

## Christ. His Constraining Love. A Sermon by T. D. Witherspoon

### INTRODUCTION.

T. D. Witherspoon entered the Christian ministry at age twenty-three, having been licensed to preach on June 6, 1859<sup>1</sup> and ordained on May 13, 1860.<sup>2</sup> In his early ministry he adopted the practice of writing out his sermons in full, transitioning to notes and outlines in his later years.<sup>3</sup> A substantial archive of some of his 4,917 sermons and note books is housed at the PCA Historical Center.<sup>4</sup> Witherspoon preached the fifth sermon of his ministry while still a licentiate at his home church where he first professed faith at age ten, Mount Zion Presbyterian Church, in Pontotoc County, Mississippi.<sup>5</sup> As indicated, it is fully written out and almost publishable as is,<sup>6</sup> if not for lack of punctuation and perhaps a few missing or implied words. It is string-bound in booklet form, comparable to the modern “blue book,” as are the other fully written sermons. Some have lined pages but most are unlined in the collection as in this fifth sermon.<sup>7</sup> In this example, the first page (i.e. the cover) contains only the title information, which reads,

No. 5  
-Christ-  
His constraining love  
2 Corinthians 5:14  
July 18579.

THE TRANSCRIPTION. Edited by Chris Coldwell. Transcriptions of several of T. D. Witherspoon’s sermons have been made by students of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary for the PCA Historical Center, and Wayne Sparkman provided the draft text of this sermon to the editor. The draft was corrected against the original, some omitted material and various editorial notes have been added and punctuation imposed by the editor where needed.

1. Witherspoon preached his “Trial Sermon for Licensure” on June 4, 1859. The text was John 1:9 and he preached at Zion Church. The next day, the Lord’s Day, he preached by request of the Zion congregation on 1 Corinthians 1:23, which he numbers his third sermon. Hence, if his numbering is correct, Witherspoon must have

The “7” in 1857 has been overwritten heavily with a “9”. This may indicate that as he used this sermon again, Witherspoon added this information and mistakenly wrote 1857 and later corrected this (as he does again, below). The sermon notes begin on the first right-hand page after the title page which is numbered page 1. On the first inside page after the title page (page 2), there

preached again the day before or preached a morning sermon also at Zion or elsewhere on the Sabbath. See Wayne Sparkman, “The Sermons of the Rev. Thomas Dwight Witherspoon Covering the period of 4 June 1859 – 17 September 1865 during which time he was pastor of the Oxford, MS Presbyterian Church and Chaplain of the 42nd Mississippi Infantry Regiment, CSA” (2005), Sermon 1, sermon 2, page 1. Thomas Dwight Witherspoon Papers, PCA Historical Center, <http://www.pcahistory.org/findingaids/wITHERSP00N/> (accessed July 2, 2018). The collection lacks sermon two and sermon four of the first sermons preached by Witherspoon. A second file lists the sermons for the later period of his ministry.

2. The prior biography gives this date. A history of the Zion Church gives the year as 1859, but this is an error. J. Hunter League, “History of White Zion Church,” <http://msgw.org/pontotoc/churches/whitezion-history.htm> (accessed July 2, 2018). Witherspoon’s ordination sermon on Romans 5:1 was preached on May 12, 1860. Sparkman, #68, p. 2.

3. See the biographical notices on Witherspoon preceding this sermon.

4. The collection contains over a hundred full length sermons, most from his ministry at Second Presbyterian Church, Memphis, Tennessee, and several hundred smaller booklets of sermon notes and outlines. Thomas Dwight Witherspoon Papers, Manuscript Collection #83, PCA Historical Center, St Louis, Missouri. Sermon 5 is number three on the list compiled by Wayne Sparkman.

5. The biography notes this was near Greensboro, apparently referencing the old county seat of Webster County, which no longer exists but is still known for the Old Greensboro Cemetery.

6. Witherspoon’s biographer makes the same observation, and also notes that he never merely read his sermons to his hearers. See the biographical notices of Witherspoon prior to this sermon.

7. The watermark or logo of the manufacturer of the booklet is on the title page in the upper left-hand corner. Closer examination may identify the company, but at press time the only thing clear is possibly the word London running on the right side of the oval shaped mark. Others of the sermons also have this emblem.

are notes on the occasions this sermon was preached and on the hymns and psalms Witherspoon chose to go with it. In the upper left corner there are hymn numbers in ink which have been augmented later in pencil with psalm selections, likely as alternatives for the later occasions.

- H. 283 (in ink) 95<sup>th</sup> Ps 1<sup>st</sup> Part (in pencil)
- H. 193 (in ink) 35 2<sup>d</sup> Hymn (in pencil)
- H. 276 (in ink) 348<sup>th</sup> " (in pencil)

These all may be found in *Psalms and hymns adapted to social, private, and public worship in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America approved and authorized by the General Assembly* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1843).

8. Pontotoc Presbyterian Church. A transcription of the session minute book online at the website for Saint Andrew's Presbytery (PCUSA), has the interesting notice. "August 31st 1856. Session met. The following members were present. Rev. J. H. Miller, Mod'r. Elders. Robert Gilmer, Wm Spencer A. H. Conkey. On motion A. H. Conkey was appointed a delegate to Chickasaw Presbytery which is called to meet at Zion Church, Pontotoc County on Friday before the first Sabbath in September, for the purpose of receiving Thomas D. Witherspoon under care. A. H. Conkey, S. Clerk." Witherspoon's brother P. F., who taught at Chickasaw College, and was an elder at Zion, transferred to Pontotoc in 1868 and came on session as well. "Session Book Of The Presbyterian Church, Pontotoc, Miss., Vol. II (1856-1874)," transcribed and annotated by The Rev'd R. Milton Winter, Ph.D., Historiographer of Saint Andrew Presbytery (PCUSA) (December 2008), pages 3, 65-66. <http://www.standrewpresbytery.org/pontotoc-church-session-records-1856-1874> (accessed, July 2, 2018).

9. First Presbyterian Church, Oxford, Mississippi (PCUSA), founded in 1837 (current church built in 1881). Witherspoon was ordained and installed as pastor of this church on May 13, 1860.

10. First Presbyterian Church, Water Valley, MS (PCA). Established in 1843, the current church building dates to 1896. <https://misspreservation.com/2012/05/15/suzassissippi-mississippi-first-presbyterian-church-of-water-valley/> (accessed July 2, 2018).

11. College Hill Presbyterian Church (PCA), was founded in 1835 and the current building constructed in 1846. It is just east of Oxford,

12. Witherspoon "accepted a call to the Second Presbyterian Church, of Memphis, Tenn., where he settled in August, 1865." See the bibliography preceding this sermon, page 4.

13. Christiansburg Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Christiansburg, Montgomery County, Virginia. Established in 1837, the 1853 building still stands today. In 1870 Witherspoon was serving here as pulpit supply.

14. In 1871 Witherspoon began two year's service in the chaplaincy for the University of Virginia, "two of the happiest and most useful years of his life..." See the previous bibliography, p. 4.

15. Witherspoon has written above the line apparently as an alternative to "to have his zeal...", the text "[to] rest [????????????] under the reputation of insanity." Italicized words are questionable. The long word that is not diciphable is apparently overwriting a previous word or words which adds to the difficulty. It looks to read something like *fatiguingly*.

In the middle of the page is a list of the other dates Witherspoon preached this sermon, the first four subsequent occasions all in 1859. In pencil are then added later dates, interestingly all in the month of October, the reason for which is not clear.

Zion	July 1857 <sup>9</sup>
Pontotoc <sup>8</sup>	" "
Oxford Aug <sup>9</sup>	" "
Water Valley <sup>10</sup>	" "
College Hill <sup>11</sup>	Nov. " "
Memphis <sup>12</sup>	Oct. 1868 (in pencil)
Christianburg <sup>13</sup>	Oct 1870 (in pencil)
U of Va <sup>14</sup>	Oct 1871 (in pencil)

On the last page facing the inside back cover, Witherspoon has given some more hymn information (perhaps for quotation as he specifies only one or two stanzas) and written a paragraph, all in pencil, except for the text in bold, which was in ink. The symbol (here rendered §) in each case varies in form but seems to stand for stanza.

Ps 90 P. 2. C. M. §3  
**283** §3  
**194** §2&4

"It was the misfortune of the Apostle Paul, as it has been of many illustrious servants of God since, to have his motives as a Christian Minister misunderstood—to have his zeal for religion construed as fanaticism<sup>15</sup> and to be regarded practically as insane—"

As for the editing of the text presented here, since this text was one penned from which to speak, punctuation has been added or changed without notice to aid the reading of it. All footnotes are editorial. Clear misspellings are corrected without notice. All ampersands are rendered "and" and other abbreviations and contractions expanded without notice. Needless capitalization has been omitted, and pronouns in reference to persons of the Trinity uniformly capitalized. The original underlining is preserved; original page numbers are noted in the text where the text breaks as |2|, |3|, etc. Quotation marks have been added or paired/corrected without notice. If there is doubt about the rendering of a word it appears either in {braces} or is commented upon in a footnote. Paragraph breaks and other formatting have been added without notice. The insertion point (^), which is original unless in square brackets, indicates words have been written interline above at that point in the text.

## CHRIST. HIS CONSTRAINING LOVE.

2 Corinthians 5:14.

*For the love of Christ constraineth us.*

The true people of God in all ages of the Church, and especially His earnest and devoted ministers, have been charged by the enemies of the cross with folly, fanaticism and madness; and while it is true that these charges are ever the result, to a considerable extent, of a malicious and contentious spirit, it is none the less true that there is something in the very nature of the zeal which Christianity inspires, that to one unacquainted with its spirit, bear the appearance of fanaticism. Zeal is but the natural fervor of the mind in pursuit of some object which it deems worthy of attainment. In itself it possesses no moral character; it is neither essentially right nor essentially wrong and we are accustomed to justify it solely by the motives by which it is impelled, the ends to which it is directed and the means which it employs. If these be such as commend themselves to us, we approve of the zeal and admire those in whom it appears; but if the ends be unworthy, the means inadequate or the motives insufficient, we condemn the zeal which enters into such a cause and we characterize its subject as enthusiasts, fanatics, or madmen.

Now Christianity is essentially a spiritual religion. The very principals in which it is grounded, the hope upon which it is built, the ends which it proposes, the means which it employs, motives to which it appeals, the encouragements which it holds out, the reward which it offers, all are alike spiritual. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit: for they are foolishness [un]to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."<sup>17</sup> Such a one can form no conception of a motive to action springing entirely from a desire to promote the glory of God. He can form no conception of the spiritual renovation of mankind as the great end to which the Christian's efforts are directed, or of faith in Christ as the simple sublime instrumentality by which this glorious result is to be achieved. To such a one the preaching of the cross is ever to some extent foolishness, and the zeal of the Christian blind infatuation. Hence in the early planting of Christianity, ere its true spirit had been apprehended and its sublime results foreseen, it was no wonder that as the young and gifted Philosopher of Tarsus dashed from him the cup of earthly happiness in the very moment of its apparent fruition, forfeited the honors and enrolments which the votaries of science and the friends of philosophy were just ready to heap upon him and gave up his time and

talents to a cause like this, men who viewed Christianity in the mere light of human reason could form no other conclusion than that the apostle was insane.

This charge of being "beside himself" had already been made against the apostle by his enemies at Corinth; and now as in writing this second letter he has spoken of the labour, dangers and sufferings to which in common with his fellow apostles he has been exposed, when he has shown how all these apparent evils have redounded to the glory of God, has disclosed in the most sublime language his entire willingness to endure or to die, to be present at home in the body, or to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord, the thought seems to occur to him: but may not all this be attributed to mere insanity—to the power of a heated imagination borne on with no adequate motive to the accomplishment of some insignificant or chimerical object? 'Not at all,' says the apostle. 'In all that we do and in all that we suffer we have a worthy, a sufficient end—for if as our enemies represent we are beside ourselves, we would have them know it is to God, to the glory of His name, to the advancement of His cause, to the manifestation of the riches of His grace in the salvation of sinners. Or if we be on the other hand, as you well know us to be in the proper use of our sober senses, we would have you feel that it is for your cause, that we may reason with you and bring you as reasonable beings to Christ. Nor in either case are we as our adversaries represent without a sufficient motive. We have an adequate, a glorious motive; we are under the very strangest and sweetest constraints to do all that we do and to suffer all that we suffer, for in all our labours, dangers and sufferings "the love of Christ constrains us." Here, then, Brethren, we have the love of Christ set forth as the great constraining motive to Christian obedience and sacrifice. Let us study it in this relation, and in order that we may do so with profit, let me invite your attention to two points: (1) the motive here referred, to the love of Christ; (2) the influence which it excels, "constraineth us."

## I.

The motive here referred to, "the love of Christ." It has been the subject of much dispute among commentators whether the love here referred to is the love which the believer bears to Christ or the love which Christ bears to the believer and which is the foundation of the former love. In so far as the phraseology is concerned, it is impossible to decide, since the love of Christ may be

16. This notation marks the beginning of the text of the next numbered page in the manuscript.

17. 1 Corinthians 2:14.

either the one or the other with equal propriety; but from the fact that in the succeeding verse the death and resurrection of Christ seem to be given as the evidence or manifestations of the love referred to, it seems evident to us that it is the love of Christ to the believer of which the apostle is speaking.\*<sup>18</sup> Indeed the very genius of the [7] text would seem to require this construction. It is not the feeble imperfect faltering love of the creature that forms his constraining motive to obedience, but it is the perfect divine incomprehensible love of Christ—that love which underlies the whole covenant of grace, which conditions the very possibility of redemption, a love which we can never doubt, however much we may doubt our own, and which can never cease to act with its constraining power.

Here, then, Brethren, is the sublime theme which we are called upon to study—"the love of Christ." How should we estimate it? With what shall we undertake to compare it? Shall we endeavor with the apostle to be "able to comprehend with all saints what is" its "breadth and length and depth and height?"<sup>19</sup> Why, in its breadth it stretches out before us a mysterious ocean, upon which as we gaze we behold no distant shore, no barrier of nation or rank [8] or outward condition, rising up to stay its flood and saying to it, like the heaven-appointed barriers of the sea—"thus far shalt thou come but not further, and here shall thy proud wave be stayed."<sup>20</sup> But the contrary, overleaping every barrier, overcoming every obstacle, this love offers itself to all of every age and country who will accept it on the terms of the gospel.

Or shall we view this love in its length? It extends along the whole line of the Christian experience, from the first moment of regeneration until the final establishment in heaven. Nay more, it extends from eternity to eternity. "I have loved thee," says the Savior, "with an everlasting love."<sup>21</sup> "The mercies of the Lord are from everlasting to everlasting,"<sup>22</sup> from the eternity of the

past in predestination to the eternity of the future in glorification, a mysterious chain of love linking two eternities together, each end of the chain be[9]ing in the heaven, while the central link meets upon the earth in the effectual calling of the sinner.

Or will you view this love in its depth? It is like the deep, deep sea into whose depths<sup>23</sup> bosom we may indeed let down the fathoming line, but whose mysterious depths are unfathomable.

Or shall we view it in its height? It is like the clear blue sky above into whose azure depths the eye may indeed gaze, but whose vastness it can never comprehend. And thus we have sent out the<sup>24</sup> measuring line of human speculation to its utmost limit; and when with the still deeper fathoming line of Christian experience we have gained still richer dimensions of this love, it is still and must ever be in its breadth and length, in its depth and height, "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."<sup>25</sup>

Or shall we view this love in its source? It shines from the very bosom [10] of God Himself. There on the eternal throne does it shine forth in the midst of all the other attributes of the divine character. There, summoned by holiness, justice, wisdom and truth, does it find its eternal dwelling place for the brightest and noblest of them all; for God is love, and as the angel whom John in apocalyptic vision saw standing in the sun was above its brightness, so this attribute of love beams forth resplendent, where all around is splendor.

Or shall we view this love in its object? While we were yet enemies He loved us. Yes, Brethren, here in this blessed gospel for the first time does the doctrine of love to the enemy appear. Search through all the tomes of heathen philosophy, examine every system of heathen morality, and you will no where find such an idea as this. You will find as their highest eliminations as the result of their highest and deepest investigations, "Thou shalt love thy [11] neighbor and hate thine enemy." But it was reserved for Christian the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ to proclaim "I say unto you, love your enemies."<sup>26</sup> It was reserved for Christianity to engraft it as an essential element of its morality, and for the Lord Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, to give the perfect exemplification of His precept by coming in person to die for His enemies.

Or shall we view this love in the condescension which it implies? "When I consider" the "heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and [the] stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him" or "the son of man, that thou visitest him?"<sup>27</sup> It is great condescension that the thoughts of the Lord of heaven should but for a moment be concerned with

18. An asterisk is added here in pencil and at the foot of page 6, also in pencil, is written, "Calvin in loco." The text following is faint but matches up to the text in Calvin's commentary, which is "that measureless love of Christ towards us, of which he had furnished us with an evidence in his death" ("which" was abbreviated "wh."). *Commentaries XX* (Calvin Translation Society, 1849; repr. Baker, 1981), 230.

19. Ephesians 3:18.

20. Compare with Job 38:11.

21. Jeremiah 31:3.

22. Compare with Psalm 103:17.

23. A word has been marked out, possibly "depths."

24. A short word or the beginning of a word starting with the letter "f" has been crossed out.

25. Ephesians 3:19.

26. Matthew 5:44.

27. Compare with Psalm 8:3-6.

His sinful, fallen creatures. The condescension appears still greater as we behold Him actually visiting our world, as we behold Him taking upon Himself human nature, as we behold Him taking this nature in its lowest outward condition of poverty and reproach in its lowest inward condition subject to pain and want, to sickness and sorrow, to all the ills and infirmities of life, save those which embrace a sinful element of nature; and our notions of condescension becomes overpowering as we see the Lord of glory crowned with thorns, spit upon, buffeted and crucified as a malefactor amid the jeerings and maledictions of a sinful world. What, I ask you, must have been a love which could prompt to sacrifices like this?

“Oh love divine! immeasurable love! Stooping from heaven to earth, from earth to hell, [...] beyond “all asking giving far, to those Who naught deserved, who naught deserved but death. Saving the vilest! saving me!” The “love divine, [...] O Lamb, once slain! [13] At thought of thee, thy love, thy flowing blood, all thoughts decay, all things remembered fade; [...] All actions done by men Or angels, disappear, absorbed and lost.”<sup>28</sup>

Or shall we view this love in the sacrifices to which it prompted? “Who gave himself a propitiation for us?”<sup>29</sup> Notice the language: not His life, not His dying blood, but Himself. We are too apt to forget the greatness of the gift which our Savior has made to us. As we see Him laying aside His crown in heaven and descending as our incarnate mediator, we feel that this was for us; but do we realize, as we see this same Jesus ascending to heaven clothed with the same humanity and again ascending His eternal throne, do we feel that this, too, is for us? As we see Him entering the gates of death, we feel that He dies for our sins; but do we remember that He rose again for our justification and that He ever liveth at God’s right hand to make intercession for us?<sup>30</sup> Yes, Brethren, not only the life [14] of suffering that our Savior lived upon earth, but the life of glory that He now lives in heaven is for us. All the acts of His exaltation as well as of His humiliation are performed with reference to us, and it becomes<sup>31</sup> therefore to live henceforth not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us.

Or shall we view this love in its tenderness? “The bruised reed will he not break and the smoking flax will he not quench.”<sup>32</sup> All earthly conclusions fail to give an idea of the tender love of Christ. Do but hear Him as He comes to the sinner lingering on the very border of despair, with all multitude of his sins rising up before

him; hear this tenderhearted Savior say to the stricken soul, “Come now, let us reason together . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”<sup>33</sup> Hear Him as He speaks to the sinner laden with the sense of his guilt and danger, saying, “Come unto me all you that [15] labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”<sup>34</sup> Or would you see the tenderness of a Savior’s love, could you feel the warm palpitations of a Savior’s heart, go with Him to the chamber of His afflicted follower, see Him as He binds the broken heart, hear Him as in accents of love He says to the bewildered, heart-stricken mourner, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”<sup>35</sup> See Him as the tears roll down His furrowed cheek and in broken accent He utters the words “I am the resurrection and the life,”<sup>36</sup> and tell me is there an earthly affection that can compare in tenderness with this? {Oh, no}.<sup>37</sup> The love of a sister ardent and ingenious {as it is}, the love of a mother with all its tenderness and depth of affection, nay, even that nearer dearer tie which binds his mutual heart in life-long sympathy and affection, all sink into insignificance in the comparison.

Finally, Brethren, look at the love of Christ in its con[16]stancy. Many waters cannot quench its flame; but with the same unwavering constancy amid all the errings and wanderings of the creature it still follows his devious course and never deserts him till it has brought him safely to the eternal shore. And thus, as we view this love in its various relations and aspects, we can truly say that in all these it “passeth knowledge.”<sup>38</sup> Well may the angels of heaven be represented as desiring to look into a love like this.<sup>39</sup> Well might Moses in

28. Robert Pollok, *The Course of Time*, Book IV, The Praise of Redeeming Love (1829; New York: Barnes and Co., 1856), 147–148. The ellipses have been inserted where text was omitted and the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc., changed to align with the source. Quotation marks denote the actual text in Pollok.

29. Cf. Titus 2:14 (who gave himself for us), 1 Timothy 2:6 (“Who gave himself a ransom for all”), 1 John 2:2 (“and he is the propitiation for our sins”), 1 John 4:10, Hebrews 2:17, and Romans 3:25. The quotation appears to be drawing from or is a mash-up of several of these.

30. See Hebrews 7:25, Acts 7:55, etc.

31. *Becomes*: is befitting; is suitable.

32. Cf. Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20.

33. Isaiah 1:18.

34. Matthew 11:28.

35. John 13:7.

36. John 11:25.

37. The two short words are faint with the first clearer and likely “oh,” and the second beginning the next line much fainter and difficult to read.

38. Ephesians 3:19.

39. 1 Peter 1:12.

that tabernacle, which he was instructed to build “after the pattern of the heavenly,” represent the cherubim as seated with expanded wings above the mercy seat, gazing anxiously upon it, absorbed in profoundest study of its sacred mysteries.<sup>40</sup> With us, Brethren, the very highest acting of mind in reference to this love is not comprehension, but admiration—astonished, adoring admiration—until our heads [17] are overwhelmed, our thoughts and understandings lost, and our souls carried out of ourselves and laid in the dust of self-oblivion, that they may be swallowed up in the contemplation of the unspeakable love of Christ.

## II.

Let us now notice, in the second place, the influence which the love of Christ is said to exert upon us. It “constraineth” us. The term in the original which is here translated “constraineth,” is one of peculiar emphasis, expressive of the strongest and deepest emotions. It is only read in one other place<sup>41</sup> of the New Testament, where our Savior says of Himself, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I strained” (or constrained) “until it be accomplished.”<sup>42</sup> The many different explanations of this term given by commentators, seem to err not so much in putting a wrong meaning upon it,<sup>43</sup> as in failing to give its full meaning. Thus, some have referred the constraining influence to the judgment, others to the emotions, and others again to the will. [18] I think it expressive of an influence exerted upon all the faculties of the soul, in which they are all drawn forth into lively and vigorous exercise, a state of the soul in which the understanding is absorbed in the contemplation of some interesting subject, the emotions armed and called into exercise and the will nerved

with resistless energy borne onward to the attainment of some desired result.

This is evidently the signification of the term in the Classic Greek, where it is used to express the influence of an orator upon his audience. For it is the true purview of the orator to bring some momentous subject of thought into intimate and living contact with the {minds} of his [audience],<sup>44</sup> to rivet the attention of the understanding upmost, to draw forth the emotions of the heart and thus to operate upon the will, and as the Greek expresses it, “have with” him or carry always with him his audience to the desired conclusion or action. It is expressive moreover of [19] the influence exerted by a single principle or controlling thought in the mind— and here again do we find a precise accordance with classic use for it—enters into the very genius of oratory that it should lay hold upon some single principle and make that the engine with which it accomplishes its mighty results. We may admire, indeed, we must admire the man who grasps in his comprehensive mind a hundred different thoughts, and making of each a separate argument, brings to bear abreast on the question, overwhelming us with a conclusion from a hundred different premises, which but a moment after we have forgotten. But he alone is the perfect orator, who seizing upon some great fundamental principle, some leading thought, forgets for the time every side issue and argument, brings all the power of his mind to bear upon it, gathers around it all the force of his learning and genius, brings all the faculties of his au|20|dience into sympathy with it and helps it with all the force of his eloquence to its natural conclusion.

Then if we will examine the term in the ~~only two~~ places of Scripture in which it is found – ~~the two~~ [^those] given above,<sup>45</sup> I think we shall see that this is precisely the meaning. And thus, when our Savior says He is straitened until His baptism is accomplished, or in other words constrained to its accomplishment, He means that His whole soul is pervaded with the thought of this baptism of suffering {therein}<sup>46</sup> which He is called to keep with the glorious results that should follow. His whole soul is animated and torn with conflicting emotions in view of it, and so intensely does He long for its accomplishment, that He is borne forward in Spirit to the time and enabled<sup>47</sup> to rejoice in the fires already kindling in the hearts of Scribes and Pharisees, only to be quenched in the life blood of the love of God. [21]

Thus too when the apostle says in the words of the text, “the love of Christ constraineth us,” he evidently refers to its inward action as a motive principle upon

40. See Hebrews 8:5, Exodus 37:9.

41. Witherspoon has later placed the insertion point and underlined these words and added interline above in ink, “a singular mistake of mine. See Acts 18:5, Phil 1:23, Acts 7:57 Etc.”

42. Luke 12:50.

43. The words “upon it” have been inserted interline in ink above “meaning as”.

44. The word is “winds” or “minds.” If one presumes “audience” at the end of the previous sentence is implied or missing (there is no indication of a space in the text) “minds of his [audience]” makes the most sense.

45. The text has been corrected in keeping with the previous correction, but in pencil as opposed to the ink used before.

46. The word is not clear and may be abbreviated with an apostrophe (a large dot) out in the margin; there, therein, through, etc.

47. The text is not clear, but seems to be “enabled,” comparing to a subsequent use. It possibly may be “humbled,” but “enabled” fits the intended sense. The word is split between two lines and begins with, apparently, a connected ampersand. If the word is “humbled,” the “m” is but a short scribble.

the heart. This thought of the unspeakable love of Christ had taken possession of the whole soul of the apostle. His mind had been filled with it. His heart had been warmed by it, his will weaned<sup>48</sup> and strengthened by it; and he himself thus enabled to count all things but a loss for the excellency of the love of Christ. Here then is the influence exerted by the love of Christ. It is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup> It enters and takes possession of the mind. It enlists and calls forth the emotions; it kindles and engages the affections. It moves upon and influences the will, and thus the whole man is constrained, {and}<sup>50</sup> with it, borne on over over [sic], every obstacle rendered superior to every danger. This is precisely the effect produced by the love of Christ in the sinner's conversion. [22]

"And I if be lifted up," says the Saviour, "will draw all men unto me."<sup>51</sup> And what is this lifting up but the manifestation, consummation and evidence of the unspeakable love of Christ? It is the love of Christ which the Spirit wields as His most powerful argument to the sinner's conversion, for it is love alone that can melt the stubborn rebellious heart. The thunder of Sinai may forever well above him; the law may proclaim, trumpet-tongued, "The soul that sinneth it shall die!";<sup>52</sup> Ebal may forever utter forth its cursings;<sup>53</sup> the sword of justice may forever sway above the sinner's head; the gates of hell may be forever yawning to receive him; and yet the heart will remain as sluggish and inactive as at first. Nay, rather, the {sinful} soul will raise up fresh mountains of sin under which to bury itself from the presence of God and will rush on more madly [23] to despair and everlasting death.

It is only when the sinner looks to Calvary, when he sees the tokens of a love as infinite as the holiness which required its sacrifice; it is only when he hears that voice in its dying agonies saying, "Father, forgive them"; it is only when he feels the pressure of the amazing love of the Trinity to the sinner, and at the same time the impossibility after the sacrifice of Christ that any sinner can escape unpunished; yes, it is only then, when love mingles with holiness, grace shines with justice, that the heart is melted, the rebel is overcome and falls prostrate at the foot of the cross. The sense of God's love in Christ has entered his heart as a beam of light from the cross, animating, affecting, transforming the whole.

Before, he has not known the love of Christ. Now for the first time under the illumination of the Spirit [24] is he enabled to understand the mystery of the cross. It has become the wisdom of God to him. He has gained a motive power in the soul of a spiritual nature. He is now enabled to feel the constraining power of a divine

love; and as we trace his whole succeeding history, we shall find that just in proportion to the life of faith in his heart shall be the strength of this reigning principle. The terms of the law cease to warn him; but a higher constraint has been put upon him, and with this principle of love animating the mind, kindling the affections and molding the will, he has an incentive to action, a stimulus to self-denial, a compassion for suffering and a superiority to danger which fit him for any and every station.

Yes, Brethren, only give me the Christian whose soul feeds ever upon a consciousness of the amazing [25] love of Christ, to whom it is light to the mind, warmth to the heart, impulse to the will, and you give me one filled for any and every emergency of life. Is he called upon to engage in arduous and incessant labour for Christ? Is there any incentive to patient persevering labour on behalf of another, so strong as the consciousness that the one for whom we labor is one who loves us with warm devotion and who has undergone greater labour for us? Is the believer called upon to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross? Let him, as he faints by the way, but lift his eye to Calvary and behold the Master toiling up its rugged steep bearing His cross amid the taunts and derisions of the enemies, and how will he rise to newness of life and girding himself with fresh vigor of soul run the wearying race!

Is the believer called upon to endure self-denial? And what form may it take in which this love will not [26] act powerfully upon it? Shall he be required to forfeit the honour of the world? What are they to him who has the love of Christ? Shall he forfeit its wealth? He counts all things but loss for Christ? Shall he endure its reproaches? That is only to follow in the footsteps of his blessed Master. Shall he sigh for the fawning smile of this world's great, when he has forever glory and honour in the eyes of his heavenly friends? Shall he pine for the paltry, fading honour of this world, when he has the favour of the King of Kings? Is he called upon to abandon home and friends, to carry the banner of the cross into distant lands? He does but tread in the footsteps of the first great missionary who came from heaven to earth, and the love of this elder brother makes home on the

48. The word is not clear with an open "a" like a "u" (not uncommon in this text), and one letter standing for the "ne", if this is the correct rendering.

49. Romans 5:5.

50. Possibly "had."

51. John 12:32.

52. Ezekiel 18:20.

53. Deuteronomy 27:11-26.

rolling wave or the distant shore; the nearest and dearest [27] of friends shall be ever with him.

Is he called upon to endure afflictions? And what though wave after wave of sorrow rolls over the anguished breast, until with the psalmist he can say all “thy billows are gone over me!”<sup>54</sup> So long as he hears above the war of the tempest the voice of a loving Savior saying to him, “Fear not,” “O Jacob.” “I have redeemed thee, [...] thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.”<sup>55</sup> What though the furnace of affliction be seven times heated? Shall not another walk therein? And the same kind voice whisper here, “When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”<sup>56</sup>

Is the believer called upon to sever tenderest ties of earth, to give up that subject the heart holds most dear, to part with [28] all life’s treasures in one, and having been bereaved of that, look out upon a world, desolate, dreary, homeless and heartless? Still, let the thought of a Saviour’s love enter the mind, and the bereaved one finds that earth is no longer desolate—nay, that the solitude and dreariness of a barren rock girt isle would be a paradise with the constant love and sympathy of such a compassionate Savior. Is the believer called upon to encounter death? What is death to the object of a Savior’s boundless love? Is it not the glad summons to His presence to behold Him face to face and go not out any more forever? Is it not to drink still more richly of the fountain of love? Is it not to hear all the yearnings of the fond heart satisfied to rest forever in the embraces of this dear object of love?

Is the believer called upon finally to stand amid the [29] ruins of a dissolving universe? What though the heavens be rolled together as a parched scroll and the elements dissolve with fervent heat?<sup>57</sup> What though every separate star shot forth from its orbit, become a separate flaming minister of death? Still the believer can rise in the sublimity of our undoubting faith, view without {tears} the majestic scene, and as worlds and

systems dash together in wild confusion, as thousands fall upon his right hand and ten thousands upon his left,<sup>58</sup> he can lift himself amid the horrors of the universal conflagrations and with the great apostle ask,<sup>59</sup> “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, [30] which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I {have} thus endeavored to illustrate, rather than fully to develop, the constraining influences of the love of Christ. Let me say in conclusion:

1. To the follower of Christ: You see where our true strength lies. It is in the view we get in the infinite, amazing love of Christ. There are periods of darkness in the history of every true child of God, times when we are led to doubt whether or not we are true Christians. Our hearts are so hard, our wills so sluggish, we distrust our own love and go with our heads bowed down, mourning over our lost estate. We spend days and weeks and months in a state of suspense, ever searching into our hearts for the light of heaven and finding only the darkness of earth. Are there any of us now in this situation? If so, let me say to you, cease to study your own hard hearts. Run away from [31] them to the cross of Christ. If you wished to know whether or not you had a love for the sublime and the beautiful, would you sit quietly in your room and endeavor to reason yourself into a belief that you had? No, methinks you would go in person or in fancy to some scene of natural grandeur, where mountains rise upon mountains, where frowning cliff and rugged rock and silvery stream and foaming cascade and flowery mead fall upon the ravishest sight, and as the emotions spontaneously flowed forth, they would evidence their presence and power in the soul. So I bid you go to Christ, study Him in His person, character or work; and if there be a spark of love in your bosom, it will kindle to a flame.

2. To the sinner: What motive to compare with this? You call us fools and madmen. Truly<sup>60</sup> “No doubt [but] ye are the people, and wisdom” will “die with you.”<sup>61</sup> Who is the wise man? He who is impelled by motives and labouring for ends which a reasonable being alone can appreciate? Or he who shares a common motive and common end with the beasts that perish?<sup>62</sup> ■

54. Psalm 42:7.

55. Cf. Isaiah 43:1–2.

56. Isaiah 43:2. Cf. Daniel 3:19.

57. 2 Peter 3:7.

58. Psalm 91:7.

59. It is not clear if the “ask” is over-writing something or has been struck out in error, since it is required. The quotation is from Romans 8:35, 38–39.

60. A word, perhaps Truly, has been struck out and “no doubt” written above it.

61. Job 12:2.

62. Psalm 49:20.