

THE LOVE THAT CONSTRAINS

Harold B. Kuhn

There are motives to action which exceed in strength the sanctions of physical compulsion and which elicit a degree of energy and endurance impossible to those who serve under threat of pain or temporal penalty. Foremost and most noble of these is that to which the Apostle Paul refers in his classic assertion: "For the love of Christ constraineth us." (II. Cor. 5:14).

Then as now, the tireless labours of the Apostle were a source of wonderment to those about him. This was especially the case with those who possessed neither understanding of, nor sympathy with, his message. In the verse preceding the one quoted above, Paul seems to be speaking of the estimate of others upon his ceaseless endeavors. Hear his words: "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God . . ." Then as now, the unbelieving world shrugs off those who displease it with such titles as "mad," or "beside himself."

Look further at this dogged messenger of the Christian Gospel: having abandoned a popular career with a future of great promise, he preaches a strange and unpopular message. With energy almost super-human, he treads down opposition upon opposition to tell of One who was crucified, and who rose again. Persistently he affirms Him as Lord and Master; he bears witness unflinchingly to his own experience of the Damascus Road, whereon he met the Risen Lord and was conquered by Him. To proclaim the message of redemption through the shedding of blood divine, he counts no human consideration dear, nor no human obstacle insurmountable. Small wonder that scoffers considered him insane.

In reply to this charge of madness, Paul cites the true source of his energetic devotion and his tireless service to his Lord. His life is a life lived under constraint, whose source was not the offer of worldly gain nor carnal applause. The love of Christ was the well-spring of the compulsion under which he poured out his life in service. This love was, in the first instance, Christ's love toward Paul, not the reverse. He never tired, it seems, of proclaiming that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It was this anticipating affection of Christ, a love transcending time and space, inexhaustible, ever giving yet never diminishing—such a love that energized the Apostle.

This love possessed the supreme attractiveness of a suffering love. Few are so callous as to fail to respond to the appeal of love that pours itself out in selfless direction, in a pure other-regarding manner. Add to this the fact that it was divine love, suffering for miserable and sinful man, suffering even to death, and it is difficult to understand the hardness of heart which brushes it lightly aside. The Cross symbolized this love for Paul. Moreover, this love was confronting love: on the Damascus way, Saul of Tarsus was confronted and conquered by the Risen Lord. At that moment, a two-fold conviction overpowered the young Pharisee: that Christ died for all and that His death had direct and personal significance for him.

Love is wasted if one-sided. It has meaning only when reciprocated, when returned. Love can only be repaid by love, and response is possible only when there is a kinship of hearts. You may have had the experience of speaking in a room containing a piano to hear the piano

respond to your voice. If you took pains to investigate, you probably discovered that only the strings tuned to the pitch of your voice answered you. The others, though in perfect mechanical condition remained silent.

The secret of Paul's reaction to the constraint of the suffering love of Christ lay in the fact of a transformed Paul, an ex-Saul, who had experienced the regenerating grace of God and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, and who served his Lord out of a heart made pure—a heart united to fear His name. The accounts of the labours of Paul need to be read in the light of his message which promised forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified through faith which has the Risen Lord as its Object.

Thus, the prime effect of constraining love was the transformation and purification of Paul's character. Beyond the two crisis operations of divine grace, Paul found himself being brought into conformity with the "stature of the fulness of Christ": wherefore he says earlier in this same Epistle, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The author of the story, "The Great Stone Face," spoke of the case of Ernest, who so long looked upon the face in the mountain that he became like the face. This story points to the deeper truth that man becomes like that which he persistently and constantly beholds. So it is in the mutual love relationship between the soul and its Lord.

Again, the constraining love of Christ produces a degree of energy and devotion that perplexes the worldly mind. We take for granted, by reason of familiarity, the hazards which Paul surmounted for the sake of his Lord and the Gospel. 'Mid beatings and stonings, in imprisonments, in hunger and cold, through shipwreck, swimming in icy Mediterranean waters, this sturdy pattern-Christian carried the message of Redemption through the world of his day and into its most raw centers of paganism.

The constraining love of Christ provided a dynamic to action above the requirements of either law or duty. There are upon the statute books of most of our States laws requiring mothers to properly feed and care for their children, and imposing severe penalties for failure to so do. But all over the world mothers, out of love for their own, perform these tasks and find joy in so doing, without so much as knowing of the existence of such laws.

In addition to law, duty makes its demands upon the conduct and resources of men. Immanuel Kant, one of the great and godless thinkers of the last century, sought to find in Duty (with capital "D") the sum of all virtue. But there is a type of conduct beyond this. Occasionally members of our armed forces are decorated for bravery in conduct "above and beyond the call of duty." To such action, the constraint of love is the supreme motive. Paul, in his tireless service in pursuit of his ministry, exemplified the action of love as a dynamic which elicited the utmost of service and devotion.

Finally, the constraint of love gives a stability, born of faith, and issuing in an unswerving purpose. Of this aspect of life, Paul said: "None of these things move me;" the prospect of imprisonment and need, of hunger

and persecution, availed not at all to deflect him from his purpose. The life constrained by the love of Christ is steadfast against all shocks, being undergirt by faith in the Eternal Son of God and sheet-anchored by a personal reliance upon the shed blood of the Captain of his salvation.

To quote one of the great preachers of the century just past: "Is His love the overmastering impulse which urges you to all good, the mighty constraint that keeps you back from all evil, the magnet that draws, the anchor that steadies, the fortress that defends, the light that illumines, the treasure that encircles? Is it the law that commands and the power that enables?" Here lies the test—and the challenge—of the self-giving love of our Christ. Dear reader, has the reality of this divine constraint been realized in your life? If not, will you not be pointed to the fountain of cleansing, at which the inward impurities which blur the vision of His love and which impede your heart's response to it, may be left, as you plead:

Thou who at Pentecost didst fall,
Do Thou my sin consume;
Come, Holy Ghost, for Thee I call;
Spirit of burning, come.

—Christian Witness

OBITUARY

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

Mrs. Howard Eye

Mrs. Howard Eye, aged 63 years, passed away at her home in Calais, Maine, on December 23rd, 1944. She had been in failing health for several years. Sister Eye was faithful in church attendance until hindered by ill-health, yet still retaining a deep interest in the welfare of the Church. She leaves to mourn her passing, a devoted husband and three children: Chester, of Gardiner, Maine; Mrs. Thomas Jennings (Louise), and Mrs. Willard Lane (Pauline), both of Calais, Me., and 13 grandchildren.

The funeral was conducted by Lic. Ralph L. Sabine, assisted by Rev. W. P. Lyons. Interment was made in the Calais cemetery.

Ernest Michaels

Funeral services of the late Ernest Michaels was held at the Sweeny's Funeral Parlors, Yarmouth, N. S. Rev. Freddie Parlee, Gospel Tabernacle Church, had charge, assisted by Rev. F. A. Dunlop. Mr. Michaels was the son of the late George and Mrs. Michaels, of Sandford. He leaves besides his wife, four children, two brothers, one sister, and his mother, Bertha Michaels. A choir from the Tabernacle Church rendered suitable hymns.

Our sympathy to those bereaved.

Barent E. Rogers

Mr. Barent E. Rogers, son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Rogers, died at his home in Olympian, Wash., on Feb. 12th, at the age of 79 years.

Besides his beloved wife and daughter, Erma (Mrs. Thomas Whiteman) he leaves four brothers, Almon, Bangor, Maine; Alexander, Wellington and Samuel, all of N. B.; one sister, Mrs. David Watson, Houlton, Me.; a number of other relatives and a host of friends.

His pastor paid him a very high tribute. He character and was prepared to go. The words spoke as follows: "He had a strong Christian