

5-3-8

Dr. P. R. Lange  
Devotional

"Let this Mind"

1956

Phil. 2:5-8

The Epistle to the Philippians is an inspired delineation of the Christian temper. It sets forth the disposition of the Christian. It has to do with the inner springs of the Christian character. It is a portrait drawn of the Christian heart.

The text sets forth Christ as exemplifying the Christian temper. The text is nothing less than an admonition to strive after those heart qualities which characterize Jesus Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus," says the Apostle.

I invite your consideration of this text under three heads:

1. What is the content of this mind?
2. How is this mind acquired?
3. What are the dynamics of this mind?

First, then, what is the content of this mind? This mind then is the mind of Christ according to the apostle. The mind which was in Christ Jesus is set forth in the verses 6-8. Paul does not give all that is in the mind of Christ in these verses. He selects those qualities of our Lord which fit the needs of the Philippians at that moment. That which Paul speaks of us being in the mind of Christ and which the Philippians were to include in their own spiritual lives consisted of a spirit of humility and an interest in the welfare of others. The graces were illustrated in our Lord's act of becoming incarnate in the human race and becoming the substitutionary atonement for sin.

Shall we now look at the steps of His humiliation as setting forth the grace of humility.

1. Consider the exalted position which was His before He stepped down. He is God: "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." The fact that He was and is God did not keep Him from stepping down and taking on the likeness of men in order to save us. On the other hand, the fact that Christ was and is God qualified Him to step down from that exalted position to help us.

The fact that we are children of the Most High does not disqualify us from helping the needy but on the other hand it is the very qualification which makes us fit for helping others.

2. Secondly, He emptied Himself. The expression, "But made Himself of no reputation" is translated by many scholars "He emptied Himself." But of what then did He divest Himself?

- (1) He did not divest Himself of personal identity which He possessed in the world eternal before He came into the world of time. What He was in the ages past before the creation He retained when He appeared among men.

(2) It was not His deity identification of which he emptied Himself. He was the same in His deity identity when He lay in human helplessness in Bethlehem's manger as when in His eternity of existence He was speaking worlds into being.

(3) He did not divest Himself of His deity attributes. We speak of moral and non-moral attributes of God. The moral are four: holiness, righteousness, justice and love. The non-moral are seven: unity, spirituality, immutability, omnipresence, eternity, omniscience and omnipotence. In looking at these deity attributes we are driven to the conclusion at once that to divest Christ of any one of these attributes would divest Him of His deity identification.

(4) Christ set aside first of all the manifestation of His glory as God for awhile. The glory was there but it was veiled for a season that He might walk among men.

(5) Christ set aside the use of His powers as God for awhile in order that He might become obedient to the Father. The powers as God were there, but He chose not to use them for a season. John 14:10, "The words that I say unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works."

"He emptied Himself." He did that in order to help us. How often we are tripped by that word "self." Christ emptied Himself of self which is the essence of humility. He set self aside when He set His legitimate desires aside. His rightful natural desire as Deity was to be glorified, to give expression of His glory to the angels. But to go to the cross He had to set that desire aside. Setting that desire aside, He set self aside; He emptied Himself of self!

In our labors in the Kingdom, we often find it difficult to forget self.

Basil, the church father of the early centuries of Christianity had been teaching rhetoric in his native city for several years when he was attracted by the fame of the monastic life and decided to pay a visit to the poor, and entered a retreat in the mountains of Pontus. His desire was to get rid of the noises of the world and of its appeal. But even there he did not find the peace he was seeking. "I have well forsaken my residence in the city as a source of a thousand evils," he wrote to a friend, "but I have not been able to forsake myself."

3. Thirdly, He took upon Him the form of a servant. The word "servant" literally means "bondslave."

It was the Lord of Glory at the Passover feast (John 13) Who laid aside His outer garments to wrap a towel about Himself and perform the duties of a slave. Those garments speak of the glory manifested before the angels in His preincarnate state. The towel, symbol of His position as a bondslave, speaks of humility with which He clothed Himself. While He was kneeling on the floor washing the disciples' feet, He was still the Lord of Glory although He looked like a bondslave. When He had finished His duties, He laid aside the towel and took the robes again.

4. He died and chose "even the death of the cross." He need not have died because He was sinless; and death was only the result of sin. Adam sinned and so died; Jesus did not sin and, therefore, needed not to pass through death's portals. He needed not to die, yet He was willing to surrender His life. He said, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." He died willingly but did not take His life as a suicide; He died obediently. He waited until His hour had come when He was able to say "it is finished." Then He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.

But, as if death were not sufficiently humbling, the apostle adds, "even the death of the cross." That was the worst kind of death. It was a violent death. Jesus fell not asleep gently, as good men often do whose end is peace. No, He died by murderous hands. Jews and Gentiles combined and with cruel hands took Him and crucified and slew Him. It was also an extremely painful death of lingering agony. Those parts of the body in which the nerves were most numerous were pierced with rough iron nails. The weight of the body was made to hang upon the tenderest part of the frame. No doubt, the nails tore their way through His flesh while He was hanging on the tree. A cut in the hand has often resulted in lockjaw and death, yet Christ's hands were nailed to the cross. It was also a death most shameful. Thieves were crucified with Him; His adversaries stood and mocked Him. The death of the cross was reserved for slaves and the basest of felons; no Roman citizen could be put to death in such a way. It was a penal death. He died not like a hero in battle, nor as one who perishes while rescuing his fellowmen from fire or flood; He died as a criminal. It was an accursed death too. God Himself called it so, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He was made a curse for us.

We must be willing to lay aside our ambition and glory, our throne of comfort, respect and power, if by doing so we may be the better able to help others. We must be willing to take the form of servants to wash one another's feet, to submit even to shame and spitting, to misunderstanding, if we shall thereby help to lift the world nearer to heaven.

II. In the second place, let us consider how this mind is acquired.

Let me be very emphatic at the very outset of the consideration of this phase of our meditation. The mind of Christ does not come to us by imitation. One of the great books of modern times is the work by Thomas a Kempis on "The Imitation of Christ." It is, indeed, a sublime treatise and the work of a master spirit. But the human heart unaided cannot imitate any more than a canary can imitate a human voice. Christ is more than a Pattern to us, more than a bright and glorious Example. He becomes the power to reproduce that pattern and to transfer to our lives that example. Our text does not bid us to imitate Christ or have a mind like Him, but to have the same mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus. This is the deepest truth of all Christian experience. It is Christ Himself who comes to reproduce His own life in the lives of His followers. This is the mystery of the Gospel. This is the secret of the Lord. This is the power that fills, that keeps the consecrated heart. This is the only way that we can be like Christ.

We sing the little song:

"Give me a heart like Thine  
By Thy wonderful power,  
By Thy grace every hour.  
Give me a heart like Thine."

Someone has said it should rather be:

"Give me Thy heart in mine  
By Thy wonderful power,  
By Thy grace every hour.  
Give me Thy heart in mine."

The word "let" expresses the whole idea of the divine life. It is not our doing but His. We do not accomplish it, but we let Him live out His life in us. It is the "Not I, but Christ who liveth in me." The mystery of godliness is "Christ in you the hope of glory." The end of all experience is union with Christ. God has made the human heart for Himself, and the heart never rests till it receives Him and draws all its life from Him. Just as the flower needs the sunshine and all its tints are but the outshining of the light that has first shone in, so the graces of the Christian life are but the reflection of the Christ Who dwells in us.

It is not by the ideas which are inculcated in the Gospels or merely the influences which He brings to bear upon us which we are to live by. The message of godliness is nothing less than this, that the very Person of Jesus is revealed to and formed in the redeemed soul, and our whole Christian life henceforth is a putting on of Christ and taking from Him moment by moment each grace that we need to live out. Do we want humility? We receive the spirit of humility from Him, and let the same mind be in you which was also in Him. Do we want love? We open our hearts to a baptism of His love, and it flows into us and lives through us. Do we want patience, courage, wisdom, anything? We simply put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and "let this mind be in (us) which was also in Christ Jesus."

Does that destroy our individuality and make each one of us simply an automaton without will or responsibility? Certainly not. So perfect is the divine adjustment to our human nature, so delicately does God recognize in us the power of choice and the right of personal liberty, that He will not come until we invite Him, and He will not act except as we cooperate by constant yielding and receiving. The slightest hesitation on our part to follow will check His grace. He will not force Himself into our life, but He will meet the surrendered will and fill the heart that opens all its being to receive Him. Just as that flower is made to receive the sun and only reaches its individuality when filled with sunshine; just as the soil needs the rain and the seed, and only accomplishes the purposes of its being when it receives the seed and absorbs the rain; so the human heart is made for Christ and it is incomplete until it receives Him. He is the complement of its being, and it unfolds and blossoms into all its powers when quickened by His life and inspired by His life, and planted and watered by His indwelling life and love.

The fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of John is perhaps the most perfect unfolding of this message of the abiding life. The three keynotes are "in him," "in us," and "abide." We are simply to let Him be and so abide that His life shall flow through us as the sap flows through the branches of the vine and the rich clusters hang without effort through the spontaneous life which flows through all the beautiful organism of the plant.

What an exquisite simplicity this gives to the Christian life. It takes all the complications away. It is not a thousand things we have to do but, one. We are occupied with Him, and He takes care of us. Our eyes are to be riveted on Him. When Peter was bidden by Christ to come to Him on the waves of the Sea of Galilee, he walked well as long as he had his eyes riveted on Jesus Christ. But when he looked at the waves and the wind he began to sink. So it is with us--as long as our eyes are looking to Jesus, we fare well. When we are occupied with Him, He takes care of us.

III. In the third place, let us consider the dynamic of that mind in us. The exhortation "Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus" reaches back to verses 2-4 for its definition as far as believers were concerned. What then are some of the specific graces which will be noticeable among us?

1. There will be oneness of mind. Phil. 2:2, "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." The apostle knew that to create concord you need first to beget lowliness of mind. Men do not quarrel when their ambitions have come to an end. When each one is willing to be the least, when everyone desires to place his fellows higher than himself, there is an end to party spirit; schisms and divisions are passed away. Now in order to create lowliness of mind, Paul under the teaching of the Spirit of God spoke of the lowliness of Christ. He would have us go down, and so he takes us to see our Master going down.

2. There will be contempt for human glory. Have we not heard of some saying, "I have been insulted. I am not treated with proper respect. I go in and out and I am not noticed." "Do nothing through strife or vainglory," verse 3. If Christ went down, down, down, it ill becomes us to be always seeking to go up, up, up. Wait till God exalts you, which He will do in good time.

3. We will see the worth of each one of the brethren. "Let each esteem other better than themselves."

4. There will be unquestioning obedience. "He humbled Himself and became obedient." The right kind of humility is obediencé to the commands of God. The outstanding mark of humility is obedience.

5. There is longing for fellowship with the saints. Paul said in Chapter 1, verse 8, "I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." Another translation has it: "I long after you with the heart of Jesus Christ."

6. If the mind of Christ is in us, there will be a compassion for the lost. Chap. 3:10. Paul speaks of "the fellowship of his sufferings."

7. If the mind of Christ is in us, there will be a sense of the presence of Christ.

In conclusion, let me say that the true Christian life is nothing more nor less than the manifestation of Christ. "For me to live is Christ."

The only secret of living Christ is occupation with Christ. And it is for this God has given us such abundant fulness in His Word. Another has well said that if the Bible were merely a guidebook to show us the way to heaven, a very much smaller volume would have sufficed. Often the gospel has been clearly told out in a few-paged tract or booklet. These many pages, all the sixty-six books, set forth one great subject, "Christ."

He who feeds upon its sacred pages is feeding on Christ. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Col. 3:16.

A number of years ago, in one of our eastern states, lived a poor widow with her son, an only son. She did her best to train him by example and precept. She gave him the best of everything that she in her poverty could afford. When the time came for the son to attend college, she supported him with the money she earned by taking in washing. She also did her best to see him through medical school. The time came for him to marry and set up a household of his own. He was ashamed of his mother because of her poverty and worn appearance. He did not divulge to his young wife that he had a mother but spoke of her as that woman who had done so much for him during the days when he had to struggle for an education.

One day this physician suggested to his wife that they prepare a place for that good woman in their own house and invite her to live with them as long as she liked. Often he would be found in the room of that good woman. One day it dawned upon the wife that in reality that good woman was none other than her husband's mother. Then they both hurried to the presence of that mother and in many tears and confessions, they begged her pardon. Then the son on bended knee before his mother said, "Now, mother, no more are you limited to one room, but the whole house is thrown open to you."

Christ does not only want to fill part of our being but our whole being. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."