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SERVING HIM WHO REDEEMED US II Corinthians 5:14-15

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again

The relationship between our salvation and our spiritual life has been aptly pictured as a train. The engine is what Jesus did, the car is what we do, and the caboose is how we feel about it all. Action, reaction, and emotion – in that order. Sadly, many of today's Christian denominations show all too well what happens when this sequence gets mixed up. For example, the Roman Catholics try to pull the train with the car of good works. Worse yet, the charismatic churches relegate the task of pulling the train to the lowly caboose of feelings and emotions. These and a hundred other misbegotten arrangements (some of them much more subtle, of course) have all run off the rails. Why? Because they refuse to allow the objective fact of Christ's redemption do the work. They all put something ahead of the Gospel, or attach something to it.

In contrast, our text for today tells us that only the Good News of what Jesus did for us can bring salvation. It's also the only thing that can provide proper motivation for our spiritual life. The Gospel alone is the stimulus that can produce any God-pleasing service on our part. That's why our theme for today isn't "Serving Him Whom We Love," or "Serving Him Who Rewards Us." No, the theme is rather:

SERVING HIM WHO REDEEMED US

Why do people join a church? Why do people try to live right, avoid sin, and serve God? Obviously, we can't answer that question for everybody. Many people do it for the wrong reasons. But we *can* answer for ourselves. For us, there is only one reason to serve our Redeemer: we do it out of gratitude to our Lord. **The stimulus is what Jesus did for us!**

"Jesus led a sinless life to give me perfect righteousness. Jesus died an innocent death to secure for me forgiveness of sins." Simply stated, this is the only stimulus that can bring forth a God-pleasing response from the individual believer. To really serve God as He wants to be served, every action and reaction must flow from the objective, historical fact of what Jesus did for us. Unfortunately, most people reverse that emphasis. An old evangelical pastor once complained, "These days people are constantly asking me, 'Do you love the Lord? Do you love the Lord?'- as though that's what my salvation depended on. The real question is, 'Does the Lord love me?!'"

The Lord *did* love this world full of lost sinners, including you and me, and He proved it by offering the ultimate sacrifice. What Jesus did for the world is a matter of record. It's simply a fact. The salvation Jesus earned for you and me is something God bestows on us, the Bible says, as a free gift of His grace. "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.*" --II Cor 5:19.

What a marvelous thing is the free grace of God! This is something that is completely contrary to our natural experience. Society teaches us that "there's no such thing as a free lunch;" if you receive a benefit, you must expect to pay for it in one way or another. But what does the Lord say? In Isaiah, we hear His gracious invitation, "*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*" --Is 55:1. God invites us to feast on the Bread of Life, our Savior, completely free of charge. No conditions. No strings attached. We are simply offered the opportunity to exchange the spotted garment of the flesh and of our own righteousness for the pure white robe of Christ's righteousness. Perfect holiness -- free. Full forgiveness -- free. Peace with God, a quiet conscience, confidence for the future, the promise of everlasting life -- all free!

And notice I said "free", not "cheap". The grace of God is offered to us free, but it certainly did not come cheap, and we dare never represent it as thus. A Christian writer named Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Such grace is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'ye were bought at a price,' and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us." We need to remind ourselves ever and again that the Lord didn't just wave a magic wand and make our sins disappear into thin air. As a just God, He couldn't do that. No, payment was demanded, and full payment was made. The enormous weight of our sins was lifted from our shoulders -- and laid upon the shoulders of Christ. He carried those sins all the way to the cross, and there endured all the punishment they deserved.

When the cup of God's wrath over sin had been drained to the last drop, Jesus said, "*It is finished.*" Precious words! Not, "It is almost finished," or, "it is finished for the time being." Jesus didn't say, "Well, My part is finished -- now good luck with your part!" No, our salvation is complete. Nothing remains to be done. To Christ's completed work of redemption we need add nothing. In fact, we dare not try to add anything lest, as the heterodox churches, we thereby deny the all-sufficiency of our Savior's sacrifice. "*If by grace,*" Paul says, "*then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.*" --Ro 11:6.

Yes, God's piercing Law leaves us no room but to despair of our own worthiness. But the message of God's grace is that despite our wretched condition, the Lord chose us for His own in Christ, "*...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us.*" --Col 2:14. C.S. Lewis gave a striking illustration of this. It's long ago that I read it, but it's stuck with me through the years: a wealthy prince announced that he would seek a bride from among his people, who would reign with him as his queen. He searched high and low, and finally came to a grimy back alley, where he found a bedraggled harlot sitting in the gutter. She was so ill-used and ugly that no one wanted her anymore, and all that remained for her was to die. But it was to this filthy creature

that the prince kindly extended his hand and said, "You are the one I have chosen to be my queen. Come and share the splendors of my kingdom!"

It's a real-life rags to riches story -- it's your story and my story. Not only has the Lord pardoned us from the certain death our sins deserved, but we also find ourselves lifted to the exalted position of *"a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people."* And all this, solely by merit of the blood and righteousness of our Savior. No wonder, then, that we value so highly the redemption won for us by Christ! It is our precious treasure - the pearl of great price that, by comparison, exposes all the flashy jewels of this world as nothing more than worthless imitations.

If the dying love of our Redeemer is the stimulus, then the response to that stimulus cannot be in question. We respond by **SERVING Him who redeemed us.**

The service that the Christian renders to Christ has always been, and ever must remain, a reflex action. John says plainly, *"We love Him because He first loved us."* --I Jn 4:19. Now, different Christians will serve Jesus in different ways, according to the gifts given them of the Lord. But in each case, the reason they do it will be identical: grateful response to the Good News about Jesus. Certainly we must preach the Law, we must identify and condemn sin in all its forms. But the unconditioned Gospel is what produces holy lives of Christian service. It's the only thing that works.

The Christian's response to the Gospel is reflexive, automatic, something he may not even realize he's doing. Paul served his Redeemer by sharing the Good News with as many people as he could during his missionary career. But although his service to Christ was nothing less than monumental, he never thought of taking credit for his work. In fact, he admitted that he didn't have any choice in the matter! *"For if I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel!"* --I Cor 9:16.

The same is true of each of us who has heard and believed the Gospel; *"necessity is laid upon us."* Like the Apostle Paul, we too must admit that we have no choice in the matter of serving Christ. We have to do it. But we don't say this with grudging resignation, as though it were some sort of heavy burden. Rather, our obligation to Jesus is a delightful one, akin perhaps to the "obligation" that a joyful bride might feel toward her beloved bridegroom. With our sins behind us, and heaven before us, it can only be a supremely happy necessity that is laid upon us! Can we do anything else but serve the Lord who bought us? No! Our text says, *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*

I read recently about an interesting custom they had in ancient China. If it happened that you were in danger, and a certain person rescued you and saved your life, then you were socially obligated to be that person's servant for the rest of your days. Well, it only makes sense, doesn't it? If it weren't for your "savior", they reasoned, you

would have no life at all; it only follows that what life is left you should be wholly given over to the one who saved it. What a perfect picture of the service a Christian renders his Redeemer! When we consider, with a shudder, the lake of fire, the everlasting chains, the weeping and gnashing of teeth -- well, I think you'll agree it gives new meaning to the phrase, "I owe You my life."

Through Jesus' redeeming work, we have escaped the torments of hell and glimpsed the delights of heaven. Naturally, the first emotions we feel are relief and gratitude. When the Holy Spirit shows us the sheer enormity of our windfall, we're immediately prompted to ask, "What can I now do for You, Lord?"

We feel compelled to do something. As our text says, the love of Christ constrains us to serve Him. And the Lord tells us exactly how to do that. Jesus said, "*If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed.*" --*Jn 8:31*. God's Word is full of direction on how grateful believers may show their appreciation for the free gift of salvation. We serve Jesus by giving Him the glory due His name. We bring Him, daily, the sacrifices He most appreciates: those of a broken spirit and a contrite heart. We rest our confidence wholly on Him, and push back the idols of this world that seek to supplant His place as our one true God. We revere the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word through which His grace is revealed. Further, we reflect His love by shedding the light of that love abroad to those who are still in darkness, and especially by dealing in a loving manner with the Christian brothers and sisters who share our fellowship.

Clearly, there are dangers to be faced. The doctor's hammer stroke to the knee brings an automatic response from the leg; if it doesn't, we know that something is wrong. Jesus' love for the members of His body likewise stimulates a reflex on our part. If it doesn't, we know that there's something out of whack with our spiritual reflexes. The "Unholy Three" of devil, world and our own sinful flesh each have their ways of dulling these reflexes. If unchecked, any of the three is capable of inducing spiritual paralysis, and eternal death.

But even in the face of these dangers the Gospel of Christ will prove the antidote for the reflex-numbing poison of the Unholy Three. The best pattern for our service to Jesus is the humble, loving service that He selflessly rendered to us. That's why Paul says, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who...humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross!*" --*Php 2:5-8*.

Christians, have courage! Our Lord has not left us defenseless and unprepared for the fight. In truth, He has placed a veritable arsenal at our disposal. Paul enumerates the weapons we have ready to hand: *the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the footgear of the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of God's Word*. We are not free, as soldiers of the cross, to leave one or the other of these accoutrements at home to gather rust. No, our duty is to buckle on the entire outfit every day. "*Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*" --*Eph 6:13*. Commenting on this verse, Martin Franzmann noted with relief that the Lord doesn't require us to dance. "The time for

dancing in the streets is not yet." For now, we are commanded simply to stand firm in His Word. We will have our hands full enough with that task!

Is there the possibility of failure? Might we conceivably lose out in our struggle against the elements of evil that oppose us? Not if we rest our hope in our Redeemer! Then we can confidently affirm with Isaiah, *"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."*