



## WOW: Word Of the Week

### Absorbed

October 12, 2022

Paul wrote that the love of Christ compelled him (2 Cor. 5:14). What did Paul mean? Some translations say that he was urged on or propelled forward. Older translations speak of being constrained by the love of Christ. This older translation reflects the idea of being held within bounds. Such restrictions also suggest the idea of control.

The basic meaning of the Greek verb is to hold together. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the verb is used when kings hold their mouths closed so they do not speak (Isa. 52:15) and when the heavens are shut. Ears can also be held shut (Acts 7:57).

In Acts 18:5, Luke uses the same verb when he describes Paul as absorbed in preaching the Good News of Jesus as Messiah. Paul was totally occupied, absorbed, focused on one thing. He was “kept on point” by the task at hand. Limited, no swerving, focused in one direction.

When surrounding forces are undesirable, the result is distress. Paul uses the same verb in Phil. 1:23 when he speaks of being hard pressed between two options: to depart to be with Christ or to remain for the benefit of the Philippians. In 2 Cor. 5:14, Paul was saying that the love of Christ left him no option!

The word in the original language is capable of several meanings.

**Fully engaged, attentive, rapt attention, unwavering, even unable to waver**

**The concept is not merely being pushed forward**

**Something is engaging, unbelievable, incredibly good news, one cannot help but speak**

I have often reminded beginning Greek students and those who have only a basic introduction to Greek tools, the exact meaning of a specific Greek word depends on context.

The word in 2 Cor. 5:14 is not the usual verb “to compel.” That would be *anagkazo*.

Paul’s meaning is more like “Christ’s love leaves me no options.” I can do only one thing, I can go in only one direction. Christ’s expansive love restricts and constrains me to the point of totally controlling me. Christ’s love focuses me so that I am totally occupied.

It may be that Paul’s statement looks forward to the ministry of reconciliation. But more likely it points backward to the “fear of the Lord” and Paul’s intense desire to persuade everyone.

If so, an interesting contrast exists in this passage. Paul preaches the gospel to persuade people because he knows the fear of the Lord, but the controlling focus that keeps him going is Christ’s love.

*In a world where eternal punishment and eternal reward are usually seen as diametrically opposed... In a world where sermons focus on either punishment or reward.... The description Paul uses suggests not an either-or but a both-and.*

Personal application! What absorbs you? What are you known for? How do others characterize your life, your priorities? Sports? Recreation? Our society and culture present an endless buffet of options.

For Paul, he was absorbed in telling others about Jesus, persuading people of God’s truth. Why? Out of fear, because he knew the fear of the Lord? Yes, he does mention that factor. But his explanation of his absorption is not fear but the “love of Christ.”

May God help us see Jesus clearly enough that we persuade others because Christ’s love leaves us no option!