

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

“Compelled?”

Have you ever really felt COMPELLED to do something before? I mean, you are simply *convinced* that you need to do something? I am sure that most of us have had this feeling. But have you ever acted on a compulsion like I am talking about, and then had it turn out completely differently than what you had anticipated?

I will never forget the Christmas of 1983. I have already shared this story with some of you. I was single, I was 23 years old, and I was enrolled in my first year at Nazarene Theological Seminary. My oldest brother Rick and his wife Debbie lived in Kansas City as well. When December rolled around, we all wanted to go back to California to celebrate Christmas with our parents. My brother and his wife were planning to spend several weeks in California, but I was planning to take a seminary course that started at the beginning of January. And so they decided to drive the 1800 miles to California, and I decided to fly so that I could get back to Kansas City sooner.

But here is where the compulsion comes in. My brother and his wife had a little baby girl named Pamela. She was born in April of 1983, and so she was only about 7 ½ months old at the time. I was rather concerned about my brother and his wife making this 1800 mile trip in the dead of winter with my

little 7 month old niece. And so I got this idea that I was sure was divinely inspired. I decided that I could take my 7 month old niece with me on the airplane. My flight was only scheduled to last 5 hours, with one little stopover in Dallas on the way. When I arrived in California, my mother (Pamela's grandmother) could take over. The more I thought about it, the more I was sure that this was the right thing to do. I was simply compelled to do it!

When the day of the flight came, Debbie assured me that she had taken every possible precaution that no "accidents" would happen. Now when I say that my sister-in-law and I were concerned about an "accident" happening on the airplane, let me assure you that we were not worrying about an accident in the air; rather, we were worrying about a much greater "accident". I'm talking about an accident in the diaper!! You see, I had babysat Pamela many times in the months since she was born. One of her favorite people on earth was her "Uncle Danny." (You can't much blame her for that, can you?). I had done lots of things with Pamela. But one thing I had never done was clean up after the "big business" in her diaper. And so my sister-in-law Debbie took a whole barrage of precautions to make sure that Pamela would not "do the business" on the airplane. (Am I explaining myself clearly enough here, or do I need to get more graphic? Please don't make me be more graphic!).

Well, it was a beautiful day for flying. I was sitting very happily and satisfied in my seat next to the window on the airplane. Pamela was playing

contently on the floor of the airplane between my feet. I was sure that this was exactly the way God intended things to happen.

We were about 25 minutes into the flight, when this most intriguing aroma began to force its presence upon my happy thoughts. I looked at Pamela, and she was still playing very contentedly at my feet. Three minutes later, I decided that I could not ignore this fascinating smell any longer. Carefully, I picked Pamela up and put her on my lap. But here is now the problem. How do you know for sure that a baby has done “the business” in her diaper? Now that I am the father of four children, I am sure that I could write a dissertation on the many available “safe” methods of checking a baby’s diaper. But as a 23 year old single guy sitting on that airplane, there seemed to be only one way to know for sure. And so I did what I thought was best: I stuck my finger down into her diaper. (Do the motion).

What in the world do you do, when you are sitting in the middle of an airplane and you have baby “do do” all over your finger? You have to remember, this was a new experience for me. What are you supposed to do? My mind quickly scanned the possibilities. I couldn’t wipe it on my pants. I couldn’t wipe it on the bottom of my shoe. I couldn’t wipe it on my sock. I thought about wiping it off on the bottom of the chair I was sitting on, but I was still sitting there! What do you do? After about 20 seconds of panicky deliberation (and believe me, those were 20 of the longest and smelliest

seconds I have ever lived through), I finally decided that there was only one place to put my finger. I needed to put it back where I found it. And so I quickly stuck my finger back in her diaper and tried to wipe it off. When I was finished, my finger didn't smell so good, but at least it did look relatively clean.

Well, this was only the beginning of a nightmare flight that I will never forget. I missed my connecting flight in Dallas, the airport in Dallas got fogged in so that all the other flights were delayed. My flight that was only supposed to last 5 hours, ended up lasting longer than 12 hours before I made it to California. And my sweet little niece did the "big business" not just ONE time, but FOUR different times.

I remember telling my mother, when I finally got off the airplane and handed Pamela over to her, "Mom, I'm never going to have kids!"

But what about that "compelled" feeling that I felt when I started out to do what I thought that I had to do? I mean, this whole thing turned out to be a lot harder (and a lot smellier) than I had anticipated! Was that feeling of compulsion wrong? Did I misunderstand what I thought that God was leading me to do? What does it mean to be compelled?

If you have your bibles, I want to read with you a short passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. I want to read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15.

[Read Scripture: 2 Cor. 5:11-15]

When I read this passage, I am especially captured by the meaning of the word "compel" in v. 14. The NIV translates this verse by saying: "For Christ's love compels us...". But what does this word really mean? And what does Paul mean when he says that "Christ's love compels us"? When you start to look at different translations of this same verse, you will quickly find that the different translations of the Bible really do not agree in their translation of this word. The King James Version says, "For the love of Christ *constraineth* us." The NASB says, "For the love of Christ *controls* us." The Rheims New Testament says, "For the charity of Christ *presseth* us. The New American Bible says, "The love of Christ *impels* us." And the New Revised Standard Version says, "The love of Christ *urges us on.*" I hardly know what most of these words *mean*, so how can I understand what Paul is trying to say! (just joking!). What does Paul mean when he says that Christ's love compels us?

Now, you will have to forgive me here because I REALLY like to look at the meanings of words, especially GREEK words. I guess it is one of those occupational hazards we always hear about. (This also explains why Greek scholars are usually the ones sitting by themselves at parties).

The word that Paul uses here in v. 14 is the Greek word  $\sigmaυνε\xi\omega$ . Now I know that you really didn't want to know this, but I told you anyway. But what

is interesting here is that Paul only uses this Greek word twice in all of his writings.

Look at how Paul uses this word here in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. He starts this passage by saying, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” Do you see the two sides in this? There is a certain polarity that Paul seems to be hinting at here. On the one side, you have the Lord, and Paul’s deep fear (actually, his deep reverence) for Christ in light of the fact that we all will have to appear before the judgement seat of Christ. This is what he says in v. 10. And on the other side, there is the persuasion of the men and women that he comes into contact with. On the one side, there is the Lord, and on the other side, the persuasion of people.

In verse 13, Paul talks about his “state of mind”. He writes, “If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God. If we are in our right mind, it is for you.” There are many different ways that we can interpret these words here, but I want to point out to you once again the polarity that is apparent here. On the one side is God, and it is as if someone is saying to Paul, “All of this God stuff! You are out of your mind.” On the other side is the group of Corinthian believers, these are PEOPLE. And it is as if someone is saying to Paul, “Come on, Paul. Think about us. Be normal! Be in your right mind.”

It is in the context of this polarity—this tension, it would seem, between God and people, between the fear of the Lord and the “anxiety” of trying to

persuade people—that Paul uses his word  $\sigmaυνε/ξω$  for the first time. Christ’s love “compels” us. Before we look at this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 a little bit further, let me tell you about the SECOND time—the only other time—that Paul uses this word.

The other place Paul uses this word is in Philippians. You will remember that Paul is writing to his Philippian friends in the first chapter about his present condition. Despite the theme of joy that seems to run throughout this entire letter, it doesn’t take too long for us to realize that things are not exactly “picture perfect” for Paul. First of all, Paul is in prison. Believe me, this is NOT where Paul wanted or planned to be writing from. Second, it seems that there was a group of people who were somehow “preaching Christ” just to make things worse for Paul. They are preaching just to make life more difficult for Paul!! I am not sure how we need to interpret this, but I am sure that it was not what Paul expected other “preachers of Christ” to be doing. And then Paul shares with his readers in Philippi that he is actually facing the possibility of a death sentence. It is in the context of these verses that Paul uses his word  $\sigmaυνε/ξω$  again. Paul says, “I don’t know what is going to happen. I might live, I might die. But either way, I want Christ to be glorified, to be exalted, in my body.”

And then Paul seems to begin to think about life or death. If he had the choice, what would he personally choose? If I were to die, Paul says, this

would mean Christ. I would be with Christ, I would be in His presence, I would be united with Him. And so on the one side, there is death and Christ.

But if I were to live, Paul says, this would be an advantage—a gain—for other believers. If I were to live, I would be able to spread the Gospel even further. Despite being in prison, despite having all the opposition, despite all the pain and disappointment, life would mean that I could bring more people to Christ. “Living in the body,” Paul says, “would mean fruitful labor for me.” On the one side, then, there is death and Christ. And on the other side there is life (with its pain and disappointment), but also its gain.

Just like in 2 Corinthians, there is a polarity that is visible here. Paul says, “For my part, I desire to depart (to die) and be with Christ, which is better by far. But for you, it would be better if I remain in the body.” What would I choose? Paul says. And then he uses his word again in verse 23: I do not know! I am “torn” (συνεξω) between the two. I am torn, “compelled”, between the two. And so this is the way that Paul uses this word “compelled” in Philippians.

So when we return to 2 Corinthians 5, what does Paul mean when he says that Christ's love "compels" us? I guess that is where we started, right?

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, I believe that Paul means that the realization and the truth of what Christ has done for us so controls and so determines our lives that we really have no "choice". Paul tells us in verse 15 that Christ died

for us and was raised again. In the light of this fact, in the light of this truth, with the realization of what Christ has done for us, what else can we do but to follow this love? Paul says, "Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all." In order to be spiritually "content", I have discovered that I can do nothing else but to follow and to be faithful to that love. Christ's love compels us.

If Christ's love truly compels us, it means that there are going to be some major repercussions that take place in our lives. It means that we are going to have to make some major choices and decisions. And these decisions will often feel like they are tearing us in two!

Using the same word in Philippians as he does in 2 Corinthians, Paul explains that this compulsion by Christ's love means that his own "personal preferences" are no longer uppermost. This is so much the case that even DEATH is compelling, should that be Christ's will.

But do you know what? As difficult as death might sound, I am convinced that there are some times when staying alive and remaining faithful to the call God has placed in our lives is even harder. As most of you know, my family and I moved to Holland and lived there for almost 10 years in order for me to earn my doctorate at the University of Leiden. Believe me, it was a very big decision to move to Holland with 3 young children at the time. (David, our fourth child, was born after we lived in Holland). But we prayed

seriously about it, and both Mieke and I felt like this was what God wanted us to do.

When we got to Holland, it seemed like everything went wrong!! We couldn't find a house or apartment to live in, and so we had to live with my parents-in-law for the first 9 ½ months in Holland. I got into a strong argument with my supervising professor at our very first meeting together, and he told me that I had made a mistake to come to Holland to try to study with a family. One thing after another, everything just seemed to fall apart!

I have to be honest with you that I prayed earnestly to God for him to “call” me back home. I didn't feel like I could turn my back on the strong conviction that had led Mieke and me to Holland, and so I prayed and cried out to God to reverse his call, and to send me back home to America. But God didn't!

After months of fighting with God to change his call for me and my life, I finally came to the conclusion that I had to STAY in Holland and to study. It was one of the hardest decisions of my life. For several months I was so miserable that I felt like I was dying! As a matter of fact, I often felt like I would rather die than to stay in the situation I was in.

I think that this is what Paul says in Philippians! He would personally even choose death over life if it were his own choice. But he is "torn"; he is compelled; he is controlled by God's will instead of his own.

The question we need to ask ourselves, then, is the "compelling" question. Does Christ's LOVE compel us, or are we compelled by something else? Are we compelled by our own desires, by our own wishes, by our own preferences, by our own comfort? Or are we compelled by Christ's love? If we are to be the people God is calling us to be, if you are going to be the person God is calling you to be, then you will be compelled by Christ's love.

Now I know that this all sounds very nice and fine while we are sitting here in a cozy chapel service. But how does this work out in the struggles we run up against in our daily lives? So, how about you? Now that you are confronted with the reality of living in Colorado Springs, now that you are confronted with the harsh realities and demands of studying at NBC, what is compelling us? Do we feel like we are having to work too hard? Have you been disappointed by the amount of work that you are required to do? I'll bet that for at least 90% of us here today, we felt overwhelmingly "compelled" to come to Colorado Springs and to study at this Bible College. It seemed and felt so right for us to be here. But for some of us, it's just not turning out the way we had planned. So....what is compelling you? What is the basis of your life and your decisions?

As children of the Kingdom, you are going to be confronted with this question the rest of your life. What if our church is not "growing" the way you anticipated, what if the pastor in our church ends up having a different vision

for our church than you do? What if your tests and papers that are required at NBC are harder than you expected? What if life in general just isn't what you had counted on? What is the basis of your life and your decisions?

If we are committed to God, and committed to following his will, then Christ's love compels us. Either we are doing his will (compelled by Christ) or NOT doing his will (compelled by our own desires, own preferences, or own will).

So who is compelling us to be where we are? This is a hard question that each one of us has to answer. I'll have to admit, it is certainly a difficult question for me to be asking myself. Who is compelling me to be *what* I am and to be *where* I am? Sometimes I can feel so torn between what I prefer to have happen and what is actually happening. Sometimes I can feel so torn between what I want to see in my life, and what God allows to happen in my life. Who is compelling you and me to be what we are and to be where we are?

If it is not Christ and his love, then I should get out! If Christ's love is compelling you to be where you are, then you CAN'T get out! In essence, you have no choice except to be faithful. This was the painful conclusion that I had to come to in Holland with my study! This might not sound too promising or too "enjoyable", but I believe that it is the basic fact of the matter. Are we going to remain faithful to God or not? Is God calling us or not? Are we compelled by Christ's love or not? If not, seek to discover God's will and be

compelled to go and do the other tasks he has called you to. But if God has called you, be faithful. It might not sound so exciting, and most of the time it is NOT! But when we live a "Christ-compelled" life, Christ's power makes us equal to the task. Paul says it himself in v. 17 of 2 Corinthians chapter 5: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ (in this sense, I think that "in Christ" is another way of saying "Christ-compelled"), he is a NEW CREATION! The old has gone, the new has come."

So what about you? Are you still being compelled by Christ's love? I am pretty sure that most of us are here today because we felt "compelled" to be here. We were sure that God had opened doors, we were positive that he had led us to this place, that he had placed his irresistible call upon our life.

But what about now, after the reality of our decision has sunk in? For many of us, it has turned out to be a lot different than what we expected. Just like my airplane ride from Kansas City to California with my niece.

But what about that compulsion we felt?

We need to come to a close, but I want to send you home with just a few observations about being compelled by Christ's love.

First, when you are compelled to do something by Christ's love, it will not always end up how you expect. As a matter of fact, MOST of the time it will not end up how you expect! Paul could tell us all about this, couldn't he?

Second, when we are compelled to do something by Christ's love, there will be conflict. Did you not realize this? There will be *conflict* when you act according to Christ's love in your life!! I am afraid that we have been done a great disservice by all the "wealth, health, and happiness" preaching that we hear in some of our churches and on the television. Following Christ does not mean that your path will suddenly be lined with roses. If we have understood our word "compelled" correctly, it means that there will be conflict. It means that we will be torn between two ends of a polarity. It means that we will face struggles in which we are pulled in two different directions. And so if you are acting according to the Love of Christ in your life, expect conflict! It will happen virtually every time!

But lastly, when you are compelled by Christ's love, God will make you equal to the task. He will strengthen you and make you to stand! But it won't be YOUR power, it will be HIS power. You will not find yourself moving forward by the strength of your own self. Rather, you will stand by the strength of your new self—God's New Creation that Christ's love begins within you.

Hear the Word of the Lord: "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

Christ's love compelled him to die for you. Will Christ's love compel you to live for him, regardless of the cost? May it be so! Amen!