

## CONSTRAINING LOVE

*“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again.” - 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.*

Dr. Paul Rees, in his little book IF GOD BE FOR US, entitles this section, Love Slaves of Jesus Christ. When we take the time to consider the Apostle’s opening words, we get the feeling that this is no throw away remark and certainly not the sentiments of a thoughtless soul. It is surely the language of intensity, coming from the heart and bubbling over with devotion to his Lord.

When teaching the Word, I often draw attention to the possibility of taking one word sermons from a text of Scripture. Here is a classic example:

1. The LOVE of Christ constraineth us.
2. The love of CHRIST constraineth us.
3. The love of Christ CONSTRAINETH us.
4. The love of Christ constraineth US.

I don’t know which of these four you think is the best. For myself, each of them amazes me, and causes me to bow in holy worship. Perhaps today you will allow the pure word of God to pour into, through and out of your whole being, like rivers of living water (John 7:48).

### I

“The LOVE of Christ constraineth us”

The New Testament uses a number of Greek words, with in our Authorised Version, are translated as LOVE. We now look briefly at two of these: phileo and agape.

Phileo is a concept that demands equality of affection, as demonstrated by the love of one person for another. It has everything to do with warm reciprocation. Simon Peter used this word when replying to His Master's question: "*Simon, son of Jonas lovest (agape) thou me?*" The answer came back three times: "*I have deep affection (phileo) for you*". He was saying that he loved on the only level he really knew how, and we must not think of him harshly for this.

He would have to learn that the LOVE of Christ surpassed that level of love. This Agape LOVE of Christ acts regardless of reciprocation. It sees nothing attractive in the one it loves, but it is a love that sees potential worth, value and esteem in worthless people - loving us when we were enemies and sinners (Romans 5:6).

It saw value and worth in Saul of Tarsus though he was a blasphemer and persecutor of the saints! Hear his testimony, written years later: "*The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me*" - *Galatians 2:20*. That love led the Christ to Golgotha, to die for Saul of Tarsus – AND FOR US!

The Apostle, writing to the church in Corinth, cannot restrain himself. He bursts out with all the passion he can muster: the LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINS US, and very definitely INCLUDING himself!

*Love that no tongue can teach,  
Love that no thought can reach,  
No love like His!  
God is its blessed source,  
Death cannot stop its course,  
Nothing can stay its force,  
MATCHLESS IT IS!*

## **II**

“The love of CHRIST constraineth us”

The Apostles love to use the expression : LORD JESUS CHRIST.

It is important for us in our day and generation to ascribe Him all honour, praise and worship in the fullest way.

LORD: His TITLE.

Scripture describes Him as:

*The Lord out of heaven  
1 Corinthians 15:47.*

*The Lord of  
glory* 1  
*Corinthians 2:8.*

*The Lord of the living and the dead  
Romans 14:9.*

*Lord of  
all  
Acts 10:38.*

These are some references, you will recall others.

JESUS: His NAME.

And what a Name it is!

*“His Name shall be called Jesus, for he  
shall save his people from their sins” -  
Matthew 1:12.*

Jehsua means SAVIOUR.

Joseph was given the title Zaphenath - Paneah by Pharaoh - suggested by some to be the saviour of the land (Egypt). In their hunger the people were told to go to Joseph, he held the key to the storehouses of life and salvation.

And so the name remains the same down the centuries, the ONLY Saviour for my hunger and the giver of eternal life.

CHRIST: His OFFICE.

Christos - the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah, the Anointed of Jehovah.

Three kinds of people were anointed in Old Testament times; prophets, priests and kings. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the ONLY One who bears all three offices!

*Great are the offices he bears,  
And bright His character appears,  
Exalted on the throne,  
In songs of sweet untiring praise,  
We would through everlasting days,  
Make ALL HIS GLORIES known.*

The practical message for today is that He is Sovereign, Ruler, King, of my whole being. It is in this context the nature of the love I am to show.

It is the love of CHRIST!

### **III**

“The love of Christ CONSTRAINETH us”

That is; it impels, drives and motivates.

Someone has define the word CONSTRAIN in a sentence:

‘The love of Christ shuts me up to a single purpose as between two walls in a narrow path.’

Do you remember the story of Balaam?

He drove his ass down a road in defiance of God and kept goading it forward until it was pressed between two walls. It couldn't turn right or left, so it sank down on its knees and refused to budge. And then it spoke to Balaam!

This is a perfect illustration of what it means to CONSTRAIN or to be CONSTRAINED. You can only move forward or not move at all.

The Apostle says, in effect. I have no option, when I think of the value and esteem my Lord placed on me - a blasphemer and persecutor - then I have to return that love in the only way open to me. That is to be an AMBASSADOR for

Him, pleading with men to be reconciled to God (verse 20). And, if that preserves my life or takes me to death, *“for me to live is Christ and to die is gain” - Philippians 1:21.*

Too often, we seem to reverse the order by how we live, 'For us to live is gain and die is Christ'! For the Christian the latter is true, but the former doesn't follow.

#### **IV**

“The love of Christ constraineth US”

What can be said about the last of these one word sermons?

There could possibly be some explanation to this, if the US represented a God fearing and obedient people. Sadly, the whole saga of human history is one of total failure and repeated disappointment to God. Time after time, because of his unfailing love, God gave mankind a fresh start. But more often than not man made a mess of it.

We do not need only to appeal to scripture to prove this. We need to look no further than our own thoughts and actions. Apart from the regenerating power of God and the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we will continue to fail miserably.

The Apostle, writing to the Ephesian Christians, puts the US in its proper and only context:

*“And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. Wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom we also had our conversation (manner of life) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath .even as others But God who is rich in mercy for his great love where with he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye\are saved). And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”*

I am so glad that I am included in the US! Are you?

**V**

*“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he (there) is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, the new has come” - 2 Corinthians 5:17.*

In the regenerated life, there are two areas where love is dominant:

1. in our salvation - love is the POWER (v 14-19)
2. in our service - love gives us PASSION (v 20-25)

There has never been a day when the world needs more saving, than today. There is more lostness, more hopelessness and despair than ever before. Modern man in his Godless self-centredness is daily finding more ways of departure from his Creator. Somehow we seem to be failing to communicate to people that salvation is not found in religion, politics or reformation, but in Christ. It is time for a redoubling of our efforts to proclaim the gospel- the whole gospel and nothing but the gospel.

*“...they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again” (v15).*

Yes, Christians need saving too! Many are losing themselves in this world's business and pleasure. Scripture plainly warns us not to *“entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life” - 2 Timothy 2:4*. The shelves of Christian bookstores are lined with autobiographies and biographies of men and woman who found that love for Christ displaced all selfish ambition and power-drunkness. Love for him was the ruling motive of their lives, it was the power of daily salvation – and OURS!

While at college, Jim Elliot, the Ecuador martyr wrote 'O God, save me from a life of barrenness, following a formal pattern of ethics, and give instead that vital contact of soul with Thy divine life, that fruit may be produced, and life - abundant life - may be known again, as the final proof for Christ's message and work.

## **VI**

*"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" - 2 Corinthians 5:20.*

We now see that, for the Apostle Paul, the constraining love of Christ gave him a PASSION in his service. Think of the high honour bestowed on an individual: an AMBASSADOR! and an ambassador for CHRIST!!

We know that an ambassador is invested with the authority of the Head of State of his country, to represent him/her, government and country in a foreign State. We have been commissioned, authorised and sent out throughout the world to represent the King of heaven. He commands us to stand out and stand up for Him, to proclaim His worth, His glory, His Lordship and His kingdom - the kingdom of heaven to all mankind.

No one in heaven's diplomatic circles is more pleasing to the King than the name of the simplest believer who, in school, university, workplace or home, witnesses to Him.

However, it will not always be as it is now. The high King, in His longsuffering, is withholding wrath and awful vengeance from a rebellious world. Make no mistake, this must not be interpreted as non involvement! IT WILL END and SOON. Did not the Lord say "*I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work*" - John 9:4. This is love's protest against procrastination. It is love's denial of the right to drift on and fritter away our lives in precious service, while the time bomb of God's judgment ticks on.

So, is it not only an honour to be called to and involved in this service, but the

Apostle senses the need for haste, as he urges us not to misuse the time:

For the ambassador "*now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation*" - 2  
*Corinthians 6:2.*

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