

The Constraining Love of Christ

2 Corinthians 5: 14-17.

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In our Bible reading this afternoon terms such as "we ought," "we should," and "we would" were used. Along with this, emphasis was laid upon the fact and the necessity of being born of God; for only "new bottles" could contain the "new wine." Reference was also made to the necessity of the power of the Spirit of God to lead us on into the apprehension and enjoyment of all that is established of God "in Christ."

I wish to give a simple touch on the love of Christ. There is an intimate relationship between it and this new, heavenly system, for that love having accomplished redemption, all is now available to us.

There is a constraint — a compelling power — in the love of Christ. Under that constraint there is a spontaneity of progress and response. We have experienced the *compassionate* love of Christ. Our hearts have been touched by it and we are Christians because it has laid hold of us. If the truth of Christianity is to be practised and maintained by us we need the *constraining* love of Christ to motivate us.

When we were on the broad downward road, in our sins, with eternal perdition before us, it was that compassionate love of Christ which took Him into death on our account, that arrested us, bowing us at His blessed feet. I wonder if we are equally acquainted with the *constraint* of that love! Of necessity this question applies only to those who know that love's compassion. It so arrests, impels, and teaches, that the first effect of the constraining love of Christ is to form our judgment in line with the judgment of God. The whole story of the cross is involved in this constraining love. Its first effect upon us is to compel us to a right judgment. So we have read, "we thus judge." Have we a right judgment of ourselves? We are prone to judge others; how very easily we sit in the critic's chair; but if we know the constraining love of Christ, *we judge ourselves*.

What is this judgment we are constrained to accept? "That if one died for all, then were all dead" (verse 14). Thanks be to God for the largeness of the extent of the benefits and blessing of Christ's death; certainly, "He died for all." The teaching here is that His death for all evidenced that all were dead. Such was the condition of every one, there was not even a spark of life Godward. This is the judgment which the love of Christ constrains us to, that apart from God's intervention in power such is our condition.

Christ's death for all does not *put* all there, it proves that all *are* there, and if that is true, then that is our condition — DEAD. I am sure that it is good for us to be constrained to this judgment. The love of Christ brings us to it — the grand starting point from which we can go forward in the things of God.

In our reading this afternoon we touched upon our deficiencies; they are largely due to our tardiness to accept God's judgment against ourselves. The Galatian Epistle, to which we referred, emphasizes this. There the apostle Paul said, "I am crucified with *Christ*" (Gal. 2: 20). Here, under the constraining love of Christ, he acquiesces in God's judgment against himself. Again in that Epistle he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (ch. 6: 14). The world as mentioned there is not the immoral, filthy world of heathen darkness; it is the religious world, where religious man has "trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy

thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace" (Heb. 10: 29).

That world and the men of it, have come under the judgment of God at the cross. It is that character of the world which is religious, refusing the judgment of God, and consequently without the power of God; without the love of God; and without that attractive and delivering Object — the Christ of God, who is in the glory of God. "He died for all, that they which should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (verse 15).

There has been a power in operation, in this world of spiritual and moral death, by reason of which there are those who live. How rich is that mercy of our God which directed His life-giving power; may our souls deepen in the knowledge of it. Some of the sweetest songs in the Scriptures have originated through saints having in their souls a large sense of the mercy of God. That mercy, then, and the power of God, with the love of Christ, have been operative on our behalf. Christ, the Last Adam, is a life-giving Spirit, and as such is the Head of the new creation in the power of which He imparts life to those who were once untrammelled in the first creation's moral departure from, and rebellion against, God. Now, where all were dead, life has been brought in — there are those who live.

Hence, another blessed product of the constraining love of Christ is that they live *unto Him*. Thus the apostle in Philippians 1: 21 says, "For to me to live is Christ." The One who loved him was the governing Object of his life. Where that constraining love is known there is deliverance from self-occupation. The Christian, in the drawing power of that love which "passeth knowledge," is Christ centred. We are all, from the youngest to the oldest, tested here. Is it *self* or *Christ*? If we have been constrained by His deathless love to apply the truth of the cross to ourselves we shall likewise be drawn to find in Him an Object outside of ourselves, One who so commands us; so absorbs us; that we cannot help living unto Him. We shall experience the liberty and spontaneity of responsive love. We shall not love because we ought; we shall not serve because we should. There is no legal, servile, bondage here. We shall love, we shall serve, we shall live to Him because we cannot help it. The constraint of His love which on the one hand reduces us to the lowest level, so blesses us that we respond to Him as the flower opens to the rising sun.

In our reading we laid emphasis on the thought of "with Him;" here we stress the words, "unto Him." At the beginning of the book of Revelation there is a song raised by a *bondslave* of Jesus Christ in the Isle called Patmos. It was, "*Unto Him* that loved us." Christ was his Object; he sang under the constraint of the love of Christ.

We do not need improved circumstances in order to make Him our Object. Perhaps we think we could be better Christians if our circumstances were bettered! I doubt it. We are in the very circumstances which God has ordered for us, and in which He intends to produce for Himself the very best in each one of us. Whatever our present lot — bodily weakness, adversity, sorrow, care, trial — we can, in the enjoyment of Christ's constraining and unfailing love, raise our song of praise "Unto Him." We read in Psalm 4: 1 (N. Tr.), "In pressure Thou hast enlarged me." It seems to me, that in any circumstances, the constraining love of Christ known in the soul, enables the believer to rise in superiority to them, because he is held in the attraction of the loving, living Christ who is above all and in command of every situation.

"Unto Him which died for them, and rose again." Is not that sufficient reason for our living unto Him? How powerful a lever to move us in devotion of heart and life to Him — He died for us. He came in love right down beneath all that we were, he came down to the very bottom for "He was made sin for us."

All this in order that He might bring us, in His own blessed company, right to the top. His death

has closed the door upon that system — this present evil world — which is contrary to God in every thing, and His resurrection has opened the door into New Creation. How much, dear brethren, do we know of the practical truth of these things? The constraint of His love will separate us from that world where He died, and at the same time will empower us to represent Him in it. Christ, out of death, the Object of our hearts, draws us into communion with Himself in the joy and blessedness of that New Creation. "The New Creation's stainless joy gleams through the present gloom." The light and glory of it are shining in the face of Him who loves us, who died for us and rose again, and it is His love that "constraineth us."