

The Love of Christ Constrains Us

When we think of heroes, of course not the kind found on the pages of comic books, in “super hero” movies or sports ‘idols’ but, the kind that actually save lives from peril, what sense of gratitude is felt toward them for having performed such an act? Did they risk life or limb for the sake of others? Did they act in their valor knowing there was the possibility of dying for others? And how long was their act of courage remembered or will it be remembered? What lasting affect did or will such a sacrifice have on the course of man’s existence into the future, let alone the effect it may have had on the past? And any sacrifice of note may have had erected to it some sort of memorial, whether made of stone, bronze or other material, in commemoration for the bravery of the courageous person or people it serves to remember. But in time manmade monuments decay or fade into the scenery and unless we are reminded of their reason for being people soon forget and generations to come may never learn from such courageous acts of valor.

But what grand act of self-**less**-ness has effected **every** person since the beginning of time, especially those who know of it presently, but ultimately to all of creation? It is the love of **Christ**. Love, as we have noted in the past, is from the **Greek** word ‘**agape**’ which carries with it different meanings according to the context in which it is used. There are four passages in the **N.T.**, which we will deal with throughout this lesson, where ‘**agape**’ is used with reference to the type of love that is associated with **Christ**. In **Jn 15:9**, **Rom 8:35**, **2 Cor 5:14** and **Eph 3:17-19**. Let’s begin by looking into these passages and taking out of them the true meaning of ‘the love of **Christ**’ as it applies to where our focus should be concerning it. In **Jn 15:9** **Jesus** is speaking concerning those who became part of the ‘**vine**’ and who would bear ‘**much fruit**’ in **His** kingdom, **He** being the **Vine** and the faithful being the branches.

Joh 15:9 **As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love.**

- In this passage **Jesus** describes the extent of **God’s** love for **Him** and then uses that same description to explain the extent of **His** love for the faithful. How can there be any love that surpasses the love the **Father** has toward the **Son**? It boggles the mind how **Christ** could possibly love us, as the fallible human beings that we are, in the same way which **His Father** loves **Him** and that nothing can separate us from it.

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the **love of Christ**? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

- We can deny our love for **Christ** but nothing can remove **His** love from us, just as a loving parent can never deny their love for their child, no matter what. We can go astray but as “the **Shepherd** and **Bishop** of [our] souls” (**1 Pet 2:25**), **Jesus** “bore our sins in **His** body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (**v.24**). **He** is constantly calling us back into the fold when we go astray, if only we will hear **His** voice. It is because of that fact that **His** love should preoccupy our every thought and action.

2Co 5:14 For the **love of Christ** controls (*Gk.4912- to hold together; figuratively to compel, preoccupy*) us, because we have concluded this: that **One** has died for all, therefore all have died; **15** and **He** died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for **Him Who** for their sake died and was raised.

- What is it about **Christ’s** love that it should compel us to give up our old ways and live anew for **Him**? What has **He** done for us that was so grand that it should consume our

very focus? Well first, let's look at what **He** did to deserve our utmost attention, then we'll look at what we need to do to show our appreciation to **Him** for such a graceful gift.

What He gave up.

- Can you imagine a person of untold wealth giving up such to live in poverty in order to serve others? Can you imagine one of the kings of any country down through the ages walking away from his throne to become just another pauper? Or of a wealthy ruler giving away his wealth to those of his kingdom so that everyone could be equal and share in his fortune? **Jesus** did just that, and more!

2Co 8:9 For you know the grace of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, that though **He** was rich, **yet for your sake He** became poor, so that you **by His poverty** might become rich.

- When **John** in the **Revelation** describes the “holy city” as it refers to “new **Jerusalem**” in **Rev 21:2, 10**, his description includes such things as “the twelve gates were twelve pearls” and “the street of the city [as] pure gold, transparent as glass”, he was describing wealth beyond the human imagination. Such were images that **John's** mortal mind could comprehend and write about, but the reality is that they are only visual images that can't describe the wealth that **Heaven** has in store for the faithful. Even when the apostle **Paul** couldn't describe paradise (**2 Cor 12:3,4**), that part of the **Hadean** realm where the righteous dead reside until the resurrection, he said “he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” and in verse 7 he spoke of “the surpassing greatness of the revelations”. And to think of **Paradise** in such terms, how can we not comprehend **Heaven** as being so much greater? This just goes to show the magnitude of **Christ's** sacrifice, in becoming the incarnate **Son of God** in order to become poor, so that many “by **His** poverty might become rich”. But **His** sacrifice went beyond giving up the wealth of **Heaven**. **His** sacrifice included **His** succumbing to a tortuous death at the hands of those of **His** own creation. And **His** act of heroism was done voluntarily.

Heb 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. **5** Consequently, when **Christ** came into the world, **He** said, “Sacrifices and offerings **You** have not desired, but a body have **You** prepared for **Me**;

Heb 10:7 Then **I** said, ‘Behold, **I** have come to do **Your** will, **O God**, as it is written of **Me** in the scroll of the book.’”

- Through **His** providence, **God** via **Holy Spirit**, revealed to **His** prophets the events that would bring about the fruition of the ultimate plan of salvation. **Christ** came with the knowledge of the suffering **He** would have to endure to fulfill such a plan. **He** was with **God** when **Eve** was told that the offspring of the serpent would “bruise **His** (**Christ's**) heel” (**Gen 3:15**).

1Pe 2:21 For to this you have been called, because **Christ** also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in **His** steps.

- Our own personal sufferings, not to be compared to **His**, are to be considered only as an example of what **He** went through because without suffering we would take for granted what **He** endured to save us. Suffering keeps us focused on the path to the eternal reward. Without which apathy would become the norm concerning our obedient faith.

1Pe 2:22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. 23 When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him Who judges justly. 24 He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

- What more can be said of the price Jesus paid to gain our focus toward matters of faith? With that said, how can we in return show our gratitude for such a sacrifice? Not that anything we do will match what Jesus did through His sacrificial gift. He understands that. But what we do shows Him the extent of our love toward Him and shows the world where our desires lean.

1. Our Works

- Obviously our works by themselves won't save us. We understand that. But, according to James our works are a sign of our faith.

Jas 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

- These works include taking care of each other's needs. In addition we aren't to be using foul language (Jas 1:26) either. A person's level of faith can be discerned the moment they open their mouth to speak. A person cannot say they are a child of God if every sentence or so includes an expletive or is spoken in unrighteous anger. Speaking to the Pharisees Jesus said:

Mat 12:34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart (Gk.2588- thoughts or feelings [mind]) the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

- And not that an evil person can't speak smooth words of deceit either. In time every word spoken will reveal the speakers intentions. Another work that shows our faith in action is to look in on and take care of the needs of the orphans and widows (Jam 1:27). It was a must at the time of Paul's writing to do so since they didn't have a 'social security system' to handle those who came on hard times. The husband/father was the primary source for his family's income but once he was gone they were to be taken care of by the Old Testament welfare system of caring for the unfortunate such as these. Even though the Old Law was nailed to the cross (Col 2:14) they were not to abandon "the righteous requirement of the law" that is to continually "be fulfilled in us" (Rom 8:4). The Old Law did have certain requirements of those who were in need that were able to work.

Deu 24:21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

- They weren't just handed their necessities, they had to work for them by gleaning the fields. But how are we to take care of those with such needs among us today? Obviously

we are to be “faithful and wise manager[s]” (*Lk 12:42*) over all that belongs to the Lord and those who can work should. Do we rely on the church to take care of them or even our own relatives when we have the means to take care of them ourselves?

1Ti 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

- Remember, one work that shows our love for Christ is to take care of the needs of others, especially those of our own households before relying on the church. That way the Lord’s money can be used to further the message of the gospel here and abroad.

2. Our Faith

- Jesus had so much trouble with even His own disciples when it came to their faith. Even though they saw all the miracles He did while with Him in His earthly ministry they still denied Him before His accusers. But we have something better than those miracles to prove the validity of the scriptures. We have the scriptures themselves, “the perfect” (*1 Cor 13:10*) written will of God. But how much time do we spend, apart from the world and its attractions, feeding our minds on such manna from Heaven? You may say “well now you’re trying to put me on a guilt trip”. How sad if it does. If we feel such guilt we may want to ask ourselves “why?”. If this question puts us on a guilt trip it’s doing what it was meant to do; prick our consciences into doing what we need to be doing anyway because of Christ’s love for us. What if He loved us in the same manner we love Him?

Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Renewing our minds through daily Bible reading and study will help when the times come that will test our knowledge of the faith. That is if we aren’t avoiding certain discussions that relate to the Bible and Christ’s love for us.

3. Our Thoughts

- Even our thoughts show our love for Christ. Others may not read our minds but He can (*and does*). Remember, what we fill our minds with will eventually, in time, show outwardly. It’s all part of our human nature. We may not want to carry out the things we might be thinking, since many of which might be sinful, but how much of that can we personally control by filling our minds with the teachings found in scripture? And no person in their right mind is immune to evil thoughts. Consider the apostle Paul.

Rom 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh (*Gk.4561- human nature*). For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. **20** Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

- Earlier in verse **14** Paul said he was “sold under sin”. But how is that possible if he was always working at filling his mind with things spiritual, as is with so many brethren? It only implies the strength that sin has toward holding us hostage to it. This just goes to show that no Christian should ever dabble in sinful practices with the idea that they are in control and can quit at any time. Sin makes slaves out of those who get caught up in it

no matter to what degree or what their strength is in the faith. How many faithful, mature brethren have we seen fall to the destructive influences of sin. Remember “to think it is to do it”.

Mat 5:27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her **in his heart** (*mind*).

- How we control our thoughts, even if others can’t see them, shows **Christ** how much we love **Him** and are grateful for **His** sacrifice of taking the punishment that should have been our own.

Our Reward

- Not that we should expect anything in return for our love to **Christ** because **He** has given us more than we could ever possibly repay. But there are benefits that we receive from loving **God** and **His Christ** that **He** said we **should** anticipate if we live lives faithful to **Him**. Remember, if we love **Him** we’ll keep **His** commandments (*Jn 14:15*).

Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love **God** all things work together for good, for those who are called according to **His** purpose. 29 For those whom **He** foreknew **He** also predestined to be conformed to the image of **His Son**, in order that **He** might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- Any and every misfortune or struggle we go through in life has a purpose. We may never know that purpose and there are sometimes when we do. How many of us, after going through a certain difficult period, came to realize its purpose and how what short a challenge it was compared to the benefit it produced? And sometimes the results are so subtle we might miss them altogether. Ultimately, **God** understands our weaknesses and how to strengthen us to be a people prepared for eternal life. After approaching **Christ** three times over “a thorn” **Paul** received “in the flesh” he came to realize its purpose.

2Co 12:9 But **He** said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is **made perfect in weakness**.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of **Christ** may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of **Christ**, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Isn’t it interesting how being made weak will make us strong? And who wouldn’t want to be made strong? **Jesus** suffered more than we will ever know. **His** suffering was both physical and mental. Concerned for **His** creation **He** endured unfathomable pain through the mockings, mental anguish and torture **He** went through in order to save us. But that too had its purpose.

Rom 8:30 And those whom **He** predestined **He** also called, and those whom **He** called **He** also justified, and those whom **He** justified **He** also glorified.

- **God** predetermined those people **He** would save. **He** limited that number in advance having given **man** free agency. So in a sense, it is **man** who determines that number. Through his choice man determines whether to be included in the number of the saved or with those who will be condemned at the judgment. All **God** requires is that man “be conformed to the image of **His** dear **Son**”. How then is it possible to be “conformed” to

that image when “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom 3:23*)? Our justification comes through “His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is **in Christ Jesus**” (*v.24*). Only those who are found ‘**in Christ**’ then are part of the predetermined number of the saved. But those of this number were first called by the gospel invitation and once answering that call through obedience were rendered as innocent of all sin. To be rendered innocent the sinner obeys the gospel plan of salvation by imitating the death, burial and resurrection of **Jesus** through immersion for remission.

Rom 6:8 Now if we have died with **Christ** (*been buried in baptism*), we believe that we will also live with **Him**.

- Once rendered innocent through our obedience to **God’s** providential plan to save us, only then we can share in **His** glory.

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is **to be** revealed to us.

- Our glorification with **Christ in Heaven** comes as part of the justification process. As long as we remain faithful to **Him**, in due time our hope of such an exalted state will be replaced with reality. We cannot compare the struggles of life with what awaits us beyond the physical creation. And no matter what trial or conflict we endure, **God** is always there. Even when we think **He** isn’t, **He’s** with us every step of the way. We only need to know and understand that **He** is.

Rom 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If **God** is for us, who can be against us? **32 He** Who did not spare **His** own **Son** but gave **Him** up for us all, how will **He** not also with **Him** graciously give us all things?

- How many times has it been asked “where was **God** when ...?” We can answer all such misguided questions with “the same place **He** was when they were crucifying **His Son**”. If **God** was willing to let **Jesus** go through what **He** did for our sakes, how can anyone ask why **He** didn’t come to their aid when they were going through a lot less than being beaten and then hung on a Roman cross? And all because of the sins of others! **Jesus** went through all of that and yet **He** still continued to trust **God** for **His** deliverance. Have any of us gone through even a fraction of what **He** went through but at the time weren’t convinced that **God** was with us? I know when I’m in one of those “poor pity me” moods I try to get out of it quickly by thinking about what **Jesus** endured for my sake. When we get into one of those ‘I, me, my’ moods we lose sight of our love for **Christ** and are unable to think of what other brethren are going through. And what goes around comes around. We should never love **Christ** as we love others but should always love others as **Christ** loves us. That will show the extent of our love for **Him**.

Joh 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: **just as** I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35 By this** all people will know that you are My disciples, **if** you have love for one another."

- “**Just as I have loved you**”. How much love is that? **Jesus** loved us to the point of dying for us. And not just dying any death either. **He** could have come during the time of any world power having certain laws pertaining to how they executed enemies of the state. It could have been during the Holocaust when the Nazis gassed their Jewish prisoners. But would that have imprinted on the minds of sinful man the way a Roman cross does? In

His infinite wisdom, God sent Jesus “when the fullness of time had come” (*Gal 4:4*) thus it was, according to *Daniel 2:44*, “in the days of those kings”, referring to the Caesars, when the Roman Empire ruled the then known world. It was the brutality of the Roman cross that would go down in history as the most barbaric punishment a government would ever use as a way to deter those who would opposed it. That was the extent that Christ went in His love for His creation. How can we not, then, control our thoughts and actions to focus on that love by living “according to the Spirit”?

Rom 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

- The “things of the Spirit” are those things that guide us through His influence. We find those things in the written word of God. Such things as faith, works and obedience. Our obedience to His word determines whether we become part of the redeemed that Christ will one day return for.

Col 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ (*Rom 6:4*), seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died (*Rom 6:3*), and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ Who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

- To be raised with Christ has to do with first being immersed into Him. If we accept the unadulterated, Spirit influenced word of God when it comes to salvation we accept it wholly and without human input because it alone expresses the true way to get to Heaven. If we accept man’s biased rendition of what we need to do to be saved we follow a dark road that leads to destruction. According to the truth found in the Bible we need to hear about the gospel, believe (*Rom 10:14*) that it came from God and that Christ is His Son (*Act 8:37*) who came “to give His life as a ransom for many” (*Mat 20:28*), obeying His word through obedience to “be baptized and wash away [our] sins” (*Act 22:16*) and then to “walk in newness of life” (*Rom 6:4*). If we wish to be compelled by the love of Christ we will follow His word, not man’s corrupted word, on these things.

Eph 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

- How can we know something that cannot be known? The apostle Paul wanted the Ephesians, and all who read this letter, to understand that Christ’s love knows no end and to experience it through the covenant relationship He desires with everyone. If you are not in, or don’t know if or are not sure you are in, a covenant relationship with Christ, you can be sure. Or if you’ve started out in a relationship with Him but feel you’re not as ‘in love’ with Him as you were in the beginning, please do whatever it takes to resume it. And if there’s anything we can do to help, please let us know.

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October 12, 2014

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