

ity, etc.” Wow, his list might sound like a lot of religious rules and regulations – unless you understand the power of the love of God. **The only reason people will really WANT to change is when they have a revelation of the love of God. That is the “gasoline” that will empower them to let God change them from the inside out.** Obedience out of a heart that loves God is very different than “religious obedience.”

Another passage that tells us how God’s love and grace will eventually change our outward behavior is Titus 2:11-15. In part, it says: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”* Thus, the grace of God is not a license to sin [as some accused Paul of preaching – Romans 6:1-2]. **No, the grace of God will teach you to live a different way. The love and grace of God are the only things that will help a person WANT to change from the inside out.** All the religious rules in the world only create frustration. All your self-determination to be a better person will never work. **The only freedom you will find is when you understand God’s great love for you – and that His grace (His ability) is there to help you change.** You will find the liberty, deliverance, and freedom that you have longed for when you simply learn to yield to God’s love and His ability (grace).

Let God’s Love Govern You

Really, when you think about it, being governed (constrained) by God’s love is what “walking in the Spirit” is all about. **If you walk in the Spirit, then you will conduct yourself in a way that is in harmony with God’s love (Gal 5:13-16).** Let’s consider an area that was a challenge in Paul’s day – and certainly still is today – the area of relationships and sex. When you read Paul’s writings, it’s clear that the early Church had its challenges with Christians being tempted in this area.

For example, you hear a lot in our culture about consensual sex. The idea is that if two adults consent, then it can’t be wrong. But did they ask God’s opinion? Does God consent to their consensus? 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 was written to Christians -- *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification;*

that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” So let’s consider this issue. Why would God prohibit you (or anyone) from sex outside of marriage? **The simple reason is that Christ wants to be the Lord of the other person’s life – not you. When you lead another person astray (even if they consent) – then you are interfering with God’s ability to lead them and guide them.** The Bible calls this “defrauding” the other person (vs. 6). In a sense, you are lying to them by promising things (either implied or spoken) that you cannot deliver. You can’t give them what only God can give them – lasting happiness, purpose, destiny, and true success. Basically, you are in the way and blocking God’s influence. Furthermore, that type of relationship is a form of idolatry because you are attempting to take first place in their lives, a place that is reserved only for God. It is still sin even if both of you “agree.” God designed sex to be an awesome gift within marriage. Outside of marriage, it eventually produces heartache, trauma, and disappointment. It may provide temporary joy, but it can never achieve the level that God intended within His design for marriage and family.

Regardless of what issue we may consider, it really comes down to one guiding rule – the love of God. The love of God ruling in your heart is the only thing that will give you the satisfaction that you long for. And, as we stated earlier, it is the only force that will help you “change” to become the person that God wants you to be. For me, the starting point is asking for a greater revelation of His love. Ask God to help you grasp just how much he loves you. Pray the prayer of Ephesians 3:14-20 (see above). **His love will change you and empower you to rise to the level that He intended you to walk in.**

Dear friend, my prayer is that you will make up your mind to live your life constrained by the love of God. Let His love be the guiding rule in all that you do.

■ Jason Peebles

Key Memory Verse:

“[I pray] that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love . . .”
Ephesians 3:17

Prayer for Greater Love

“Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins. I accept His sacrifice and commit my life to Him. Give me a greater revelation of God’s kind of love. I want to yield my heart to you in every way and be governed by your love in every area. In Jesus Name – Amen.”

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Perhaps the greatest factor that will determine your walk with God is what I call the “love factor.” How much do you love God? I can almost hear everyone respond in the same way -- *“But Jason, I TOTALLY love God!”* Do you?

If You Love Me

Jesus said in John 14:15 *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”* Later he repeats the same idea – *“He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me” (14:21).* Wow, that certainly puts a new twist on “the love factor” doesn’t it? **So let’s ask a very important question that strikes at the heart of the matter: “Is raw obedience equal to loving God?” I don’t think so.** If that were the case, then the Pharisees in the Bible would have been champions of God’s love, yet we know that was not true. **I know that in my own life, during some of my most disobedient times, my heart was still crying out to God to help me break free.** Even then, I had a deep seated love for God that was longing to bring me into a place of greater conformity to His will. The type of obedience that God wants is obedience that proceeds from a heart of love.

Love and Obedience

It's one thing to "say" we love Him and quite another thing when it comes to obedience. **The truth is our obedience (or lack of it) will be determined by how much we are motivated and governed by the love of Christ.** As a Christian, there will be many times in your walk when the Holy Spirit prompts you to do something (or conversely, not to do something) and at first, your flesh will resist the idea. It is in those moments that you come face to face with the idea of Lordship. Is your love for Him greater than your love of self? It might be an inner prompting from the Holy Spirit to reach out to someone who has offended you, drop a habit that is not healthy, or remain in a job when you would rather quit. Those are the times when you must learn to yield to the love of God. **2 Corinthians 5:14 is a powerful verse that says, "For the love of Christ constrains us." The apostle Paul had come to the point that God's love for him – and, likewise, his love for God – was the dominating force in his life.** The Amplified version puts it this way:

"For the love of Christ controls and urges and impels us, because we are of the opinion that [if] One died for all, then all died. And He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him who died and was raised again for their sake." 2 Corinthians 5:14

Wow! This verse reveals the main "engine" that drove the apostle Paul – the love of Christ. **Authentic Christian maturity is not about raw obedience, going to endless church meetings, or trying to act spiritual.** No, it's about the love of God bringing you into a greater union with Christ and conformity to His will.

Young and in Love!

Here's an example that I'm sure we have all observed. Have you ever noticed how young people act when they are first in love? It's really funny at times. **It's as if their love "constrains" them to do things that they otherwise would never do!** For instance, in the beginning, one of them may go to a particular restaurant that they really don't like, just

because the other person wants to go. Or, they might go hiking when hiking is the absolute last thing in the world they would do! When two people are in love, they will eat food they don't like and go places that they don't enjoy – all because they are madly in love. **Why? The simple answer is that the love they feel on the "inside" controls their behavior on the "outside."** And, it doesn't stop as you grow older. Even married couples will sacrifice because they love the other person. I think that's what the "honey-dolist" is all about! The husband will run errands and jump through hoops just because He loves and respects his wife. And, the wife will do the same. **You see, when you truly love someone, there are times when you push aside your own desires simply because you love and respect the other person.** Only a totally selfish person expects a relationship to be "all about them."



So how does all this relate to your walk with Christ? Well, the greatest commandment in the Bible is *"to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"* (Mt 22:37). **Your love for your Savior on the "inside" should start governing your actions on the "outside."** And, yes, sacrifice will be involved – but it should be a sacrifice that proceeds from love and not religious duty. There are times when the Holy Spirit will prompt you to push aside your own desires and follow His leading. This is the battle that the Bible describes between flesh and Spirit (Galatians 6:17). In order to walk in the Spirit, you will find that you need a greater revelation of the love of God. **Thus, dear friend, if you long for a deeper walk with Christ; if you have areas of**

disobedience that you are struggling with; or, even if you feel entirely away from God at the moment – let me suggest that you start praying for a greater revelation of the love of God in your life. God's love is the "seed" in your heart that will help you break free. This is what eventually brought the Prodigal son home and this is what propelled the apostle Paul on his journeys. You must let the love of Christ (and your love for Him) become the "engine" that drives your life.

Greater Revelation of His Love

Throughout his letters, the apostle Paul prayed for the believers of his day to have a greater revelation of God's amazing love for them. Paul knew that the "agape" love of God is the cure for every problem that we will ever face. Experiencing the depths of God's love in our own lives also frees us to love others with that same love. One of the best places to see this is in Paul's prayer of Ephesians 3:14-21. As a side note, let me encourage you to start praying this prayer for your own life. My feeling is that if it was good enough for Paul then it's good enough for me! I want you to study this prayer and see how it relates to our study on constrained by His love --

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from who the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."
Ephesians 3:14-20

Wow, this passage is so awesome! I've made it a habit for many years to pray through this passage every day for myself and my loved ones. First of all, notice that Paul is praying what I call an "inside/outside" prayer. He prays for the Holy Spirit to strengthen us on the inside (in the inner man) –

because he knows that when we are strong on the inside then we will be strong on the "outside." **And what is the thing that will strengthen you the most? Paul says it is being "rooted and grounded" in God's love.** When you face any problem of life, you will be stronger to face it when you remember just how much God loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His Son to die on a cross for you. Romans 8:32 connects the idea of God's love to every answer that you will need in life. It says, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, *how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?"* **When you remember the love of God, then it gives you a confidence that God will walk with you through anything. He is there to help you pay your bills, overcome tragedy, work through messes, and help you get on top!** If he did not spare his own Son then he will not limit his help for you in any way. An ongoing revelation of God's love is what we all need to stay strong on the "inside" in your mind and emotions.

So, dear friend, the next time that you are tempted to think you are not going to make it or that no one loves you – remember Romans 8:32 and Ephesians 3:14-20. **Yes, God loves you and has proved it by sending His Son. Allow that knowledge to strengthen you and embolden you.** By the way, one final note on Paul's prayer. Notice (see above) that the prayer ends by declaring God can do *"above all that we ask or think."* You can expect amazing results when you walk in the knowledge of God's awesome love.

The Grace of God Teaches Us

As you grow in God's love, His love will help you change in many ways. The New Testament is filled with passages that tell us to put off the "old man" and put on the "new man." Basically, it is talking about allowing the change on the "inside" to manifest on the "outside." **As the love of God begins to govern your life, you will want to lay aside negative things** -- lying, cheating, laziness, anger, bitterness, immorality, and every other work of the enemy. Ephesians 4:22-5:8 says precisely that. Paraphrasing, Paul said – *"Therefore put away lying / let him who stole steal no longer / let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth / let all bitterness and anger be put away / be kind one to another / put off sexual immoral-*