

CHRIST'S CONSTRAINING LOVE

"For the love of Christ constraineth us." II Corinthians 5:14.

What is it that makes a man act just like he does? Why do two men with practically the same field of motives before them act differently? Why does the Christian act differently than an unsaved person? The conduct of every intelligent being is governed by some chosen motive. The motives are many and various, some higher and some lower; and the quality of the conduct is determined by the character of the motive which moves to action.

Now and then there appears a life so completely and so differently Christian that it at once demands and yet defies explanation. The worldly minded have a large number of depreciator terms that they always fling at all who have higher standards and nobler aims than they have. Long ago, they called a prophet "a fool." When the news came to the brothers of Jesus that He so kept on in His benevolent work of healing the sick and preaching the gospel and raising the dead that He didn't even have time to eat, and that He was so shut in by the needy, anxious and scrowling people who crowded around Him that He couldn't get any rest, that He seemed to be wearing His very life out, they said, "He is beside Himself; let us go and seize Him." Thus the family of our Saviour proposed the getting out of a writ of lunacy and putting Him under confinement as not having His right mind, needing a guardian needing somebody to take care of His affairs. In the light of what they said about our Saviour when He was here in the flesh, we ought to remember that the servant is not greater than his Master.

On a certain occasion Paul appeared in court to answer a charge preferred against him, and as he was telling about the vision that he received on the way to Damascus, and how the Lord Jesus Christ saved him, commissioned him, and empowered him to turn the nations from darkness to light, and to give them an inheritance with the saints in light through faith in Christ, as he was going on with his story Festus pointed his finger at him and said, "Paul, you are beside yourself. Much learning hath made thee mad." Festus simply could not understand it. Think of such a speech as that in a courthouse, with a shrewd, calculating lawyer prosecuting. It was quite natural for Festus to say, "That man is crazy. Now, he isn't a bad man; he is simply crazy." Even so, the cynical worldlian, or even the shallow Christian, today says that the whole-hearted Christian is a fool or a crazy person.

Although the Corinthian brethren had heard Paul, had believed the gospel which he had preached, had accepted Christ as their Saviour, had been baptized upon the profession of their faith in Him, and had started in the Christian life, when Paul came before them and exhibited a zeal that was like an unquenchable fire, and stood and received stripes on his body until the blood ran down his back, they said, "He is crazy."

In reply Paul wrote this verse as an apology. In substance he remarked, "You ask an explanation of my conduct, why I unselfishly do the things that I do; why I count money nothing; why I count fame and glory as nothing; why I spurn the greatest honors that this world offers. You don't understand; it is the love of Christ that constrains me to be like I am." Thus he told them that his actions were inspired, controlled and impelled by the constraining love of Christ. He had abandoned a brilliant career for what seemed to them a very poor one. He explained that the reason for his conduct was that the love of Christ constrained him. He meant that Christ's love overmastered him, impelled him or drove him. It burned within him, held him as its captive, and carried him onward and upward. Christ had won exclusive rights in him. Unreservedly he gave himself to Christ. Christ's love for Paul was the force that held him together. Sin had torn him apart, but Christ had put him together again, and was holding him with a mighty grip.

I. The Meaning Of Our Scripture.

Immediately one has the feeling that this is the language of intensity. No lazy, languid soul is speaking here. It is the flaming forth of a hot heart, the unshamed testimony of a life that is commanded by a mighty and all-mastering motive. That warm heart is

the heart of Paul, that life is one which has left its indelible mark on twenty centuries of Christian history, and that motive is none other than the love of Christ.

1. "The love of Christ."

When we read here about the love of Christ, we should understand the words correctly. To this end we should ask, Just what did Paul mean when he spoke these words? Did he mean Christ's love for him, or his love for Christ? Unquestionably, this expression means Christ's love for us and not our love for Him. The love of Christ for us spoke in His words, shone in His actions, mirrored itself in His tears, and at last drop by drop it fell in blood from the cross. It was that love of Christ that met Saul of Tarsus in all his guilt, streamed forth upon him, touched him, broke his heart, broke his habits, brought about the salvation of his soul, altered his character, changed his career, and made a marvelous and abiding difference in his whole life. The love of Christ here means His infinite love for us in dying for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. It is not how we love Christ, but how Christ loves us.

However, Christ's love for us is creative in its effect. Christ's love for Paul awakened his love for his Lord. His love for Christ was only the response, or the inevitable sequel, to Christ's love for him. His love for us awakens and sustains a responsive love for Him such as we express in the old hymn:

"My Jesus, I love Thee,
I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the follies
Of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer,
My Saviour art Thou,
If ever I loved Thee,
My Jesus, 'tis now."

Christ's love for us is self-denying, unselfish, free, enriching, boundless, continuous and eternal.

2. "Constraineth."

This is a translation of the Greek word "sunecho," which means to hold together and to press on every side. It means to shut up to one line and purpose, as in a narrow, walled road. Christ's love grasped Paul's mind, captivated his thoughts, controlled his emotions, engaged his affections, formed his character, influenced his actions, molded his life and shut him up to one course of conduct. Christ truly won exclusive rights in Paul. The love of Christ fences out of the lives of Christians all programs of wrong living and fences into their lives all programs of right living. When the love of Christ overmasters a Christian, it so adjusts his likes and dislikes that he will hate that which is wrong and love that which is right. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." When Christians have duties to be performed, burdens to be borne, trials to be met, sacrifices to be made and work to be done, the love of Christ can transform these things into the most delightful tasks.

II. The Motives For Our Service.

Every intelligent act results from some motive. The act may be performed for pleasure, profit, position or power. Motives may be high and holy, or they may be degrading and devilish, but we are constrained by them. Among the motives for rendering religious services are the following:

1. The fear of punishment.

People are held back from doing many things because they fear the penalty. Many

do things that are right because they are afraid to do wrong. Many serve thinking that thereby they will escape the punishment of hell. Fear of punishment is a very inadequate motive for religious service. The one who serves from a sense of fear renders a slavish service.

2. The sense of duty.

This gives evidence of the consciousness of moral and spiritual obligations. It involves a desire to do what is right.

3. The hope of reward.

Many have a great interest in their reputations. Of course, they know that some form of religion is favorable to one's reputation. The greatest aim of many is to gratify self-esteem and pass through life honorably. Multitudes serve with the hope of receiving happiness in the future and gaining heaven in the end. Those who serve in order to get rewards certainly render a selfish service.

4. The love of Christ.

Love is the purest, highest and mightiest motive for service. What is it in Christ that draws men, wins their allegiance away from Satan, and makes them ready to follow Him through peril and sacrifice, even to death? It is the love of Christ. He came into the world to reveal the love of God, and men saw it in His face, felt it in His touch and heard it in His voice.

Love is the impelling motive behind all self-denial, self-sacrifice and labor for Christ. When writing of his missionary travels in South Africa and the dangers which he had to encounter there, Livingstone said, "I do not mention these privations as if I consider them to be 'sacrifices' for I think that the word ought never to be applied to anything we can do for Him Who came down from heaven and died for us."

The love of Christ warmed Paul's heart, stirred his emotions, fired his intellect, and pressed him like a resistless torrent to a devotion to Christ which is simply indescribable. The driving power in his life was the thought, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." I fear that the emphasis today is placed on our love for Christ rather than on Christ's love for us.

The Christian who serves Christ because he loves is moved by the noblest impulse that ever stirred God or men. There is no service like that of the one who serves because he loves. Those who serve from a sense of love are far more careful and accurate in their obedience than those who serve from a sense of loss or gain. Is the love of Christ the great motive power in your Christian life? If not, you are not rendering the highest Christian service and you are not having the greatest Christian joy.

The love of Christ should constrain us to live godly lives, to love each other, to be filled with the Spirit, to be obedient to His will, to give of our means, and to faithfully promote His cause. Napoleon stood before his men and cried, "One hundred men, Forward! Step out of the ranks!" He thus called for one hundred loyal soldiers to lead a forlorn hope when it was probable that every volunteer would be killed. Not only one hundred men, but every man in the regiment stepped forward, and offered himself to live or die for his emperor. Christ, our Captain, lifts His bloodstained hands, and calls for you and me to step forward in His service; to give our hearts, our talents, our time, our lives, our all for His cause.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."