

Christ's Constraining Love

“The love of Christ **THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS**
constraineth us.” the love of the Heavenly
—*II Corinthians 5:14* Father. We do, of course,
know something of God’s love apart from Christ.
God’s love is manifested in the sunshine, the rain,
and in the wondrous provision of all the things we
need. Those who think reasonably see in all these
things a manifestation of the Creator’s love. How
much greater, however, is the boundlessness of
divine love that is revealed to the Christian through
the life of our savior, Christ Jesus.

The disciples said to the Master, “Shew us the
Father,” and Jesus replied, “He that hath seen me
hath seen the Father.” (John 14:8,9) In the life of
Jesus, as recorded in the four Gospels, we have a
wondrous close-up view of the Father’s love. It is
this love that constrains us—that is, draws and
holds us within its control. The Bible tells us what
this control is, saying that inasmuch as we see
Christ’s love manifested by the sacrifice of himself
for us and for all, we conclude that we do not really
belong to ourselves, but to him who died for us.

Hence we should live unto him and not unto ourselves.—I Cor. 6:19,20; II Cor. 5:15

If we are thus truly bound by Christ's love, it should hold us within the constraints of humility and unselfishness in our walk with God. This means that if we find ourselves viewing life and its experiences from the standpoint of how we can benefit most therefrom according to the flesh, we are straying from the drawing power of the Master's love. A daily check-up on our attitude should reveal how close we are living to Christ—how closely we are walking in his footsteps.

To the extent that we are constrained by the love of Christ, we will endeavor to be guided by his example in all things. There are many wonderful examples of faithfulness given in the Bible. We think of Enoch, who “walked with God;” of Abraham, who pleased God by his faith; of Moses, who was “meek, above all . . . men;” of David, a “man after [God's] own heart;” and of others who were commendably noted in various ways. We can profit by their example in many respects, but not altogether, for these faithful servants of God did some things we should not do. With Jesus, however, it is different. His entire life—perfect in thought, word, and deed—is a pattern for our lives if we have yielded to the constraining influence of his love.

Jesus knew God's plan far better than we know it, and it is well to keep this in mind in considering the example of his life. He knew that the kingdoms of this present evil world were all a part of Satan's empire, but he did not rail against those kingdoms. He taught, rather, that we should render to Caesar

the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are his. (Matt. 22:21) He knew that the scribes and Pharisees of his day were hypocrites, and when conversing with them, he told them so. He did not go out of his way publicly to proclaim this fact to the world, but he did tell the Pharisees of their hypocrisy.

Jesus, furthermore, could read the hearts of people. He could say of Nathaniel, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47) On the other hand, when there was guile, such as he detected in the hearts of the Pharisees, he was qualified to tell them about it. If we could read the hearts of individuals today as Jesus did, we could safely follow his example in dealing with hypocrites. However, since we cannot do this, it would be wise to maintain a course of proclaiming the comforting message of the kingdom, rather than to expose the imperfections of others.

Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, being in no way contaminated by his contacts with fallen man. However, this was not because he kept himself distant from the people, or separated himself from their company. We likewise are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, not by holding aloof from mankind, but by the indwelling spirit of God that helps to shield us from the imperfections with which we are surrounded. Like Jesus, we cannot hope to bear witness to the people if we do not come in contact with them. As our Master was not contaminated by his contact with publicans and sinners whom he wished to help, so we can keep ourselves separate from the world while bearing witness to it.

Jesus knew the time was not then due for the conversion of the world. He saw that not even the Jewish nation would be converted as a result of his ministry. Nevertheless, he zealously performed “mighty works” in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, placing a measure of responsibility upon the individuals in those cities because they did not repent.—Matt. 11:20-24

The Heavenly Father’s love, which prompted the gift of his Son to be man’s Redeemer, was thus manifested in the Son by his untiring effort to help Israel see the light and repent. His deep concern was revealed near the close of his ministry, when he said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”—Matt. 23:37

If we are constrained by the love of Christ, we should have no less interest in our fellow men than he displayed, especially in our brethren. We, like Jesus, know that this is not the time when the world will be converted. We recognize that only one here and one there, even of those who profess to be Christians, will accept the Truth in this age. We see, furthermore, as Jesus did, that a glorious opportunity is yet to be given to all mankind under the favorable conditions of Christ’s kingdom. However, if the constraining influence of Christ’s love has the same effect upon us as it had upon him, we will work just as hard and sacrifice just as much to let our light shine now as though we believed the world actually would be converted as a result of our efforts.

We are not to do this in the spirit of accomplishing great and wonderful works. Neither are we to do it to make a name for ourselves, or to convince ourselves or others that we have a right to God's favor because of our works. We will also not do it in order to build a big church organization. Jesus did not engage in his ministry of service for any of these reasons.

We are to minister as Jesus did because we want to be like him, fully yielding to the constraining power of his love. We are to do so, not at the expense of our own growth in grace and love, but because our increased growth in love impels us to serve others. Being constrained by the love of Christ to lay down our lives in the service of the Truth, and for our brethren, we will also endeavor to follow his example of kindness, mercy, patience, long-suffering, and brotherly kindness in all that we say and do. Let us all continue to pray for one another, that we may be constrained more and more by the love of Christ, and be more like him in all things. ■