

Title: Christ's Constraining Love

Text: 2 Corinthians 5: 14

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Place: SGBC, New Jersey

2 Corinthians 5: 14: For the love of Christ constraineth us;

When it came to believing and preaching Christ, some accused the apostle Paul of being mad—beside himself. Others accused Paul of being too sober, too serious. Speaking by the Holy Spirit of God, the apostle Paul answered,

2 Corinthians 5: 13: Whether we be beside ourselves, *it is to God*: or whether we be sober, *it is for your cause*. 14: For the love of Christ constraineth us!" (2Co 5:13-14)

Did Christ's love for Paul really make Paul forsake his former, vain, works religion? Yes. Did the love of Christ really make Paul give himself to the service and worship of Christ alone? Yes. Did Christ love working in Paul really constrain Paul to hazard his life in order to declare the gospel of Christ to Christ's people? Yes.

The love of Christ really does constrain his people to worship and serve the Lord Jesus.

Our topic is "Christ's Constraining Love." Are you and I really constrained by Christ's love? I pray Christ will make us honest with him tonight. If we are not under the constraint of his love, I pray he will bring us under that constraint this very hour.

I want to show you three things that Christ did [and does] in love to God his Father and his people, by which Christ's constrains us to love and serve him.

CHRIST'S LOVE ON THE CROSS

Christ Jesus loved God his Father and his people perfectly. Someone asked Christ this question, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Mt 22: 36-40)

Christ Jesus is the only one who ever fulfilled the law in perfection—in perfect righteousness from a holy heart, without any sin. He loved the Lord God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind and he loved his neighbor as himself.

The place we see Christ fulfilling the law is on the cross. On the cross, Christ loved God and loved God's elect by being made sin for us—being made our sin for never once loving God and being made our sin for never once loving our neighbor as our selves. On the cross, Christ loved God and his neighbor as himself by being made a curse for us—the curse his people deserved by our hating God and our hating one another.

He did this in love to God his Father, manifesting the righteousness of God. He declared God "just." Righteousness was established and justice was satisfied by Christ. He declared God is "the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom 3: 26)

On the cross, Christ loved the Lord God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind and he loved his neighbor as himself. On the cross, we see true love; we see perfect righteousness; we see pristine holiness.

When God gives dead sinners his Spirit, he teaches us that only through faith in Christ do we establish the law of God, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law...Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” (Ro 3: 28, 31) We are not justified by our law-keeping but by Christ’s law-keeping; not by our doing but by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ who established the law for all God’s elect. When we believe on Christ, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us.

That is the love of God for his people. It is in Christ Jesus his Son. It is in the finished work of Christ crucified. This is the love of Christ which constrains every true believer. It is not the law that constrains us. It is the love of him who is the end of the law who constrains us. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Rom 10: 4) “By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13: 39)

CHRIST’S LOVE IN OUR HEARTS

Also, by Christ’s work in our hearts the love of Christ constrains us to love God and our brethren. The apostle John said, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.” (1 Jn 4: 10)

No sinner that God saves, first loved God. God first loved those he saves. He chose who he would save, sent his Son to save us, and Christ is the Propitiation, the Mercy Seat, the Atonement, for our sins. Christ reconciled to God all for whom he laid down his life.

When Christ dwells in us then he constrains us to love God and our brethren. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” Here is how we are brought to have this love. “No man hath seen God at any time.” Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Faith and love are united. John is teaching us this is a spiritual work. “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” (1 Jn 4: 11-13) The reason we believe and love Christ, and the reason we love our brethren with a godly love, is because God takes up his abode in us. “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.” It is for this reason that we love. It is “because he hath given us of his Spirit.”

God is love. Here is what God’s love does. God’s love sovereignly, effectually, irresistibly, invincibly, makes his people to see and testify—to believe and to confess—that God our Father sent his Son and saved his elect all over the world, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world.” (1 Jn 4: 14) The Father did not fail and Christ did not fail. His name is called “Jesus for he shall save his people from our sins.” (Mt 1: 21) God’s love makes us believe and confess that Christ saved his people from our sins.

God’s love effectually brings each of his children to confess Christ by God dwelling in us and making us to dwell in him! “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” (1 Jn 4: 15) Here is the result: God’s love, without fail, effectually makes his child to know and believe the love that God hath toward us, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” (1 Jn 4: 16)

Beloved, true believers dwell in love. Love is our home, our abode. This Love in whom we abide is a Person, “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (1 Jn 4: 16) God made us to dwell in Christ who is Love and Christ who is Love dwells in us. It is as Paul said, “Of him are ye in Christ

Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.” (1 Cor 1: 30) That is the true love of God. The true love of God is in Christ, making his people one in Christ!

Here is the end to which God’s love brings his child. He makes us rest in Christ knowing that we are complete in Christ, “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” (1 Jn 4: 17) Christ is complete at God’s right hand and we are complete in him though we are in this world. Christ is seated and accepted at God’s right hand and so are we though we are in this world.

So the end to which God’s love brings each of his dear children when God makes us behold we are in Christ, the Love of God, is to make us cease being tormented with the fear of God’s judgment and wrath, “There is no fear in Love; but perfect Love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in Love. We love him, because he first loved us.” (1 Jn 4: 18) God’s wrath was extinguished in satisfied justice toward his people in Christ on the cross. We have no fear of the wrath of God for one reason, when God took up dwelling in us, he made us to know he first loved us and has saved us freely in Christ his Beloved Son. “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Rom 8: 15)

Also, by being born of his Spirit, God creates in us love for our brethren who are born of the same Spirit. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” (1 Jn 4: 20-21) Again, John is teaching us that love is the fruit of the Spirit of God put into the new heart. Concerning this commandment given by God, remember the apostle Paul said, “The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Rom 8: 7) True godly love is spiritual fruit which only God can produce, so he says in the next chapter, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.” (1Jo 5: 1)

These are two certain facts. One, when we are born of God, we shall believe Jesus is the Christ. Notice, believing Christ and loving God is one in the same, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him...” Two, when Christ make us to be born again then we shall also love our brethren, “and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.” (1Jo 5: 1)

It is impossible to believe and love Christ until we are born again and it is impossible to be born again and not to love his people. It is because Christ and his people are one. When we are born of the Spirit then we see what great price Christ paid for our brethren so that we love them for Christ’s sake. His brethren are the object of his electing, dying, regenerating love!

Now some speak of love in a very sentimental way. It would be nice if we all lived in a little town with one little dirt street like you see in the old western movies. One family of believers would own the mercantile shop, another would run the carpenter shop, and another would be the blacksmith. The pastor could walk out the church door at the edge of town, go door to door visiting everyone and still have time to study as I ought. But we are way more spread out than that.

Still, we spend a great deal of time together, considering how spread out we are. Believers invite one another into our homes. We provide for each other. We care for one another whenever and however we can. But chiefly, the love of brethren is in doing this right here: gathering together as the body of Christ under his gospel as we worship Christ by his Spirit.

Hebrews 10: 23: Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24: And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. [how] 25: Not

forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The love of Christ constrains us to believe and love Christ who is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And the love of Christ constrains us to love our brethren, to provoke one another to love, exhorting one another, chiefly, by our presence together under the sound and support of the gospel of Christ. Really, the only excuse for not gathering together is bodily sickness. Brethren will provide for each other in every other way so that we can all meet together at the foot of Christ under the sound of the gospel. So let nothing come between you and the gospel of Christ. If we are his we will not.

CHRIST'S LOVE IN THE WORD

The reason we will gather together to hear the gospel and search God's word is because Christ's love constrains the believer to love the word of God.

Christ himself is the Word. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." (Jn 1: 1) Christ is the eternal Word who is God. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (Jn 1: 3) Christ is the Word who created all things. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." (Jn 1: 4) Christ, the Word, is the life and light of men and Christ, the Word, is especially the spiritual Life and spiritual Light of those born again of the Word. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (Jn 1: 14) The Word is Jesus Christ who was made flesh, the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth. Christ the Word came to uphold and fulfill the Word of God, in truth, that God might be gracious to his elect, while remaining just and true.

Also, every true believer is born again by the Word of God. The apostle Peter wrote, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24: For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (1 Pet 1: 23-25) Christ the Word and the written word, whereby the gospel is preached unto you, are inseparable. The written word was given by Christ. The written word is all about Christ. And Christ, the Word, comes in the preaching of the word so that the Word is the incorruptible Seed by which we are born again.

2 Corinthians 2: 9: As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10: But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

2 Peter 1:4: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Oh, the blessing of God's divine operation upon dead sinners like us! By Christ the Word, through the word preached, his Spirit has revealed in our hearts the deep things of God. He has given us exceeding great and precious promises of God. By Christ being formed in us he has made every believer a partaker of the divine nature. And he continues to grow us and make us enjoy this oneness with him through his word.

So seeing Christ is the Word, seeing the written word is by Christ, the word is all about Christ, seeing we are born of this incorruptible Seed by the gospel, the conclusion is this, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Pet 2: 1-2)

Have you tasted the Lord's grace in regeneration and redemption? Once we have tasted the Lord's grace then we hunger and thirst for his word.

Imagine a man blind from birth given sight! He would never grow weary of gazing up at the blue sky or across the yellow wheat field or at his father and mother's face! Think of the man deaf from birth given a hearing ear. He would never grow weary of hearing birds singing, children playing or the voice of the one who loves him.

Likewise, spiritual eyes and ears never grow weary of searching God's word. The pictures and types of Christ are beautiful to our eyes and a sweet song to our ears. They never grow dull. In the word we behold Christ our Righteousness covering Adam and Eve's nakedness; Christ the Promised Seed who bruised the serpent's head for his people; Christ, Abel's Lamb, our Acceptance with God; Christ in Noah's Ark who bore the rain of judgment that Noah might live; Christ in Abraham offering up his only begotten Son we are reminded "God shall provide himself a lamb."; we behold Christ is our Ladder as he was Jacob's; we behold Christ in the Burning Bush; Christ our Passover Lamb; Christ our brazen serpent lifted up. Believers delight in the word of God because we delight in Christ our Redemption, Christ our Righteousness, Christ our Holiness, Christ our Inheritance, Christ our All!

I was in Rock Valley, Iowa in 2003. I picked up a Bible of one of the members. I turned to my text. She had my whole outline written in the margin, with 3 or 4 dates when it had been preached from that pulpit before. I was so glad and encouraged! Afterwards, she told me it was just as new as the first day she heard it.

How can any man say he loves Christ yet he does not love the Word? Or how can a believer grow weary of the glorious gospel repeated over and over! The whole written word of God concerns one subject, Christ our Redeemer.

Someone will say, "Preacher, I have trouble understanding the word." Well, a skilled laborer does not become skillful in one day. It takes practice. But Peter said, "Desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby." How could you expect a baby to grow by the milk, if the baby never drinks the milk? It is by the word that we grow and the more we grow the more we desire the word by which we grow. Lay aside all the sinful distractions of the flesh and the world. Ask the one who wrote the word, the one who it is about, to teach you and show you Christ in the written word.

Another will say, "Preacher, I have all these school books that I am required to read so I don't have time for anything else." "And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Lu 10: 41-42)

This is certain, Christ's love constrains us to believe and love God our Father and his Son Christ Jesus, Christ's love constrains us to love our brethren and Christ's love constrains us to love the Word, the preaching of that Word, reading his word and supporting his gospel. Let folks say we are crazy or let them say we are too serious and fanatical. We say with Paul and all Christ's saints, "The love of Christ constraineth us!"

Amen!