

## Week of June 3, 2012

### *A Legacy of Love*

#### **Passage Outline:**

1. **Love Compelled** (2 Cor. 5:14-15)
2. **Love Communicated** (Acts 17:1-4)
3. **Love Continued** (1 Thess. 1:2-10)

#### **What This Lesson Is About:**

This lesson is about Paul's motivation for ministry—the love of Christ—and how Paul showed that love to the church in Thessalonica, a church that shared that same love with others.

#### **How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life:**

This lesson can help you identify ways you can communicate the love of God to others.

#### **Spiritual Preparation Through Personal Bible Study**

D. L. Moody is a name you might know. He was personally responsible for preaching to over one hundred million people and personally witnessed to nearly three quarters of a million people, and he did this long before the development of mass communication or easy travel. He died in 1899.

His story is also typical in that a devoted Sunday School teacher led him to Christ. After Moody began his ministry, a fellow preacher powerfully influenced him, changing the tone and direction of Moody's preaching. Countless ministers have this kind of testimony. What makes Moody's story different, and particularly appropriate for a lesson on the legacy of love, is that both of these major influences in his life emphasized the central importance of God's love. The Sunday School teacher, Edward Kimball, emphasized God's love. The preacher, Henry Moorehouse, convinced Moody the central message of the Bible is God's love. Moody picked up the message of God's love, making it the major theme of his sermons. From that foundation Moody passed along a legacy of love that influenced millions.

The greatest motivation for change in a person's life is love. That "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16) means we have a legacy from the Father to develop and pass along to others. This last lesson on our study theme of "A Lasting Legacy" takes us to the zenith of what a legacy is all about. God gives what we most desperately need, and He intends for us to share that gift with others whose needs are equally desperate.

Studying this lesson can help crystallize the major theme of the entire Bible and adopt it more completely as the foundation for your life and ministry. You are a teacher. How wonderful is your task to tell other people weekly about God's love for them! People want to be loved. They are searching. You can point them to the answer for their quest and their questions. By identifying ways to more clearly communicate God's love to them, you will pass along a legacy of love.

#### **Love Compelled** **(2 Cor. 5:14-15)**

**14 For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. 15 And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.**

In this section of his letter, Paul focused on the motivation for his ministry and mission. False teachers had infiltrated the church and attempted to undermine Paul's authority as an apostle and usurp his leadership in the church. Part of Paul's response was to explain his motive for coming to them in the first place. He did not seek financial gain or self-promotion. He founded his ministry entirely on love.

He summed up his motive for ministry in the phrase **for Christ's love compels us** (see this lesson's word

study on “Compels”). The Greek syntax allows various interpretations: either the love Christ has for us, the love we have for Christ, or both loves. The former translation, as represented in the HCSB, is much more likely. Paul was overwhelmingly motivated by **Christ’s love** for him. Based on that love he risked his life, and eventually gave his life, in the effort to tell other people about **Christ’s love** for them.

Paul arrived at this fundamental insight after a long journey. His conversion on the road to Damascus culminated what I believe were previous suspicions that his pharisaical weights and balances theology was terribly flawed. He could never be good enough to earn God’s favor, but here was the insight: what he would never be good enough to earn through works was already available to him through God’s love and grace. Paul’s response was reasonable and life changing. He realized he could receive through faith what he could never earn. God’s favor was His gift because of His love, not because of Paul’s manufactured goodness.

A further insight concerns the nature and purpose of **Christ’s love**, namely it is an active force to change people, not an overly sentimental emotion. God’s love, born out of His nature, must become the Christian’s driving force. God’s love is not merely to be received and enjoyed; it must be shared and multiplied among all people. The love of God for us is intensely personal, but it must never be kept private.

God’s expansive love for all people led Paul to another insight. He realized that **One died for all**, that is Christ died for every person. That meant that **all died**, that is though all people need Christ’s sacrifice and offer of grace, only believers experience the benefit of His death. Even a straight-laced Pharisee was not born spiritually alive. All people need the life Christ offers through His love.

This former Pharisee had long thought Gentiles generally were beyond the reach of God’s covenant. Of course, Paul would have accepted, perhaps reluctantly, the occasional convert to Judaism, but he would never have conceived of an active mission to bring Gentiles into the covenant! Discovering Christ’s love for **all**, however, meant Paul became an Apostle to the Gentiles, sharing Christ’s love with them. The same love that drove Christ to the cross drove Paul into Gentile lands to share this good news.

As teachers we might have a variety of motivations for weekly preparation and class leadership. We have been asked to teach, probably by one of the church’s ministers or a member in charge of recruiting teachers. We want to justify their trust in us and help the church. That is a fine motivation. We also have class members who rely on our preparation and teaching. They likely praise us and show their appreciation in numerous ways. Meeting their need is important and valid. We might also have a gift for teaching, and exercising that gift weekly fulfills part of the purpose for which God created us. Again, this is an entirely appropriate motivation for teaching.

One motivation should reign over all others, however. The love of Christ **compels us** to share His love with others because He loves all others deeply, too. There will be times when weekly preparation is a burden and time seems limited. Some Sundays simply do not appear from any outward standard to have been successful. We could have multiple reasons at any given time to give up this place of service. But we will have one enduring reason to keep going back. Christ loves the people who come to our classes, and we have the wonderful opportunity to share that good news every week. Pray that God will burden you to share faithfully the love of Christ with all people.

The love of Christ is more than simply an invitation to enter His grace, it is also a motivation for living in a way that honors God. Believers **no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them**. Paul underscored here the fact that salvation is not only a means of getting into heaven, but a way of life, motivated by Christ’s love, that applies to every single moment of life.

You might occasionally run across people who appear to treat the grace of God as an excuse to live riotously, sinning so that grace may abound (see Rom. 6:1). This abuse of grace ignores the transformational effect of grace. God’s love that we receive through grace changes us from the inside. We live for Him daily as an expression of gratitude, obedience, and above all as an expression of our love for Him. Thus, Christ’s **love compels us** both to share that love and to live in love.

Take a moment to reflect again on the fact that Christ loves you. What difference has His love for you made in your life? Never forget or neglect the truth of His love for you. You cannot share effectively what you have not embraced fully.

**Think about the specific circumstances that led to your first agreeing to become a teacher. Circle factors that led you to your present ministry; underline your primary motivation for being a teacher.**

**Love to study the Bible      Like being around people      Enjoy influencing others  
Arm-twisted into doing it      Feel called by God      Love God and want to serve Him  
Somebody had to do it**

**How often do you think about God’s love for you (and for class members) as a primary motivating factor for teaching?    Never    Rarely    Sometimes    Occasionally    Regularly**

### **Love Communicated (Acts 17:1-4)**

**1 Then they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As usual, Paul went to the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead: “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.” 4 Then some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a great number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.**

If the first section of this lesson described the principle that drove Paul’s mission, this section demonstrates the practice of that principle. This passage opens a window into Paul’s second missionary journey as described in Acts. Along with Silas and Timothy, he had traveled **through Amphipolis** [am FIP uh lihs] **and Apollonia** [ap uh LOH nih uh], two cities in Macedonia [mass uh DOH nih uh] that were on a the well-traveled Via Egnatia, a major east-west highway connecting the Roman Empire. Neither city had a synagogue, and for this reason Paul likely did not stop to preach the gospel there.

His goal was **Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue**. Paul’s Jewish background and deep familiarity with Scripture resonated with people who shared a longing and expectation for the **Messiah**. He began by sharing the rather stunning revelation **that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead**. First-century Jewish expectation of the Messiah did not include any idea of suffering, certainly not death on a cross. Paul’s insistence on sharing the entirety of the gospel, including the cross, caused violent responses from his countrymen during the first missionary journey (Acts 14:5,19), and more violence was in store. Paul was undeterred because the love of Christ compelled him to share the gospel even with a reluctant audience.

**A previous *Biblical Illustrator* article ““The Scriptures” in Jesus’ Day” (Winter 2002-2003) relates to this lesson and can be found on the Spring 2012 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).**

Two principles stand out in the passage so far. First, a teacher must know the Scripture in order to share it effectively. I am constantly amazed by ways God speaks through His Word. The effectiveness of our witness generally, and the effectiveness of our teaching in particular, rests first on fidelity to the Bible not the cleverness of presentation. We cannot be brilliant enough to corner someone into the kingdom! As a teacher maintain fidelity to God’s Word even if the audience does not appear to be responding positively.

A second important principle emerges from Paul’s ability to communicate to the people. He was a good teacher. He spoke in synagogues where the message would have been more likely to be heard and understood. But Paul also demonstrated an ability to adjust his approach to the audience. In Thessalonica he spoke as a Jew to other Jews. Later in this chapter he would philosophize with the Greeks in Athens, the geographic center of their philosophical culture. Without ever sacrificing the central truth of the gospel, Jesus Christ crucified and raised, Paul considered different ways he could effectively communicate God’s love in his world.

Every teacher should have this same willingness to consider ways to improve delivery of the message. Without question, gaining a hearing for the gospel today is more difficult than in the recent past. Our message competes with countless other messages in a culture trained to regard all messages as equally valid. It would be easy to blame the stoniness of the soil and leave the matter there, but a good teacher also considers the effectiveness

of the sowing. Take advantage of materials that can augment your study and opportunities to learn about effective teaching techniques. Read commentaries. Attend training events. You can pick up valuable insights that will improve your teaching. In fact, one undeniable principle in effective teaching is that the good teacher never stops learning.

Paul's faithful teaching over a period of **three Sabbath days** resulted in **some** Jews becoming followers of Christ, as well as **a great number of God-fearing Greeks**, and **a number of the leading women**. This rather brief period of time might lead us to assume that Paul simply held the equivalent of a three week revival and moved on. However, we have two letters Paul wrote later to the Christians at Thessalonica that indicate he formed lasting relationships during his time there.

Because the very foundation of our mission rests on Christ's love and His desire to form a relationship with us, we know that the gospel is best received in a context of relationships. Taking time to get to know class members, praying with them, simply enjoying time with them should be genuine expressions of the love of Christ through you to them. Christ is our example here. To communicate love most effectively we must show love to the people we are trying to reach.

**Okay, it's time to grade yourself (again!) as a teacher. Review the three principles explained above, what grades would you give yourself?**

<b>PRINCIPLE</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
<b>Being a student of the Scriptures</b>	_____
<b>Using good communication skills and various styles</b>	_____
<b>Developing personal relationships with your learners</b>	_____

**What can you do to "pull your grades up"? Ask God to help you live out your love for Him and your class members in your role as a teacher.**

### **Love Continued (1 Thess. 1:2-10)**

**2** We always thank God for all of you, remembering you constantly in our prayers. **3** We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, **4** knowing your election, brothers loved by God. **5** For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. You know what kind of men we were among you for your benefit, **6** and you became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. **7** As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. **8** For the Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything, **9** for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God **10** and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The seeds Paul planted in Thessalonica grew and multiplied in wonderful ways. In fact, the opening verses of 1 Thessalonians are some of the warmest, most affirming in all of Paul's letters. Characteristic of his letters is a lengthy opening summation of his **prayers** for the church. Paul was both brilliant and prayerful, and he would be the first to emphasize the primary importance of the latter quality. Our love for others should be undergirded by our consistent prayer for them.

**Two previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Thessalonica" (Spring 1978) and "Paul and the Thessalonians" (Winter 1997) relate to this lesson and can be found on the Spring 2012 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).**

The numerous affirmations for the Thessalonians includes Paul's acknowledging their **work of faith** and **la-**

**bor of love.** In the same sentence he noted that all of this great work through them began because they were **loved by God.** We see the legacy of love beginning with God Himself, passed along to Paul, received and transmitted through the Thessalonian believers. We witness here the legacy of love passed along from one generation of Christians to the next.

One potentially confusing phrase is *your election*. This term highlights God's initiative in salvation. Salvation did not begin with us, and is impossible in our own strength. But having begun with God's **election** we are enabled through His gift of free-will to respond positively to His initiative. Paul's letters are in full agreement with the entire Bible's twin affirmation of God's sovereignty and humanity's free will. One does not negate the other.

We should pause here to express gratitude for all the previous generations who ensured our opportunities to share in this legacy of love. As in the opening illustration for this lesson, let us remember clearly the people who led us to Christ. But we can also think beyond them, to the earlier generations that stretch all the way back to Paul or other of the earliest Christian missionaries. In that long line of witnesses is God's church that has faithfully, even if sometimes falteringly, transmitted the message of Christ's love. We are merely part of the latest generation to be compelled by that love.

Paul's effectiveness rested not **in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance.** He relied on resources beyond his own strength. The success of the early church, indeed its resilience through the centuries, testifies not to the sophistication of human efforts but to the empowering presence of God.

In the classroom on Sunday mornings, we should be keenly aware of and seeking to communicate the sense of God's presence. One of the most remarkable facets of Scripture is that in reading, studying, and presenting the Bible we are not dealing with words only. From the sacred pages rises up a figure who is no less than Christ Himself! To draw on Paul's image of **power**, the spiritual potential of ministry among class members is electric. We must never forget that great things can happen when we prayerfully and carefully prepare to teach a lesson. The one immutable quality of the class this coming Sunday is that God will be present.

Paul also acknowledged the powerful impact of personal example, for without hesitation he reminded the Thessalonians of the **kind of men we were among you**, even affirming with unblushing confidence that the Thessalonians **became imitators of us and of the Lord.** No one can seek this role proudly. To become an apt role model requires extreme humility. Paul's ultimate reward as an humble and faithful role model was his joyful observation that the Thessalonians themselves **became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia** [uh KAY yuh]. You can hear Paul's thrill in the words, **For the Lord's message rang out from you.**

We can close this four week study of "A Lasting Legacy" with no better words than these: **the Lord's message rang out from you.** That message rang out to me through a choir teacher named Mrs. Carr who was patient with a little boy who was mildly interested in singing but not at all interested in standing still. The message rang out through a sixth-grade boys Sunday School teacher named Mr. Cochran who patiently redirected our efforts at transforming Sunday bulletins into airplanes and taught the Bible to literally generations of sixth-grade boys. The message rang out through Brothers Holland, Craig, and Pierce, pastors who each modeled for me some facet of God's love. All but Brother Pierce have joined the great cloud of witnesses, but their legacy continues.

I can recall with precision only a few words and a few images from the faithful men and women who guided me spiritually. But I can recall with tender fondness and lasting gratitude the love they showed a little boy, a teenager, a young man who limped along to Christ-likeness because of their examples of love. I have no higher purpose than to ensure that the same love of Christ that compelled them to work, sometimes without visible positive results, compels me also to pass along a legacy born in God's heart.

Each of us is the blessed beneficiary of a legacy formed of hope, faith, and love. We have no greater inheritance and can pass along nothing of greater value than this age-old legacy. May the Lord's message ring out from me. And from you.

**Dear teacher, do you see yourself in this amazing line of faith, hope, and love? On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (constantly), how regularly do you remind your class members that God is actively present in the**

room with all of you as you study His Word together? \_\_\_\_\_ How often do you remind your learners of the role each of them plays in passing on the legacy of Christ's love to those over whom they have influence? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus**

- Settle in your mind that Christ's love for all people is the highest and best motivation for your ministry.
- Christ's love can help you reach all kinds of people, even those who are different from you or especially difficult to love.
- Help others determine to pass along the legacy of love they have received by teaching them that their love for others will be their ultimate witness.
- By focusing on Paul's determination to share Christ's love and to be an example to Christians, increase the effectiveness of your ministry and testimony.

**As you close this time of personal study, take each of the Bible truths listed above and turn them into prayers back to God...for example, "Father, thank you for the love of Christ in my life. Help His love to become the highest motivation for my ministry as a teacher." As you pray, allow the Holy Spirit to add His "grades" to the things we have talked about all month long, and spend a few moments just allowing Him to speak to you even as you are speaking to Him.**

Word Study: *Compels* (KJV, "constraineth"; 2 Cor. 5:14)

The underlying Greek word literally means to hold fast or press together. It can be used of a disease that afflicts a person (Matt. 4:24), or to describe literally stopping up one's ears so as not to hear a message (Acts 7:57). The word indicates finality and a binding force expressed as commitment or decision. The word does not indicate in 2 Corinthians 5:14 a reluctance or an action against one's will. It denotes the final and ultimate motivation for sharing the gospel. Love is the key to Christian proclamation.