

“Farewell – Part 2: Bound by Grace”

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“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:22-27)

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Pastor Wally pointed out that Paul was “constrained” by the Holy Spirit. Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines the word to mean: “Urged irresistibly or powerfully; compelled; forced; restrained; confined; bound; imprisoned; necessitated.” Pastor Wally likened it to Paul being handcuffed to the Holy Spirit. Webster’s meaning imparts that something or someone has the power to impose their will on the other person. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul tells me that “[t]he love of Christ” compelled him. Oswald Chambers in “My Utmost for His Highest” wrote: “Paul said that he was overpowered, subdued, and held as in a vise by “the love of Christ.” Very few of us really know what it means to be held in the grip of the love of God. We tend so often to be controlled simply by our own experience. The one thing that gripped and held Paul, to the exclusion of everything else, was the love of God. “The love of Christ compels us....” When you hear that coming from the life of a man or woman it is unmistakable. You will know that the Spirit of God is completely unhindered in that person’s life.” Who or what “controls” my life in my day-to-day activities? Explain.

R.C. Sproul once said: “It’s the revelation God plants in the soul of every person. God reveals his law in the mind of every human being by planting a conscience within each of us. However, we face a problem: the conscience is fluid. It’s not fixed. Almost all people adjust their consciences between childhood and adulthood, and the adjustment is almost always downward. That is, we learn how to turn the volume of our conscience down so that our ethics align with how we want to live and not how God tells us we should live.” If I’m not “constrained by the Spirit” – “bound by the Holy Spirit”, then how easy is it for me to also ignore the Spirit’s leading and conviction of sin in my life and why?

Submitting to the power and control of the Holy Spirit, Paul committed to go to Jerusalem though he did not know all of the details and the details that he did know about future imprisonment and afflictions were less than encouraging. Can I be content with uncertainty about tomorrow, but can I also be content with the certainty that some of my tomorrows are going to hurt? If so, how so? If not, why not?

What would it take for me to undertake such a journey?

Paul laid out the basis for his confidence about his future in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 (“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (emphasis added).) In this passage, he is speaking from experience. He knows these things are true because he’s been through them and had to deal with affliction, desperation, persecution and physical beatings. He also knows that if his afflictions result in his death that “...he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.” (2 Corinthians 4:14) Can such an attitude be said of me? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that being bound by the Spirit means that I am bound in grace and that being bound in grace means what I know God’s message. Philippians 3:8 tells me that Paul put his beliefs into action: “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” What binds me more, God’s grace or my worldly needs and why?

According to Webster’s 1828 dictionary, to “testify” means to “...make a solemn declaration, verbal or written, to establish some fact; to give testimony for the purpose of communicating to others a knowledge of something not known to them.” Back on July 29, 1888, Spurgeon preached that “In the first place, never let any man testify what he has not seen. If you are not personally aware of it, do not tell it; it is the personality of the testimony that is the power of the testimony. That truth which you have never experienced, you had better leave to somebody else to preach. This is the cause of the failure of a great many ministers, there is no personal

conversion at the back of their ministry, and consequently no Christian life within them; their preaching is the testimony of a man who says that he heard such and such a thing; and you know how a judge will stop a witness when he begins to say what others have told him. “No, no,” says he, “what did you see yourself, my good man? What do you know about this business on your own account? I do not want to know what others said to you about it... When you try to bring others to Christ, you must do it by bearing witness of what Christ has done for you. If he has never done anything for you personally, for you, you cannot testify for him, and must not pretend to do so.” Paul testified “to the gospel of the grace of God” because he had first-hand knowledge and had experienced “the grace of God.” What, if any, is my testimony of to the gospel of God’s grace?

John Piper said, “My aim tonight is to persuade you of the truth — or at least open you to the truth — that **it is better to lose your life than to waste it**... when he says, “I do not count my life of any value but for this one thing,” isn’t he saying, “Better to be faithful and die than unfaithful and live”? Or, “Better to lose your life than to waste it”? My goal is not to stay alive. My goal is to stay on course... A Christian who says, “Better to lose my life than to waste it” and who means it for Jesus’s sake is not speaking in his own power. He is constrained by the Spirit. This is how we all got started on this race when we were dead in our sins. How did you come to say from your heart, “Jesus is Lord”? Paul tells us how we came to say that in 1 Corinthians 12:3: “No one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” You would never have said, “Jesus is Lord” unless constrained by the Holy Spirit, overcoming all your fears and all your rebellion. And no Christian ever says, “Better to lose my life than waste it,” except by the Holy Spirit. This is the evidence that he is in you.” Is my goal to truly stay on the course God has set for me regardless of the cost? Explain.

Piper went on to say that “[w]e don’t all have the same form of ministry. But we do all have the same essential goal: to magnify the glory and the greatness of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This is the racecourse all Christians are running. The turns and the terrain are different. The aim is the same. Paul said in Ephesians 1:5–6: “God predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.” That is the **ultimate meaning of life — the meaning of the race — to live to make much of the glory of the grace of God**. That is the unwasted life.” In what way(s) have I made “much of the glory of the grace of God”? Explain.

Is the ultimate meaning of my life “to live to make much of the glory of the grace of God” or has it become something else? Explain.

Paul didn't shrink back from declaring, teaching and testifying to "the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) R.C. Sproul once explained the difficulty in doing what Paul did. Sproul said, "In order to preach a passage rightly, it must be preached in context. Context, however, isn't simply the verse or chapter before and the verse or chapter after; it is the totality of the Word of God. Thus, when we preach a particular passage, if we do it right, we actually are preaching the whole counsel of God. We preach the whole Bible every time we preach any passage of the Bible. We cannot rightly explain the love of God if we do not include an understanding of the wrath of God. And in like manner, we cannot rightly explain the wrath of God if we do not include the love of God. The Word of God, paradoxically, is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. But how can we capture the whole counsel of the Lord without swallowing the entire day of the Lord in the process? ...The solution comes when we remember that we not only ought to preach the passages as they come and that we not only ought to teach the whole of the Bible whenever we preach any of the Bible, but that we must always preach Christ and Him crucified... That is, there is one hobby horse we must never dismount or allow ourselves to be bucked from. The one message that all the Bible proclaims, from cover to cover, is the story of Jesus Christ." That's what R.C. says is required of a pastor in preaching the full counsel of God. What is required of me as the hearer of the full counsel of God when it is being preached and why?

Pastor Wally encouraged that if "the world is not ashamed of their beliefs...don't be ashamed of [mine] and highlighted Romans 1:16-17 ("For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."). Spurgeon once said, "Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is the truth of God, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail." Pastor Wally clarified that the Gospel "is not a message about how to get into heaven. It is the message of the accomplished plan/purpose of God to save sinners from themselves." In 1 Corinthians 15:1-6, Paul says: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep." In other words, "Don't argue with me...it was all done "in accordance with the Scriptures" ...if you have a problem with the message, take it up with God." Do I have that kind of boldness or do I need the level of my boldness elevated? If so, how so? If not, why not?