately needed in our church. The number of pulpits being vacated each year through retirement and death greatly outpaces the number of men graduating from our seminaries. It's always been my hope that our young men would consider this as an answer to the question of what it means for them to live for Christ. But it's not only pastors that are needed. We often struggle to fill teaching positions with qualified Synodically trained candidates. Deaconesses are in great demand and are such a blessing to the church. But, service to Christ is not confined to the role of the professional. We also need strong lay people to support our efforts with prayer and one-to-one confession of the Faith. As verse 20 says, "We are ambassadors for Christ." Every believer has some role to play in the advancement of the kingdom. We are the voice of Christ to our world.

What *do* you think of Jesus? Do you consider His love for you? Or is it something you don't think much about, something you learned a long time ago, but have sort of let slip into the back of your mind? I'll tell you this: Jesus doesn't want to live in the back of your mind . . . because that's not where He holds you. You are always before His eyes. There's never a moment in which He doesn't think of you. Isaiah writes: "Can a mother forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me" (Is. 49:15-16). There's never a moment in which He doesn't think of you. He loves you more than you can possibly know.

As Christ's ambassador, and your shepherd in this place, I beg you, be reconciled to God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you have been reconciled to God.

Do you know what the Prodigal Son in today's Gospel did when he realized he could



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be reconciled to his father? He went home. He repented of his sin, confessed it to his father, and his father welcomed him with rejoicing. Your heavenly Father longs to be reconciled to you. He's done everything to make that happen. Jesus gave His life to pave the way. So come home. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen