

Constrained?

'For the love of the Christ constrains us'

2 Corinthians 5:14 DBY

The apostle Paul was definitely a passionate follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw himself as Christ's ambassador with a Divine message of reconciliation, "as though God were making his appeal" through him (2 Cor. 5:19-20). Pursuing his calling was for him no easy task: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed..." (2 Cor. 4:8-9). What kept this man going? Paul explained that the love of Christ *constrained* him. The Greek word here translated 'constrained' or 'controlled' or 'compelled' is *sunecho*. It is used 12 times in the NT, 9 times by Luke, twice by Paul and once by Matthew. Comparing these 12 references will help us understand what effect the love of Christ had on Paul – and what it can also do to you and me.

1. It overcame him: The word translated *constrained* is sometimes translated *suffer*. Matthew tells us that "people brought to him [Jesus] all who were ill with various diseases, those *suffering* [*sunecho*] severe pain" (4:24). "Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was *suffering* [*sunecho*] from a high fever" (Lk 4:38). Luke also tells us that the father of Publius "was sick in bed, *suffering* [*sunecho*] from fever and dysentery" (Acts 28:8). Suffering claims, subdues and overcomes a person. It imposes itself. When something hurts, our thoughts, our words and our behavior are affected by that pain. Similarly the love of Christ overcame Paul, it strongly influenced everything he said and did.

2. It occupied him: "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul *was occupied* [*sunecho*] with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus" (Acts 18:5, ESV). Intense occupation with God's word moved Paul to preach it. Intense occupation with the love of Christ, a love that was willing to suffer and die for ungrateful humans moved Paul to also express it.

3. It held him prisoner: The Jews were very angry. Stephen was describing his vision of a victorious Christ. "At this they *covered* [*sunecho*] their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him" (Acts 7:57). They forced their ears not to listen. When the Lord Jesus was arrested and taken to the house of the high priest, "the men who *held* [*sunecho*] Jesus mocked Him and beat Him" (Lk 22:63 NKJ). They forced Jesus to stay. Similarly, the wonder of the love of Christ held Paul. It seized him. It would not let him go.

4. It shaped his priorities: The apostle Paul tells us about one of his dilemmas: On the one hand he desires to depart and be with Christ, on the other hand he desires to stay and serve Him and His people. How does this feel? He explains, "I am *pressed* [*sunecho*] by both" (Phil 1:23 DBY). Paul feels constrained between two options, he feels forced to choose. Life is too short to live everything. We must make choices. What motivates your decisions? Awareness of the deep love of Christ for him and for others shaped Paul's priorities. It forced him and it will force us to make certain choices.

5. It gave him energy: Strong emotions increase or drain our energy. After Jesus liberated a dangerous demon-possessed man, "all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were *overcome* [*sunecho*] with fear" (Lk 8:37). Their fear drove them to ask Jesus to leave. Appreciation of the love of Christ drove Paul to keep on going.

6. It filled him with confidence: After Jesus wept over Jerusalem, He prophesied against it: "The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and *hem you in* [*sunecho*] on every side" (Lk 19:43). Here the word is used to describe a city being completely and closely surrounded. A sick woman was healed when in faith she touched the cloak of Jesus. He stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" Peter said "Master, the people are *crowding* [*sunecho*] and pressing against you" (Lk 8:45). Jesus was completely and closely surrounded. Paul knew that the love of Christ completely and closely surrounded him. Nothing could reach him without first passing through Christ's love.

7. It made him desperate: The Lord Jesus had come to reveal the love of the Father, to give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus pictured his suffering and death as a baptism. He said: "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how *distressed* [*sunecho*] I am until it is completed!" (Lk 12:50). Here the word is linked with a deep longing and a sense of urgency. The Lord Jesus is distressed, He is eager to complete the task assigned to Him. The love of Christ filled Paul also with this deep longing, with this sense of urgency to live out his Divine calling.

Are you experiencing painful financial, relational or physical circumstances? Are you afraid of taking an important decision? Do you, like Paul, sometimes feel hard pressed on every side? We are not alone. "Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom 8:34). Let that love of Christ also 'constrain' you! It is a choice.