

An Influence To Christ-likeness

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2Cor. 5:14-17 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: **15** And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. **16** Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more. **17** Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Opening remarks: If this portion of truth from the Word of God doesn't cause a person to begin to look at his/her spiritual life and behavior and really ask whether or not it reflects the life and actions of Christ, then there is no incentive in existence to convince or provoke a person to do so.

I do say that the way the Lord's people respond to these profound words of truth about Christ's love differs from person to person. But, while there is a difference, there is **some kind** of response in those who stop to think about what scripture says here (read the verse again).

I say that there are different responses, but those are positive responses. Because, we are able to see that some of God's children digest what scripture has said here and then make serious commitments about what they realize the words mean. This is because the Lord has a way of turning a light on in our heads about His word by using the Holy Spirit to apply that word to our understanding. On the other hand, some other folks who profess to be saved (that I truly believe are God's children) let these verses pass right over their heads, and don't apply them in any deep personal way, and as a result are changed very little if at all. They don't necessarily reject the message of this Word, and so that, in itself, is a positive thing. But, they fail to get the meaning and as a result lose the blessing of moving upward in spiritual growth. So, for one, there is a large blessing; for the other there is little or none.

Let's hope that every believer here can find some spiritual growth as we look at these verses today. Let's look to the Holy Spirit to really open our hearts to what is written here.

I. The force of what scripture says here about Christ and us begins in a phrase of v. 14: (...”the love of Christ constraineth us...”)

- ❖ To begin to get a deeper understanding of what this phrase is telling us, let's think for a while about the word “constraineth.” It is a mild looking word with great depth of meaning. Considering its meaning, we may see the magnitude of the force of Christ's love operating upon our lives as believers:
- ❖ **Definition 1: To compel by physical, moral, or circumstantial force; oblige**
- ❖ Now, compel means to influence, to cause to do something, or even to turn someone in the direction of doing something. With the idea of “compel” in mind, we want to think for a bit about the moral and circumstantial force in this definition; and we want to think about the word “oblige”
 - So this phrase is about the love of Christ influencing or turning us by a **moral force**...the moral impact and influence of Christ's love upon us
 - as the moon influences the ebb and tide of the oceans of earth, so Christ's love stirs and lifts our moral consciousness and causes us to **consider and desire righteousness and holiness**.
 - as the sun rises on the horizon on a bright summer morning, driving the darkness before it, so **Christ pushes back the darkness of carnal predispositions that linger in our lives**

- **Circumstantial force:** The circumstances of the relationship of love between Him and us constrains us
 - It was by the miraculous power of Christ that we were drawn into this salvation relationship. As a whirlpool in the water draws and swallows that which is floating on the pool, so Our Lord drew us by the force of grace acting on our souls and we were engulfed in the power of His love.
 - the power of Christ dictates the circumstances surrounding our relationship with Him and like a potter's hands on the yielding clay, He shapes that relationship into a productive and meaningful spiritual house filled with beauty and love
- The word **oblige** carries the idea of force. It is the force of Christ's presence, power, and love that causes us to feel obliged to follow Him...to serve Him. Our awareness of the height, breadth, and depth of Christ's love, and our sense of His divine power that wraps chains of steel around our hearts and we welcome and seek that constraining force that causes us to voluntarily obligate ourselves to Him in service.
- ❖ **Definition 2 for "constrain": To keep within close bounds; confine**
 - The boundaries which His constraining love draw around us
 - We are like water running down a hill which is forced into the lowest part of the drainage system to be channeled where the topography of the land dictates. Christ's love is like that land, as the power of that love compels us to flow as He guides, influences and directs.
 - The constraint of Christ's love defines the boundaries that we prescribe for our lives as a result of the influence of His loving constraint
 - In the natural world, almost all animals establish themselves "territories" or "home ranges" in which they live, feed, raise their young. They set those boundaries and mark them. They rarely go beyond them. They constrain themselves to that familiar landscape. The love of Christ acts this way upon us. Paul says in **1Cor. 6:12**, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."
- ❖ **Definition 3 for "constrain": To inhibit or restrain; hold back**
- ❖ The love of Christ acts as the force that keeps us back from things we might ordinarily be led to do.
 - Like a bridle holds a horse back when the rider pulls on the reins, so the love of Christ reins in the carnal nature we have
 - There's a cold remedy out on the market that promises to inhibit the effects of a cold that is coming on. It works for me. This cold remedy reminds me of the inhibiting force of Christ's love in my life which **constrains my old nature** from having free rein and ruling in my life.
 - They have that insect repellent patch (Thiamin...Vitamin B1 absorbed through skin, excreted through pores; repels mosquitoes/flyes). This is so like Christ in our lives. Because He loves us, His power and His presence becomes part of us and it **inhibits or restrains forces of the wicked one and of the world.**
 - It is the love of Christ that produces the **prudent hesitancy and caution with which we conduct our business** in the world and among God's people
 - The apostle Paul catches the spirit of this in his dealings with the church at Thessalonica when he said: (**1Thess. 2:10-11**) Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and justly and unblamably we **behaved ourselves** among you that believe: **11** As ye know how we **exhorted and comforted and charged** every one of you, as a father *doth* his children,
- ❖ **Definition 4 for "constrain": To produce in a forced or inhibited manner.**
 - The love of Christ constrains us and moves us toward our spiritual productivity. The channeled and focused output of our lives as the Holy Spirit causes the love of Christ to direct our productivity toward His purposes.
 - Under the influence of Christ's love we become that carefully cultivated olive tree...that well

dressed and pruned grapevine. “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price...” (1 Cor. 6:19-20) The bible says (Song of Sol. 8:11) Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon...” So Christ has a vineyard and we are His precious vines. He wills that we go and bring forth much fruit...His love constrains us in that direction

II. The outcome of Christ’s substitutionary death is found in v. 17: (“...a new creature....”)

- ❖ Believers are a quite different creation of God from the **carnal human**:
 - who has one thing that influences what decisions he makes and what action he takes; a depraved nature - **Romans 3:10**
 - who is a servant (under bondage) to sin
 - **John 8:33-34**
- ❖ The new creature has another nature.
 - **John 3:6** **That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**
 - The butterfly goes into the cocoon an ugly caterpillar; it comes out a beautiful, ethereal, creature...just so, we are caterpillars in our carnal lives, but when we are enshrouded in the regenerative cocoon of God’s saving grace, we come forth a spiritual creature that is beautiful in the sight of God.
 - A nature inclined toward God: As the plant growing up in good soil bends toward the sun, so our new nature inclines instinctively toward the Lord.
 - **Romans 8:15** (our soul cries Abba Father to our God) – This is really evidence of a nature attuned to God
 - **Psalms 42:1** As the hart panteth after the water brooks, **so panteth my soul after thee, O God.** – isn’t this the evidence of a soul that is constrained by the love of Christ?
 - What do you think this phrase (out of **1 Cor. 6:15**) means? “But we have the mind of Christ”
 - It means this: That we have the spiritual understanding to know the way Christ thinks
 - Because of His love for us, the Holy Spirit has been sent from Him to guide us into all truth and therefore we are possessed of a source for guidance that is coming straight from the mind of Christ

III. The argument for the radical change in the person is found in v. 15 “...they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

- ❖ A contrast between the two lifestyles is intentionally set by scripture here
 - **There is living unto self – let’s take a self-test on this by answering a few questions to ourselves:**
 - Do you spend your energy on your personal life goals without involving Christ in them
 - Do you spend your wealth on things that are relevant only to what you want without considering the purposes of Christ in it
 - Do you use your brain principally on thoughts relevant only to this earthly life without including the things of God in those thoughts
 - **And then, there is living unto Him which died for us and rose again – let’s take another self-test**
 - When you burn energy on personal life goals do you seek the will of God both in those goals and in the direction you will expend energy?
 - When you make plans to use your money for something, do you take thought for the purposes of Christ and whether how and what you spend can glorify Him?
 - Do you consecrate your thinking processes to Him and call on Him to assist you in how you think?
 - When you involve people in your life, is that involvement based on honesty and a willingness to make sure such involvement is as beneficial to the other person as it will be to you?

IV. As a final note, a contrast then between the walk of the unbeliever and the walk of the believer is the benchmark, the index that categorizes the person:

❖ **The walk of the unbeliever described:**

- **Ephesians 4:17** This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,
- Peter describes the walk of the unbeliever like this: (**2Peter 2:10**) “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness,...”
- **Jude v. 18** How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

❖ **The walk of the believer described:**

- **Romans 8:1** *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
- **Romans 6:4** Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.