

Who Are You Living For?

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I want to ask each one of you sitting here within the sound of my voice, young and old, boys and girls alike, a very personal and in some ways a very simply question, but a question perhaps more than many others if not more than any others will help you to know precisely where you stand before the living God. And the question I want to ask you, that simple, personal, pointed question is this: who are you living for? Not a complicated question. According to the Scriptures, everyone of you is living basically for one of two people. You're either living for someone who is small, insignificant and, in reality, unworthy of being the object of your life, or you're living for One who is great and glorious and infinitely worthy of being the One for whom you live. Who are you living for? The youngest child who can take my question and process it in his brain and at least grasp the elements of what it means, that child is living for someone, someone worthy to be lived for or someone unworthy to be lived for. The oldest man or woman in this building is living for someone, someone worthy to be lived for or someone unworthy to be lived for.

We're going to answer that question looking together at a text found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 5, where we read in verse 15 these words: "And He [Christ] died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." There's the two people for whom each of us is living, one or the other. Sitting here tonight, everyone of you, regardless of age, regardless of background, regardless of understanding, is either living for yourself, or you're living unto Him who died and rose again.

As we attempt to wrestle with this question and the guidance this text gives us in wrestling with that question, I want you to note with me first of all who we all live for by nature. When Paul writes these words, he is explaining what makes him and his fellow laborers in the Gospel tic. He is explaining to these Corinthians what makes him what he is as a man and as a servant of Christ. And in that setting, he said in verse 14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us [that is, it holds us in its grip. Christ's love for us as His servants so seizes hold upon us that there are times we may appear out of our tree]." Notice, he says in the earlier part of the text (v. 13), "For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you." There are times when the Apostle was so constrained by the love of Christ in selfless service that people accused him of being out of his tree, having something less than a full load. And he says, "If that's so, then you must understand that something has taken hold of us. The love of Christ has taken hold of us. And that love, having taken hold of us, has changed us from what we once were. For we once were what all men are by nature, creatures who live unto themselves."

Now that's not the way God intended us to be. When we turn to Genesis 1 and 2 and read the account of the original creation, we see God creating the man and the woman in His own image, placing them down in a perfect environment, in a perfect

relationship with each other; giving to them a standard of obedience that was reasonable. And the creature, man (Adam and Eve), in that context of a perfect environment with no bent to evil, found their delight and their joy in living unto the God who made them. Doing His will, enjoying communion with Him, seeking to glorify Him in His world was the deepest delight of Adam and Eve. It was their blessedness as well as their joy. But when sin entered, all of that turned inward upon themselves. And from the tragic fall recorded in Genesis 3 to this very hour, each of us by nature is a creature who lives unto himself. Sin brought about nothing less than this horrible, wretched tyranny of self-centeredness. When God was pushed out of the place of being the One unto whom Adam and Eve were living, rushing into that vacuum of a vacated God, came a new god called self.

So when the Apostle writes these words, he can assume that all men without distinction, in terms of who they live for by nature, live unto themselves. And very early this shows itself in little ones. You see it in petulant, pouting self in a little toddler; in hot, temper tantrum self. You see it in their greedy, selfish self. Soon it merges into lying, manipulative self, into whining, sneaky self. And as the human soul and mind develop the ability to express this obsession with living to self multiplies in tragic and in horrible ways, no wonder the prophet could say, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way." In other words, we have all turned to living unto ourselves.

Now in some people, the living unto self finds expression in a life of open, evident, obvious, and in many cases a disgusting lifestyle of lawlessness and debauchery. In others, it expresses itself in moral, upright, cultured, refined self-centeredness. But the common denominator of every fallen son and daughter of Adam is that by nature he lives unto himself, his own pleasure, his own satisfaction, the seeking of his own ends, the pursuit of his own happiness. By his own rules and his own standards, he lives unto himself so that the Apostle can write, "He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves", because he knows that by nature each of us does indeed live unto himself. Who are you living for? Unless you've been transformed by the grace of God, while I know little of the specific details of your life, this much I can say on the authority of the Word of God, you live for yourself. Who do we all live for by nature? We live for this idol called self.

But then note secondly who some live for by the power of God's grace. According to our text, there are some like the Apostle Paul and his companions who live unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again. Some by the power of His grace no longer live unto or for themselves, but they live unto Him. And the "Him" in this passage is obviously the crucified and the risen Christ. He is referred to as the One who died and who rose again, a clear reference to the Lord Jesus. He was the subject of verse 14: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that One died for all, therefore all died." So the Apostle is saying with respect to himself and his companions, and as we shall see, this is true of him not because he was an apostle, but because he was a Christian. In the language of verse 17, his was in Christ, and being in Christ, was a new creation. So when he says, "that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again", he is not referring to himself because he is an apostle, but because he is a Christian.

The One who for whom some live by the power of God's grace is none other than the Lord Jesus who died and rose again on their behalf. His person is lived for in a loyalty that exceeds the loyalty to any other person. His will is chosen as a way of life. His

ways are desired and embraced as the pattern of life, not with perfection, not with equal constancy. But according to our text, the base line of their lives is this: when you ask them the question, "Who do you live for?", they are able to answer honestly and to validate it by the pattern of their lives. They live unto Him who died for them and rose again. In other words they can say with the Apostle Paul in the language of Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ. I live unto Him . He is the object of my life's focus, my desires, my ambitions, my standards, my goals. They all focus on Christ. They flow out of Christ and back to Christ. For me to live is Christ." Who are you living for? By nature, you with me must answer, if we're thinking Biblically, we live for ourselves. Who are you living for? If you can say, "I am no longer living unto myself, but unto Him who died for me and rose again", it is because the grace and power of God has come and changed the whole focus and the whole direction of your life.

Then note with me what it is that makes this difference. We've seen who we all live for by nature. We live for self. Who some live for by the power of grace, they live unto Christ. And what makes the difference? Well, if we read this whole section beginning with verse 14 in which the Apostle says, "The love of Christ constraineth us", we see that the death of Christ on behalf of sinners is the central theme of this whole section culminating in the Apostle's words in verse 20: "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." What makes the difference? Sitting here tonight, there are certain boys and girls, men and women of all backgrounds and degrees of knowledge. Some of you are living for yourself; some of you are living for Christ. What makes the difference? And what is the issue that divides the two groups? Well, according to the Apostle in this passage, it is the truth of Christ crucified brought home to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle could say in verse 14, "The love of Christ constraineth us [Christ's love for us holds us in its gracious pressure because we think in this way: that One died for all; therefore all died, and that those who receive life by that death, and they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again.]" What does all that language mean? Well it means this: the Apostle says when we contemplate what the death of Christ signifies, it is our understanding of the significance of His death that has brought us to the place where we no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who for our sakes died and rose again. This is what we understand: that living unto self is such a wretched and abominable thing in the sight of God, so provoking of His wrath and displeasure that it demanded the enfleshment of the second person of the deity; it demanded that Jesus Christ the God-man to be handed over to death to die under the wrath and curse of God. Now surely, if living unto self is such a disgusting, abominable, and wretched thing in the sight of God that nothing less than the bloodletting of incarnate deity can satisfy God's justice against living unto self, then surely, anyone who says,

"I see in a crucified and risen Christ my only hope of acceptance with this God, my only hope of the pardon of my sins, my only hope of being right with God, surely then, if I receive life from the death of Christ on behalf of sinners, that life is not to be lived to the end which demanded its death. Surely, the life received is not to be lived unto self. It was living unto self that provoked the wrath and anger of God. It was living unto self that caused the bloodletting of incarnate deity. Then surely, if I receive life

from the death of Jesus, it must be life no longer lived unto myself, but unto Him for my sake died and rose again."

You see the logic of that in the Apostle's words. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that One died for all, therefore all died [that is, all died in Him]." And what died in Him and with Him in His death spells the death knell to living unto self "that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." This passage clearly teaches that whenever the Spirit of God shows us what we are as sinners, and shows us something of the glory of God in the face of Christ crucified for sinners, there is the constraint of the love of Christ, and there is a perception of the purpose of the death of Christ that we no longer consciously, deliberately live unto ourselves, but unto this person, the Christ who died for us and rose again.

We learn, then, from this passage that all professed faith in Christ crucified that leaves people still wedded to themselves is spurious faith. A professed faith in a crucified Christ, a professed reception of pardon and forgiveness from a crucified and risen Christ that leaves someone still living to himself is not Biblical faith. The faith that is unto salvation and the pardon of our sins is a faith that brings us into this attachment to the person of Christ. And He does not take second or third place in the life so attached to Him. But that life is found being lived unto Him. Now if that is the teaching of the passage (and I believe it clearly is), do you see the tremendous relevance it has for so many matters that we get hung up on?

I want to speak a word to you young people tonight, some of you wrestling with this whole question, "Am I really attached to Christ in faith? Or is my faith Mom's faith, Dad's faith, and the church's faith? Is it really my faith?" May I give you one way by which to come perhaps quite quickly to an accurate answer. Who are you living for? You say, "Pastor, that's nebulous." Alright, let's get specific. You and Mom and Dad are having discussions over what kind of music you're going to listen to. Well, at the end of the day, kids, isn't this the issue? Do you really want nothing to come into your ears but that which is pleasing unto Christ? At the end of the day, it's not what kind of music do I like. But the real issue is what kind of music can I listen to and know that it pleases Christ. Rather simple, isn't it? You see, something else is at the focal point of your decision about the music you're going to listen to. It isn't whether or not it fits here or there on the scale of what others say is acceptable. The issue is, you want to please Christ. And you're willing for Christ to stand as Lord over your Walkman, over your CDs, over your radio, and over your stereo, not as some kind of a celestial bogymen, not as some kind of a celestial scrooge. But you know whatever is pleasing to Him is the thing that is good for you. Now I ask you teenager, is that the way you think at all?

You're wrestling with what is appropriate dress, what is innocent stylish dress, what crosses the line into the immodest and the bizarre?" Well, at the end of the day, isn't this the issue you need to come to grips with: I'm not my own. The cross of Christ has constrained me. I am now longer committed to live unto myself. The issue is not what pleases me but what will please Him. And I know He says whether I eat or drink or whatsoever I do, I'm to do all to the glory of God. So the issue is not whether I will be considered on the cutting edge of the latest styles or whether I will be considered a little doubtful and a little darky. The issue is, what will my Savior think? What will please Him? And you see, when that begins to be the focal point of life, you carry

about with you the means of finding the right standard, and it is living unto Him who for your sake died and rose again.

In the choice of your friends, this begins to be the litmus test: what will the Lord Jesus think? What will the Lord Jesus think about my choice of these friends? Will they be instrumental in His hands to help me in my Christian life to spur me to greater Godliness. I'm not talking about the friendships that you will prayerfully establish with a view to being a witness to the transforming power of the Gospel. I'm speaking about the choice of friends in whom I'll find delight and with whom I'll have voluntary companionship because they welcome what I have to impart to them, and I know I can welcome what they have to impart to me. And we do each other good on our way to heaven. "He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves [in the choice of their friends], but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." And when you can say, "For to me to live is Christ, pleasing Christ, doing the will of Christ, knowing what advances the honor of Christ. That's what I live for. I'm living unto Him." I say it resolves many of these little tacky issues.

I would be considered by many an old man, but my memory's not gone yet. And when God saved me as a teenager, this resolved about 98 percent of the issues with which a lot of you are wrestling. I had a passionate obsession to live unto the Christ who had rescued me from the horrible nagging guilt of an accusing conscience, the dread and fear of hell, the sense of no purpose and direction in life, the panic mode I was in as a senior in high school wondering what in the world am I going to do with my life? I'm at that age when people expect you to say what you're going to do when you're done with high school. "Are you going to college? What's it going to be? And how are you going to earn a living?" All of the purposelessness and confusion and lack of direction and accusing conscience was swallowed up in Him who died for me and rose again. And when I began to live unto Him, it was relatively easy to choose my friends, relatively easy to make choices about the music I listened to, relatively easy to make choices about clothing and a host of other issues over which I see so many young people constantly struggling until these things become almost an obsession. Can it be that the problem is you're dealing with rules and regulations, and you've never known what it is to be wonderfully arrested and blessedly obsessed with this person who alone is worthy to be the One you live under?

You're really not that big and wonderful a thing to be the object of your life. It's a tragic thing to live unto self. You're a small insignificant thing. You're not worthy to be the object of your life. There's Someone infinitely worthy. It's the glorious Son of God whose beauties cannot be described, whose glory cannot be spoken of by mortal tongues, the One who is even now the object of adoring worship of all of the intelligent creatures in heaven. God pulls back the veil in the book of the Revelation and gives us a little peek of those that cry, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Now you may think that you're pretty special, but you can't even draw your next breath unless God gives it. He gives to all life and breath and all things. And you may think you're pretty special. A few people think you're nice looking and handsome and attractive and well built. But in a national beauty contest, you wouldn't even make the second round. You say, "Pastor, that's not very flattering." That's reality. Who in the world are you to be made the object of your life, dependant upon God for your next breath? God could stop that heartbeat in a moment. What tragic folly to make yourself the object of your life, the one to whom you live.

God in Christ is prepared in His love and mercy to deliver us from that horrible tyranny of self-centeredness, and to free us into the glorious liberty of a Christ-centered life. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that One died for all, therefore all died [that is, all died in Him]." So wretched, so vile, so unworthy a thing is this living unto self that those who have thus lived are judged in the death of Christ so that all who by faith beholding God's glory in the face of a crucified Savior "no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." And that is so fundamental and radical a change that it is called in 2 Corinthians 5:17 a new creation. "If any man is in Christ, [a new creation]: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." And how new they are with this whole new center of life and existence. And all of them are of God's grace. Verses 18-20:

"But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us [now speaking as an apostle and his companions] the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."

Give up the god of self; be reconciled to the God who made you, the God to whom in Adam in Eden you were related as the center of your life. You have turned aside and turned to your own way. The Apostle said the great plea of the Gospel is, be reconciled to this God because this God has done an amazing work in Jesus Christ. And He has done it not only that we might have a righteous pardon, but that we might have a radically new center of life.

I come around full circle to where I began some 40 minutes ago with a simple, pointed, personal question: who are you living for? Are you living for yourself? You've got a tiny, shriveled, damning god. Or are you living unto Him who died and rose again for sinners? You have a glorious, saving, majestic, triumphant God worthy of being the One to whom you live. May God help you to honestly ask and realistically answer that question. And may you have no rest until you can say with the Apostle, "The love of Christ constrains me as well. For I thus judge that if One died for all, all died in Him. God has put His death sentence upon living unto self. And receiving life from a crucified and rising Savior, I now joyfully say, no longer to live unto myself but unto Him who died and rose again."

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