



The love of Christ

For the love of Christ is constraining us, judging this, that, if One died for the sake of all, consequently all died.

—2 Corinthians 5:14



I was sitting out on the front porch last night, watching the sun tip toward the west. It was still bright and hot and the leaves of the sycamore tree here took advantage of that. As the sun dappled them, they found a little bit of a breeze and shimmied. God hung hundreds of leaves upon this tree in reach of the radiation so that they could make a merry noise to Him. Not a single leaf refused the privilege.

What a picture of Jesus Christ. He is the one Son, the only Son of God and the source of all our spiritual life. He shines on all of His creatures as we shudder in the

middle of our day (a tickle runs down our backs) without knowing what caused it—perhaps it is some sort of basking in His life when we're least conscious of it or expecting it. His attention never lapses, not even at night. We live and move and have our being in Him, even while sleeping. Not even atheists can escape the attention of God; one day they will all realize just how lavish it really was.

God is one, yet we are many—just like the sun and the leaves. So many leaves, yet not one competing with another. Not even a billion leaves can exhaust the sun's power, any more than a million atheists can exhaust God's love. The miracle of love is this: pulling love from God only increases His stores of it. The harder the pull, the more overflowing the stores. I'm trying to think of an analogy in everyday life, but I can't.

The loaves and the fishes were a hint of it in the Bible, but this was by no means everyday life. The more food the disciples yanked from the baskets, the more loaves and fishes appeared. The faster they yanked, the faster came lunch. It was the ultimate drive-thru window. Thus also with grace: the harder that sin draws grace into its wound, the greater quantities of grace run to the rescue. It's as though grace were competing with itself to cover the sin: "Me!" "No me!" Word of the need goes forth, and thousands of gallons of grace wash in—just to cover a single evil thought. Only a teaspoon of grace is needed for such a degree of crime, so the rest of the grace—absurd amounts—stays waiting for something else to happen. Trying to outdo grace never works because trying harder only turns grace from sufficient to preposterous. Some people have tried to exhaust grace. I will not mention names.

SOLAR FAVORS

Then I thought of all the things besides the leaves and the trees that benefit from the sun. Though the need might be indirect, nothing on this planet lives apart from the sun. The sea life feeds on the plankton that flourishes at the top layers of the oceans. Animal life depends on



the herbage of earth. Meat-eating animals eat herbivores, who eat the herbage, which needs sun.

Try to picture every living thing on earth: sea life, animal life, life beneath the microscope; redwoods, leaves of every ilk, moths, aphids and antlions—and of course human beings—and now marvel at the universal dependence upon the one great orb. None of these things fight one another for the orb because the orb is an equal-opportunity shiner. Not even humans have figured out how to wage war over solar favors. The sun shines on the just and the unjust alike. I have seen many unjust people with sunburns.

TIGHTWAD GOD?

The grasshopper does not resent that the leaves of the trees, at their altitude, get first light. And the leaves do not say to the grasshoppers, “Stop using our leftover radiation.” Not one leaf I watched that evening questioned solar charity. The leaves instinctively realized, I think, that to do so would be cutting off their little green noses to spite their faces.

God’s love falls upon Israel, but this nation wants God all to themselves. They resent that the love of God could and does wash abroad. It falls on “unworthies”—of all things—as though Israel has the market cornered on commendability. The absolute love of God for everyone emits *from* God, and so can only be restricted at that Source. If Israel wants to restrict it, they punish *themselves*. History attests to this. It’s like fouling the city’s water supply to keep your enemies from hydrating. Then you go to your own sink—oops; maybe that wasn’t such a great idea.

Any attempt to harass, regulate or limit God’s love can only hurt those perpetrating such mayhem. Israel is a special people to God, but He tests them to show them the state of their own hearts. On a scale of 1 to 10, they rank at about .5—and that’s just the left ventricle. What if God *does* love aliens? This outrages the Jews. See how the Jews hated Paul for taking their “personal Deity” outside Palestine. They loathe to extend forgiveness or mercy to anyone; see how this has boomeranged on them and left their own house desolate. Want to burn down the world? Go ahead and call down the fireball; you may find your

own house incinerated. For Israel, it's an eonian curse. At the end of the curse is a giant mirror where they will look at themselves and say, "Oops."

Imagine us telling God that we resent His eventual salvation of all humanity. We say to Him, "We wish you were a little less lavish with this love business." What if God

"God's love is like central heating. There's one knob for everything."

answered, "I *am* rather sun-like, shining on everything. I will crank it back ten notches." He does so, and we wonder what became of *our* God-imparted warmth. Well, He cranked down the thermostat *everywhere*. It's central heating. There's one knob for everything.

If our hearts become constricted by the plaque of hate or bitterness, then God becomes restricted in our own eyes—not because He is restricted, Himself, but because our tainted lens distorts Him to our perception. To us, He will become what we believe Him to be: a tightwad God; a celestial Scrooge.

CONNECTIVITY

I find that all love is connected. To test this principle, I have tried to love some people less. For the sake of experimentation and research, I sit in a chair and concentrate on depreciating certain individuals who I sort of don't like already, but happily tolerate. For this operation, I usually cross my arms and stare at the floor. I need complete quiet and a room temperature set at exactly 59 degrees. At this temperature, it takes a good two minutes to work up a healthy distaste for someone, longer for out-and-out enemy. A heart rate elevated to 90 beats per minute tells me I've attained the proper pitch of hostility; detestation takes much longer, generally three and one-half minutes and a heart rate hovering around one hundred. Thus ends Phase 1 of the experiment, when I look up to break the spell (Phase 2) and concentrate on the people I really do like a lot. What I find is that I don't like these people as much as I did before the experiment. Thus do I know that love is connected. If I decrease love in one area, it affects all other areas proportionately; I still love my sister Kelly a lot—but just not as *much* a lot. Yet when love gushes abroad from my heart to touch even my enemies, the light shines brighter everywhere—and my sister can hardly stand me.

ECOSYSTEM OF LOVE

There is special love everywhere, but even this love connects to other love like an ecosystem. Jesus is said to have loved the disciple John. This was a special love even when compared to His love for the other disciples. No doubt John basked in it. But what if one day John said, "I wish You would crank it back a little for those other guys. This is so good that I want more of it." Uh-oh. It would be like the leaves saying to the sun, "We adore our treetop address because we seem to get more of you here, but we want more still. Dial it back on the *tree*, will you?" Silly leaves. I would tell John, "You are better served celebrating Christ's lavishness than plotting how to market or channel it. You're going to screw yourself."

The fear, I suppose, is that love will run out. What a waste of concern. We may as well suppose that cutting down millions of trees will preserve the sun. The sun is neither encouraged nor discouraged by forest acreage. The sun does its thing, the volume of benefactors being irrelevant. Neither is God encouraged nor discouraged by either throngs or a paucity of people. We do not conserve the love of God by killing people. We do not conserve it by asking God to dial it back. As with grace and that little lunch on the mount, more people only produce more love. The more pull on God's resources, the more resources come to the need.

Would we want it any other way? I hope not.

For the love of Christ is constraining us, judging this, that, if One died for the sake of all, consequently all died. And He died for the sake of all that those who are living should by no means still be living to themselves, but to the One dying and being roused for their sakes. —2 Corinthians 5:14-15

—MZ



Our friend Rick, Kelly and me at a Pro Football Hall of Fame event Friday night in Canton, Ohio.