

Constrained by love

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to consider words in the chapter we read, second epistle of Paul to Corinthians, chapter 5, reading at verse 14.

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.

Now last Sabbath evening, we start to look at verse 10 of this chapter, and we notice that in the context, there were two things which inspired Paul to live the way he did.

The first was what Christ would have him be, and secondly, what Christ at the day of judgment would show him to be.

And that was an awful thought for Paul to be shown for what he really was, and an awful thought for us all to think that at that day, the character that we form in this life will be displayed for all to see.

[1 : 42] And it was that thought that led Paul to speak in verse 11 of the terror of the Lord, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord.

Now this is not the attitude that the ungodly have towards God, an attitude that constrains them to live away from God and to flee from God, to run other than where God is, but rather is to be thought of in terms of that attitude of awe and reverence that people are to have for God.

Paul was saying that what he knew of God produced reverence in his heart for God. And that made him an object of love, an object of honour, and one who was to be served by him.

And therefore he says, knowing God as we do, we persuade men. And therefore in answer to the question, that perhaps basically he is answering anyway in this chapter, why do you live the way you do?

Why do you preach the way you do? Why do you spend your life as you do, as a servant of Christ, a minister of the gospel? In answer to that question, he says, because we know what God is and we want to persuade men.

[3 : 20] We want to convince them by the exposition of the truth. And you know that this was the great ministry that Jesus told his disciples they were going to have in the world as they presented the truth persuasively and convincingly.

the Holy Spirit was going to enlighten the minds of men and women, to enlighten them in such a way that they would be persuaded to accept the truth.

That's the meaning of the word. When the Spirit has come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Now says Paul, and there were people in Corinth, as there were in other places, who were questioning his motives as a preacher.

Now says Paul, that is my motive. I know God, I'm acquainted with God, and I want to persuade men to love God.

And that is known to God himself. We are manifest unto God. God knows my motive. And he says, I trust also that you recognize my motive in preaching.

[4 : 40] He appeals to God, and he appeals to the Corinthians for confirmation of his motives. Now the point here was this, that Paul's enemies were accusing him of glory seeking.

They were accusing him of being an opportunist, of moving into certain areas and trying to influence the thinking and the minds of people who were trying to condition them, trying to browbeat them into submission.

Well he says, that is not my motive at all. My motive is to seek the glory of God. I am not here, he says, to commend myself, either in preaching or in writing.

I am here to commend God and to give you occasion to glory on our behalf. And I am saying that, he says, so that you will be able to answer these critics in Corinth.

People who say that we are only out for our own ends. Well I am giving you, he says, as though he would send them, I am putting this ammunition into your hands so that you will be able to answer these people.

[5 : 52] These people glory in appearance, he says, and not in heart. What matters to these people is the externals, the outward appearances of religion.

What appeals to these Pharisees is what people see them to be. What is important to us, he says, is the heart.

What a passion is inwardly. And you know that, and you yourself know this as well as anybody else. What was said of old by someone is equally true today.

What a man is before God, that is what he is and nothing else. What he is before God. And here Paul lays bare his heart.

And he appeals to God and he appeals to them for confirmation that what he is interested in is the heart. The gospel is interested in the heart.

[6 : 57] God is interested in the heart. And we persuade men with the gospel and through the gospel that they may give their heart unto God.

And then he turns to another form of criticism. There were people who accused him of being a madman. on the one hand, people accused of being a cool, calculated logician on the other.

Well, he says, whether we be beside ourselves to God, whether we are considered out of our mind, if people think that I'm a madman and preaching the gospel, so be it.

I do it for God's sake. If, on the other hand, people think that we're sober, people think that we're cool, calculating logicians, trying to influence them by reasoned argument on the basis of the truth, so be it.

Whether we're considered as madmen or as cool logicians, we are doing this for God's sake and for your sake.

[8 : 07] And then he comes to the very heart of the matter. In the words of our text, he tells us the real motive that impelled him to live, to preach, and to act the way he did 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 live should live not unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.

Now here he is, coming to the great compelling force that operated on his heart and compelled him to preach the way he did, namely, the love of Christ.

He tells us how he really feels. He tells us why he feels that way. He unfolds for us here the working of his own heart.

And in answering his slanderous and his critics, he shows them his heart. I do these things because I am impelled, constrained, propelled by the love of Christ.

[9 : 32] And I want a little tonight to look with you at two or three things that I brought before us in this text. The power that influenced him, the love of Christ. The influence it produced on him, it constrained him.

the discernment or the judgment that accompanied it. We thus judge that if one died for all, then we're all dead, or really then all died.

And then the conclusion that he drew from it, that we live for him who died and who rose again.

First of all then, the power that influenced him. the love of Christ. Now there are two ways in which the Bible, in which the New Testament particularly, usually speaks of the love of Christ.

First of all, it speaks of it as Christ's love for us and secondly, as our love for him. And there is no doubt but that it is in the first way that the words are to be understood in our context here.

[10 : 47] Christ's love for us. Now, where do you start? When you take up a theme like this, the love of Christ constrains us.

Where do you start? Here is the vastest subject that you could possibly speak of. Well, let us take our start from what the Bible, how the Bible brings it, the way the Bible brings it before us.

We are told, for example, that from all eternity, Christ loved his people. So the first thing you speak about the love of Christ is this, the first thing you say about it, is that it is eternal.

That means it had no beginning whatsoever. Now, that concept itself makes it difficult for you and for me to understand it. You see, it is extremely difficult for us to think in terms of something which had no beginning.

Children here tonight, for example, and you parents who are used to instruct your children in the things of God, you will know that from time to time they confront you with a very difficult question. [12:01] And the question is this, where did God come from? And you try to explain to them that God had no beginning. God is eternal. Now, the mind of the child finds extremely difficult to come to terms with that concept.

And I suggest to you that it is true of yourself here tonight as an adult to think in terms of a love which had no beginning at all from all eternity.

And then linked with that concept is this, that that love was sovereign, that that love was free. Now, what that means, I think, is this, that there was not a thing in the people who were loved that drew that love towards them.

And this is the difference between the love of God and human love. This is the difference between divine love and human love. You see, you love someone, but you know that your love for that person had a beginning, and it also had a reason.

No, there is a sense in which we can deal with this later on, in which love is blind. Nevertheless, there is something in the object, or there was something in the object of your love that drew your love towards that person.

[13:20] There were certain qualities, perhaps the way the person appeared, the way the person acted, their nature, their disposition, there was something about them that drew you towards them.

there was an affinity, something clicked. But you can never say that of the love of God for us, because God loved us when we were undeserving of any good thing from them.

No sinner in the world tonight could possibly address the Almighty and say to him, I earned your love, I deserved your love.

No one deserved to be loved by Christ. It is omnipotent, it is all-powerful, it is indestructible, it is immeasurable, it is unchangeable, it is tender, it is practical.

You see, Christ loved from all eternity, sovereignly, omnipotently, unchangeably, and in the course of time when he came into this world, he showed that love in practical ways, and he showed it in the greatest way possible, greater love hath no man than this, that a man laid on his life for his friends.

[14:38] Now this is at the very heart of what Paul is going to deal with in a minute, and what Paul is going to deal with is this, he's going to tell these people in Corinth, look, I live the way I do because Christ died for me.

This is the way in which Christ proved his love for the world, that he gave his life a ransom for many, and while he was in this world there were many practical examples he gave them of his love for them, his tenderness towards them, his compassion, his protecting care, his deliverance of them, his guiding of them, his preparing of them, his comforting of them, his love surrounded them, all the time he was with them in this world.

He was patient, and he was practical. In every conceivable way, the love of Christ is a truly impelling and constraining motive.

Now, I just want to leave that just now because he deals with it first of all generally, and then he goes on to speak of it more particularly. that which impels me to live the power in my life is the love that Christ had and has for me.

You know the way in which the hymn writer put this, could we would think the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made, were every blade of grass a quill, and every man a scribe by trade.

[16:23] To write the love of God to man would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain a whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

What he saying is this, this love is infinite, it is therefore immeasurable, and there will never come a time when that love will be fathomed, when that love will be understood, when that love will fill your mind in such a way there will be nothing else left of it for you to discover.

Throughout the endless ages of eternity, the love of Christ will remain eternal, will remain infinite, and that is one sense in which eternity will be eternity.

Throughout the endless ages of eternity, the redeemed soul of man will drink out of this ocean, and it will remain an infinite ocean throughout the endless ages of eternity, and the mind, and the heart, and the will, and the thought of the redeemed will nevertheless be filled with a love which will always remain the same, the love of Christ.

Now as he considers it, he tells us secondly that that love produced and influenced on him. The love of Christ constrains us.

[17 : 58] Put it another way, what he says was that this love governed his thinking and controlled his living. He was so governed and so constrained by the love of Christ to make the will and the love of Christ his own rule of life, and he sought the glory of God consequently as a result of it.

Now this word constraining leads us right into the heart of an individual. You see for Paul the religion that he practiced and the religion that he preached was one of experience.

There is a sense in which the Christian faith is presented as a cool, calculating, intellectual exercise that people delight to engage in.

Well the Bible never ever presents it like that. It presents it as that which engages your mind and your attention, but also as that which has a profound effect upon the way a man lives, and the way upon which a woman lives, and a boy and a girl lives.

It constrains. Now I suggest to you that there are two ways in which this concept is to be understood.

[19 : 24] You know that the Gaelic translation of this word is far more effective than the English. It speaks of an agony of feeling.

It speaks of an agony of action and of love. It is the mind and the heart is impelled and coerced by love.

This love moves the heart to action. Now you think of natural love. A husband for a wife and a wife for a husband. Boyfriend, girlfriend.

Parents and children. Children and parents. If you love someone truly loved, you know that the feeling that you have towards that person moves you to action.

love. You are impelled along a certain path. You are bound by that love to that particular path that all your aims and all your aspirations are concentrated on that great object and on that great objective.

[20 : 36] What Paul says is this. My life, he says, and you think of what he says, my life is governed because I am gripped by a power that won't let me rest.

It moves me along. It carries me along. There's an illustration you could use here to show this. You know, if you see a fast-moving river and you throw a stick into the river, that stick is carried along by the river.

It becomes part of the river itself. And this is what Paul is saying, that the love of Christ so gripped him that it has carried him along its own stream.

He is caught up in this great movement. It possesses him. It masters him. It controls him. It makes him work.

And that is the nature of love. It always compels you to act in the interest of the one you love. If you love someone and you're not compelled to act in the interest and for the sake of that person, I don't think you love that person at all.

[21 : 51] Love inspires you to serve because you want to serve. Love inspires you to give because you want to give.

It constrains. And there's another idea here that you are bound together with the object of your love. Your heart is knit to that person's heart.

And you become one. This is how the Bible speaks of human love. It speaks of marriage in this way.

For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they too shall be one flesh. They become one in aspiration, one in aim, one in objective, one in action.

The union of love. So it is with a convert and Christ. They are bound together under the banner of the love of Christ.

[22 : 53] And this is what the church said in the Old Testament, his banner over me was love. You take that banner away and the union is destroyed.

This was Paul's argument, Romans chapter 8. Destroy the love of Christ and you destroy the believer because you have severed him from Christ.

But I am persuaded, he said, that nothing is able to sever us from Christ. And as I said earlier, just as you are constrained by it and bound by it, so you are swallowed up by it, borne along by it, as I said earlier, like that stick in the river.

And I think the point that Paul is making is this, and he wrote this letter after he was many years a servant of Christ, many years a preacher of the gospel. This power wasn't a diminishing one in his life.

It was an increasing one. It was as though the stream and the river was gathering momentum. If it began as a trickle, it became a stream. The stream became the river.

[24 : 02] The river became a flood. And ultimately that flood became an ocean. So it is, this is the way in which the Bible pictures the love of Christ for us.

We are caught up in it. And I want to put a personal question here tonight to the Christians before me. And those of you who may not be Christians, don't switch off because I seem to be speaking to people of the silk just for a minute.

Isn't it tragic that instead of this love impelling and constraining you more tonight as a Christian, it seems to be constraining and impelling you less.

Isn't that a tragedy? Because I want to suggest to you something. If human love is what it ought to be and what you believe it to be in your own life.

It isn't something which has become a diminishing power in your experience but an increasing one. It isn't one which has had less influence on you but more. And should it not be the case therefore at the spiritual level, at the spiritual level, that the love of Christ should be gripping you more and more tonight and constraining you love to more and more.

[25 : 25] you think of the way in which Paul gave himself to Christ. Spurgeon, Wesley, McChain, Whitefield, Bunyan, all these men and great women right throughout history, swallowed up by the love of Christ.

as I said last week. Would Christian life, would church life, would congregational life, not be far more healthy if you and I were taken up with this great issue and not with peripheral issues such as seem to dominate our thinking more and more.

And if you and I were more concerned about our love for the Lord and the Lord's love for us constraining us to live life and my life and the life of the church, be a better one tonight.

The love of Christ, said someone, doth me constrain to seek the wandering soul of man with cries and treaties, tears to save, to snatch them from the fiery wave.

Well, he says, there is a power that has gripped me and that power is the love of Christ. It constrains me. It keeps me from doing certain things and it moves me to doing other things.

[26 : 46] There are two signs to constraining, to agony, to coagno, two signs. It hems you in, love hems you into your object and it also constrains you to act in the interest of your object.

love. And it is love that keeps you from doing what you ought not to do in the name of and for the sake of the object of your love.

But there's a third thing here. There is a discernment or a judgment, an intellectual assent to which he has come, a conclusion to which he has come.

And this is what he says. Because he says we thus judge that if one died for all then all died. That's the way it should be written. And that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who loved them, who died for them and gave and rose and rose again.

Now what is Paul here saying? Well you know, love as I said is a first and experience that you have. You know what people say.

[28 : 00] Tell me how you know that you love. And someone will answer to you, better felt than telt. Of course that's true. But then you see, you must at the same time be able to articulate your love.

I'm not suggesting that a person can reason himself into loving. But I am saying that a person can reason himself into knowing that he loves.

And there's a difference. what Paul is here saying is this. As he considered the love of Christ, as he thought of it, there was something about it that made him come to a certain conclusion.

There is something about this love, he says, that makes me conclude this. What? that if one died for all, then all died.

That's the judgment of the conclusion that he has come to as he considers this love. He looks at the love of Christ, and he looks at the way in which Christ expressed it, the way in which he showed it.

[29 : 08] Now you know as well as I do how he showed it. He came into the world and he died. But wait a minute. what does that mean?

Christ died. Well, you've got a Bible as well as I have. And you know that what the Bible tells you is this, that Christ died for those who were given to him by the fathers.

That's what he said himself, I am come to lay down my life a ransom for many. My father gave them to me. From all eternity he loved people. And he came into this world to die for them so that they

might be saved from their sins.

So what he says is this, this love he says gave itself in death. But I realize something else he says, that those for whom he died died in him.

And what he's putting his finger on here is simply this, the substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus. Now you've heard the word before.

[30 : 15] Substitutionary. What it means is this, Jesus in dying died for you and for me if he died for those who were given to him from all eternity.

That's what it means. He took our nature, took our sins, died our death. We were estranged from God, we were guilty sinners, hell deserving, deserving to be cast out from the sight of God forever. And what happened? Christ came, took our nature, took out sins, died our death. He stood there for us. All our sins, as he tells at the end of this chapter, were made over to him.

Our sins were imputed to Christ, and Christ died for such. But there's another side to the picture, and it's this.

I realize this is Paul, that all for whom he died, died in him. That's what it means.

[31 : 23] It doesn't mean really that all those for whom Jesus died were dead spiritually. that is our truth. But the truth that he's emphasizing here is this, that all those for whom he died, died in him.

If the death of Jesus was substitutionary, there was something else in it. we were united to Christ in his death. That's what it means.

This is a mystery that I find extremely difficult to explain to myself, far less to you. We were united to him when he came into this world in his passion.

We were united to him. Our sins were made over to him. Our death became his. He died our death. So that, could I explain to you like this?

As a saved sinner, I can say tonight of Christ who died, he died my death.

[32 : 23] He took my sins. And the death that I deserved, he died. And that death is no mine.

I died in him. Now says Paul, that's the conclusion that I came to. As I consider the death of Jesus, I saw it as a death for me.

And I saw it as a death in which I was united. And just as my sins became his, so all that he did becomes mine.

We died in him. it's the exact same thing that he's referring to at the end of the chapter. What theologians refer to as imputation and counter imputation.

But someone may say, so what? Well, no. This is the answer to so what? So that we which live should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him who died and rose again.

[33 : 35] As I consider, he says, and I think this is Paul's argument, as I consider the extent and the length to which Jesus went, it has a profound effect on the way that I live.

And this is the effect it has on me. Because of what he did for me, I can never again live unto myself, but unto him who died for me and rose again.

And my friend, this is the very principle that cut the cross, the one reason for which you and I live in this world as we are by nature.

Who do we live for? Ourselves. Who do we want to satisfy? Ourselves. Who do we want to glorify? Ourselves. Whose will do we want to live? Our own. Whose end do we seek? Our own. Whose first and foremost in our lives?

[34 : 44] Ourselves. Myself. But once Christ comes into your life, and this is Paul's argument truly in 14 and 15, once this power comes, once this love touches you, once you realize the length to which he went, how can you ever again live for yourself?

that's his argument. The more I realize this is what is love meant, the more I realize that I cannot live for myself, but live for him who died and who rose again.

And here we are now, almost back at the beginning, back at where we started. We live not for ourselves, but for him.

Well, if I were going to ask you some very pointed questions tonight, I'm sure that I could make you as uncomfortable as I would want to make myself.

Paul says, he died for me, therefore, I live for him.

[36 : 11] Before I close the service, may I ask you to try and explain to yourself what this really means, living for him and not for yourself.

Well, let me help you to answer the question. You must first of all recognize the relationship in which you stand to him. Then you must acknowledge the blessings that he has bestowed on you by

his death.

Then you accept the obligations that that lays upon you. then you try to consider the prospect that that opens up before you.

And then you consider the inheritance that Christ by his death has purchased for you. Since Christ died for us and we died in him, surely that should lead us habitually to present our lives as a living sacrifice unto him.

And I don't think I can escape this thought that Paul is here emphasizing the great fact, he's going on to deal with it in the next verse, that the life into which Christ has come with the power of his love is a life which has been radically changed.

[37 : 42] So that you don't live for yourself anymore, you live unto him. Now as you and I look at a Christian, I know my friend, we can all come together and think about these things at the end of the service.

As you and I here tonight consider and think about the Christian, you would say of him as I would, well, the Christian after all speaks like anybody else, works like anybody else, sounds like anybody else and appears like anybody else.

Just an ordinary human being, isn't he? Yes. But the life that he lives, he lives with that different emphasis, with that different motive and with that different direction.

Because a power has taken over his life and that power is the love of Christ and the constraint of that love is now seen. the thought that Christ died for them constrains them to live for them.

They are hemmed in, hemmed in. They are kept from doing things by love. Do you realize, I'm sure you do, I shouldn't put it like that, of course you realize that love acts like that.

[39 : 08] Love keeps you from doing many things. Remember what Joseph said. When he was being influenced by Potiphar's wife to commit sin, oh he says, how can I sin against God?

how can I do it? In his presence. And as I was saying to say last week, I think that this is one of the great failings in modern society, that we have lost our scriptural conception of God and of the love of Christ.

And if we could only get it back, it would hem us in to live for himself. are not to ourselves.

You see, the great thing about love is this, it conquers self. And it acts as a restraining influence on self. It does that.

There are many tragedies in the world tonight. There are many homes in which love is supposed to reside, where love doesn't show itself at all.

[40 : 27] In possession and control of the home is the monster self. And when self wants its own way, love goes out the window. But when love is part and part of the habitation, it has a controlling influence where it resides.

love is the love. It also constrains you to live. There is something full and free about love. And the life that Paul is speaking of here is a life in which he was free to love as Christ, free to serve as Lord, free to live a life which was worthwhile, free to work and free to witness, and free to live for him.

And then when that kind of love fills your life, the most ordinary things take on a new meaning. For the woman, the daily chores of a home are easier to undertake.

For the schoolboy and the student, the necessary homework is more easily undertaken. for us all, whatever possessions may be, or a station in life, whatever we are asked to do is more freely done when we are impelled by love.

Because as love becomes a barrier to sin, so it becomes an incentive for work and for action in the name of Christ.

[42 : 04] And notice, we live like this for him who died and arose again. He is no more dead. He is alive.

And the fact of the matter is this, I think this is the emphasis here, he is alive to be with you, alive to be for you, and alive to be in you.

And this is our great incentive and our great motive for living. Now then, you may think tonight that this kind of sermon has little relevance for you who are not a Christian.

My friend, don't think like that. What Paul is speaking about here is this. You and I have motives for living here tonight.

You've got a motive for everything that you do, wherever you go, and whatever you want to be. love of Christ. What this verse is asking you to answer is this.

[43 : 08] Is the love of Christ the great motivating principle in your life? Is it that impelling and constraining force that moves you to live the way you live?

has this love dethroned self from your heart and enthroned Christ in your heart?

know that these aren't difficult questions to answer, I suggest to you. And as you and I stand before God tonight, surely you ought to know whether this power has taken over your life.

And if it has, make sure that self doesn't want to get back on the throne, and that self doesn't want to dethrone Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.