



INTRO:

So, question for ya here to start: ***What are you passionate about? What are you passionate about?*** Take a moment to think about that...Somewhat of a tricky question right? Maybe even a “double-edged sword.”¹ Cuz on the one hand we tend to be a bit skeptical of people with a lot of passion right? Super passionate people can often seem a bit fanatical/even crazy...But then on the other hand, our culture seems to constantly tell us we need to BE passionate. And if we’re NOT, we won’t be happy. If you don’t FIND your passion, you’ll never amount to anything. EVEN, if you don’t SHOW passion about certain cultural issues, you’re considered complicit in a number of perceived “evils.” In other words, the whole issue of passion is pretty pressure-packed...And sadly, for awhile now, church has not exactly been associated WITH something that exists to help you navigate that pressure, at least not - people assume - in a relevant way!... As we continue our ***What Church Can Be*** series today, I wanna show you, really simply here, is that **Church Can/even SHOULD Be ___ Passionate**. SHOULD help you understand and gain for yourself, real, guiding passions. That’s what we’re gonna explore today...So let’s follow-along as we hear the reading of God’s word from our series text: **2 Corinthians 5:11-21**... **(PAUSE RECORD)** Julie reads...

TEXT:

So each week we’re breaking down a portion of the passage you just heard read, and WHICH, as we’ve seen, is part of a larger defense, BY the Apostle Paul, of both his *ministry* AND his Gospel *message*, TO a church, which sadly had not only, begun distrusting Paul, but subsequently disbelieving the Gospel... Ya know, history has repeatedly born-out that just because a church, at one time, believes and lives according TO the Gospel; that doesn’t mean, it’s gonna do it for ALL time. The landscape of our city/certainly our region is one dotted with churches that’ve sadly replaced a once robust trust and rest in the finished work of Christ with something else - social/political activism, program management, building maintenance, you name it. We have to CONSTANTLY see success/*listen*, as nothing more and nothing less: ***than learning to trust and rest in Jesus for every area of life AND helping others do the same*** - as Jesus Himself said in **John 6:29**, “*THIS is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*” And so Paul’s been seeking to bring the Corinthians back to trusting his Gospel *message* BY reminding them of the validity of his Gospel *ministry*...And in our verses today, he’s gonna CONTINUE doing that BY sharing with the church: his guiding *passions*!...AS he says, “*For if we are beside ourselves, - meaning if we appear crazy for some reason - it is for God; (and) if we’re in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us.*” Paul is affirming there that everything he does/everything He’s about/His *passion* is two-fold: serving God and others; knowing God and making Him known! That was his *passion*....So **3 Things We Learn Here ABOUT Passion and Church Being Passionate: 1. What We Mean By Passion in the first place. 2. Why Love For God and Others Is To Be YOUR Passion. And 3. The Sign That Love For God and Others Has BECOME Your Passion.**

¹ “The Recovery of Passion” - “Bury Your Ordinary” - Justin Kendrick: Vox Church - 1/27/21

So **First, What We Mean By Passion.** You notice in **v.13**, Paul repeats a tiny but important word. ***Ya see it?*** It's the word "for." He says, "*if I'm beside myself it's FOR God.*" And "*if I'm in my right mind, it's FOR you;*" meaning everything Paul does, whether seemingly crazy or not, is driven by a desire EITHER FOR God or FOR others. Everything is subordinated to that. THAT'S what passion really is. A lot of times I think we equate passion to simply interests or affinities - ya know I'm passionate about seafood or the beach. But the word "passion" actually comes from the Latin "*passeo,*" meaning, "*to endure, suffer, be affected/moved-by.*"² A true passion isn't just something you like or are interested in. It's something that subordinates and displaces everything else. It's, as Tim Keller says, "*an overmastering love.*"³ You think about great athletes or artists: The reason they're great is because they have a **passion** for their craft **right?**/this overmastering love for sport or art that subsequently subordinates a bunch of other loves like, for example, eating, sleeping, hobbies. So these great athletes/artists, they don't eat too much OR too little. They don't sleep too much OR too little. They don't indulge in chocolate, or if you're Tom Brady - strawberries apparently. They don't spend tons of time going out cuz they're training. EVERYTHING gets subordinated. THAT'S **What We Mean By Passion.** And of course, we need these "overmastering loves" **don't we?**, because without em, you end up living an otherwise mediocre, flat, barely-coping, kind of life...BUT, of course, we don't just need ANY passion; we need the RIGHT passions; since haven't we seen over-and-over again: people who found their passion, pursued their passion, obtained their passion...but then still found THEMSELVES empty. **Haven't you noticed that trend in our culture/maybe even in your life?** You think of someone like Michael Phelps, for whom it's well documented, that even after having won 23 Olympic Gold Medals by the time he was just 31 - more than anyone in history by DOUBLE - even after obtaining that life-long passion, found himself more lonely, empty, and battling suicidal thoughts than before.⁴...You can't just have passions; you have to have the RIGHT passions, which Paul says here is Love for God and Others!

So **Second, Why Is Love For God and Others To BE YOUR Passion?:** Well, take a look at the beginning of **v.14**, which we'll unpack in more detail next week, but look where Paul says, "*For the love of Christ controls us.*" Powerful statement! Because what he's telling you is WHY Love for God and Others has become his defining passion...The New York Times published an article in 2019 entitled "*Why 'Find Your Passion' Is Such Terrible Advice.*" And it detailed how that mantra that we all need to FIND our passion, is really pretty stupid, GIVEN that, according to scientific study, passion is rarely found. Rather, it's DEVELOPED. Such that if you believe you'll just one day discover your passion, you're likely to do the opposite, because you won't keep-on with things that may end up BEING passions, BUT were difficult or scary in the beginning...The point is: Paul must've read that article, cuz he's NOT saying, "*well, thankfully, I've found my passion. It's God and Others and I hope you find that too.*" No! What does he say? He says, "*For the love of Christ CONTROLS us.*" Paul didn't FIND a passion for knowing God

² Insight from "The Recovery of Passion" - "Bury Your Ordinary" - Justin Kendrick: Vox Church - 1/27/21

³ Temptation - The Gospel According to Joseph—June 15, 2003 - Genesis 39:1–23 - Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁴ Michael Phelps Illustration adapted from "The Recovery of Passion" - "Bury Your Ordinary" - Justin Kendrick: Vox Church - 1/27/21

and making Him known. In a way, it found him! That word “*control*” - some translations say, “*compel*” - it means like, “*to be constrained!*” One translation says, “*The love of Christ leaves me no other option but to live for Him.*” No other option!⁵ ***See how this is so much more than just “finding your passion?”***...It’s more like what happens to a computer when you replace the operating system so that the functionality of all the apps and programs get altered. The “*love of Christ*” altering all the different “apps” or aspects of Paul’s life to the point that knowing Him and making Him known BECAME His passion!

Now, a lot of people hear that/maybe YOU and think, “*THAT sounds a little too fanatical for my tastes.*” Cuz we’ve all known that person ***right?***, who only ever talks about religion, church, the Bible, to the point that everyone’s just kinda just over it. We’ve ALL known that person. If you haven’t...you might BE that person/just sayin’! But that’s not what we’re talking about here. That IS fanatical and I’d say, as Tim Keller does: People like that are really more like Paul in his PRE-Christian days, when as a Pharisee, he DIDN’T know “*the love of Christ,*” and was therefore desperately trying to convince people/and himself that he was superior to em.⁶ That’s not what we’re talking about when we say, “*controlled by the love of Christ.*” What we’re talking about is a person, who because of having been, what theologians call, “*regenerated,*” or made alive TO God BY God - what Jesus called in ***John 3***, “*being born again*” - has begun to SEE all of life through the lens of Jesus. Like a pair of glasses or contacts. Those of you who wear glasses/contacts know that you obviously don’t spend all your time LOOKING at your glasses or contacts right? But you DO spend all your time looking at everything THROUGH your glasses or contacts...A person “*controlled by the love of Christ,*” because they’ve been regenerated and made alive to God, isn’t necessarily always talking about Jesus, but they are always looking at everyone and everything THROUGH the person and work OF Jesus!⁷

Which is WHY Paul’s guiding passion became knowing God and making Him known! Because when you really consider the love of Christ - how He endured death in your place, so that you might, NOT ONLY, NEVER be condemned for the ways in which you’ve chosen to live for yourself, but ALSO be eternally blessed - when you’re really made alive to that, unless, as John Calvin said, “*you’re just harder than iron, you won’t be able to refrain from devoting yourself entirely to Jesus!*”⁸ which is to say, “knowing Him and making Him known,” since Jesus Himself essentially said devotion is about: “*loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength...(and) loving your neighbor as yourself.*” The reason **Love For God and Others Is To Be Your Passion** is because it’s consistent with being made alive to the *love of Christ for you...Have you been made alive to Christ? And is knowing and making Him known your guiding passion?*

⁵ The Cross and Christian Ministry - 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:10 - November 17, 2013 - The Cross and Christian Community - David Platt, “[The Cross and Christian Ministry](#),” in *David Platt Sermon Archive* (Birmingham, AL: David Platt, 2013), 4151.

⁶ Knowing the Risen Christ (Easter Sunday) - The Cross and Your Life—April 3, 1994 - Philippians 3:3–11 - Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁷ Glasses illustration adapted from “Knowing the Risen Christ (Easter Sunday) - The Cross and Your Life—April 3, 1994 - Philippians 3:3–11 - Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁸ John Calvin and John Pringle, [Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians](#), vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 230.

Finally here's how you can know: **The SIGN That Love For God and Others Has BECOME Your Passion.** And there's two things ya gotta see here. **First**, ya gotta see Paul admit, he knows some/even Christians think that aspects of his life are crazy. As he says, *"if we're beside ourselves, it's for God."* He's acknowledging the chatter that some people thought Paul was a bit off. And scholars are divided as to WHY - it coulda been because of his allegedly esoteric teaching, or his ecstatic experiences like having visions from God and being able to speak in tongues, OR it coulda just been his relentless zeal in sharing the Gospel.⁹ Whatever it was, people looked at him and thought, *"he might be beside himself."* ... **Can I share with you a little-secret?** If you are a regenerated/"*controlled-by-the-love-of-Christ*" follower OF Christ today, then like Paul, SOMETIMES, people are gonna think you're crazy! **Why?** Because the **Second** thing ya gotta see is that when Paul talks about being "*controlled by Jesus' love,*" implicit IN that is the idea that you're NOT controlled by other things that typically control or just take priority for most people. And as a result, you look and live differently, which to some might appear crazy! I'll just give you a few examples: Think about how you deal with **worry**: There's tons of people **right?**, who are spiritual, religious, attend church, but when something gets em worried, what do they do first? Maybe get upset; try to slow down/breathe; maybe make a pro and con list, take a walk, watch a movie, shop, you name-it. And it's not that ALL those things are bad, it's just that: what DOESN'T come first is Jesus. He maybe comes third or fourth. But a person "*controlled by the love of Christ,*" what do they do. They go to Jesus first. They know that because He loves em, He's WILLING to help them. And because He's Jesus, which is to say, the fully human/fully divine Son of God, He's ABLE to help em. So you go to Jesus and think on what He's taught you; what He's done for you and how that bears on your worry... Or how bout **bitterness**. When you're "*controlled by the love of Christ,*" you run to Jesus IN your bitterness. You say, *"You're the Judge Jesus. I'm not the judge. I don't have to hang judgement over this person who's hurt me. You didn't do that with me. Look at how you've forgiven me; I can forgive them."* ... Or how bout your **money**? How do you decide how much you're gonna spend and on which things? You go to Jesus. You look at his teachings/figure out His values. You understand things like, all your money is really His and given to you BY Him to steward FOR Him... Same thing with what **lifestyle** you should live, and how your **relationships** should be, your **sexuality** should play out, even what you **say and don't say**, things you **participate in**, what you **wear**... A person "*controlled by the love of Christ*" - like those glasses/contacts - doesn't necessarily always SEE Christ, but rather strives see everyone and everything THROUGH Christ!... But you understand, at times, that's gonna look crazy. Continuing to tithe and give financially in a down economy, because that's trusting Jesus? That looks crazy to the everyday person!... Not getting back at or canceling that person who really hurt you? That's just not normal! Not sleeping with your boyfriend/girlfriend, getting drunk, gossiping about other people, spending your money all on yourself, actually committing to a church family vs putting your kids in every activity imaginable? These things, not only aren't the normal, they're SPIRITUAL/they require the Spirit bringing a sense of Jesus' love into everything, which to the average person can look crazy! **THAT'S The SIGN That Love For God and Others Has BECOME Your Passion!** Not that you ARE crazy, but that your life is, in some senses, unexplainable apart from faith in Christ!

⁹ Reasons adapted from Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 351.

It's like those old iPod commercials - remember these/mid-2000's? - just a dark silhouette of person, and you can't hear anything. All you see is these bright colors and them just going CRAZY dancing! "*beside themselves,*" at which point they take out their EarPods and you finally hear the music they've been dancing to. They were dancing to the beat of their own drum/in sync with a whole nuther beat... THAT'S what it's like to be "*controlled by the love of Christ.*" It can look crazy to those around you, but that's because you're doing life to the beat NOT of your OWN drum/like everybody else, but to Jesus' - loving/knowing Him and striving to make Him known! **The SIGN That Love For God and Others Has BECOME Your Passion!** You at times look a little crazy, because apart from the love of Christ, your life is unexplainable!

CONCLUSION:

Is that you? Is your overmastering, passion to love Jesus and help others do the same? Does it show in the way you live? Has something happened to you that you can't but almost seem a bit crazy when you live according to it and wanna get it out?...Man, I hope so, because IF SO, it means the love of Christ has not only saved you, but IS saving and becoming FOR you like that new set of glasses or contacts through which to see, enjoy, and just deal-well with life!...And if you're thinking, "*I don't know if that's me, either cuz I don't know the love of Jesus like that OR I do, but I JUST keep falling back into patterns of loving myself more than Him and others,*" ya gotta understand two things in **CLOSING** here: **Number 1:** You're NOT alone. That's all of us. Whether we need to know the love of Christ for the first time in order to be saved or the 9-HUNDREDTH time in order to be sanctified; that's ALL of us! This is WHY we're here! You understand Hub, church is not where good people go, in order to show they're good. No! It's where broken/bad people go to be reminded of One who's BETTER. So can we just get any posturing and pretense out of the way now, and just collectively acknowledge that: If you're here, it's because you DON'T know and AREN'T controlled by the love of Jesus like you oughta be. And THAT is ALL of us! **Amen?**

Which is why, **Number 2,** you gotta understand that: the beauty of Christ's love is that you don't control it; IT controls you. "*For the love of Christ controls US.*" WHICH MEANS if you're sensing right now that you DON'T know the love of Jesus or you do, but like I said, are more prone to loving yourself rather than Him and others, the answer's not to try harder and resolve to do better, as if you could control Jesus and make Him love you. The answer is to realize, as Paul says at the end of **v.14**, that because Jesus has "*died for all and therefore all have died*" His love has already been given to you! There's nothing YOU need to DO to gain it, except repent of either not having received it OR putting yourself UNDER it! And THEN just keep coming back TO it, until it begins to subordinate every...other...love/UNITL knowing Him and making Him known, more-and-more, becomes your guiding passion. Just turn and run into the arms of His already-love for you. As the hymn says, "*Everlasting arms of love, are beneath, around, above... He who left his throne of light, And unnumbered angels bright...He who on the accursed tree. Gave his precious life for me...He it is that bears me on, His the arm I lean upon*"...**Let's Pray...**