

Christ is my Life—studies in Philippians (3)

Having the mind of Christ Philippians 2:1-13

Our section has a practical purpose.

- It begins in the previous chapter: 'Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ' (v. 27).
- Now, we are called to be other person centred (vv.2-4)—'have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus', or, 'which was also in Christ Jesus'.
- This call is applied by calling us 'to work out our salvation ... because it is God who works in you' (vv. 12-13).
- This practical purpose is bedded in a profound work of God, revealing to us, and forming in us, the mind of Christ.

We are on holy ground.

- We are being told how Jesus thinks about his own coming into the world and his service on our behalf.
- We are being told the way in which God is at work in us.

Having the mind of Christ is bundled with being of one accord (v. 2, 5).

- True sociality grows out of having the mind of Christ, and is difficult to acquire without it.
- Oneness of mind, affection, spirit and purpose comes from there being something between us that is bigger than any one of us—Christ himself, and him giving to each one the same direction and power for life.
- This unity cannot mean uniformity because differences are important. We have various gifts, insights, and opportunities provided by Christ for the good of his people.
 - C. S. Lewis observed that there are more ways of doing good than evil, so variety among Christians is not surprising. The question is what status we give our differences.
- The causes of conflict are ... (v. 3)
 - Rivalry = self promotion
 - Conceit = empty glory
- We are to be humble and reckon others to be better than ourselves (v. 3).
 - Humility is having a true understanding of our situation: we are creatures, designed to serve; we are sinners, now redeemed; we are saints—freed to be what we are.
 - The twin foci of our living are to be the greatness of God's goodness to us in Christ and great significance of people around us.
 - Cf. the gross emphasis in media on self-promotion.
- A mind-set that is true (as he will demonstrate is in Christ) is to think 'also' about others, not just about ourselves (v. 4).
 - Jesus said we are to love others as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:39).
 - Paul says, no one hates his own flesh (Eph. 5:29).

This not as easy as it sounds!

- There are probably some disagreements at Philippi (1:27; 4:2).
- Paul has only Timothy who is genuinely interested in others (2:19-21).
- As sinners, we feel our loss of glory and compensate by puffing ourselves up.

We are not merely being presented with an ethic but a power—a mind-set presented to us by Christ's coming and his presence among us.

- If there is any encouragement in Christ (v. 1)! Here is some 'if'!
- Think of what it means to be befriended by God—addressed from within his family, persuaded by love, endowed with God's Spirit and deeply loved. The reference is to what believers already know, but may also point to what is about to be said.
- We will look at what the mind of Christ is and then return to this 'comfort'.

Look at Christ Jesus (vv. 6-8).

- It is remarkable that we know the **mind of Christ**, which is, of course, to know the mind of God. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2:16). We will return to why we can be so sure of knowing this.
- He **has** the *form* of God, indicating 'one who possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God himself' (Alec Motyer, p. 109).
 - This is how angels see him, or how Isaiah (Isa. 6) or John (Rev. 1) sees him. He looks like God because, in every respect, he is God.
- He **takes** the *form* of a servant/ slave (v. 7).
 - He is among us to do the will of the one who sent him (John 5:30).
 - He is present among us to serve us (cf. Matt. 20:26-28).
- He doesn't think his deity is for himself—to be guarded and **grasped** (v. 6).
 - He doesn't need to of course, because he is God and can live truly as what he is (John 5:18, 26).
 - He doesn't feed himself.
 - He doesn't call for legions of angels—even though he could have.
- He is born in the **likeness of man** (v. 7). Note the inference—to be human is to serve.
 - He doesn't stop being God to become a servant/man. He retains both *forms*. In Christ, God is saying 'This is who I am!' (cf. John 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:6).
 - Angels at his birth do not lament a loss of glory (Luke 2:14)!
- This is called **emptying himself** (v. 7)...
 - He does not empty himself of deity; rather, he expresses it.
 - He does not empty himself of his abilities—rather, they are veiled.
 - He does empty himself of anything inconsistent with his being man among us.
 - The effect of this is that he is 'poor' (2 Cor. 8:9).
 - He asks to have again the glory he had with his Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:5).
 - We are not told of anything of which he emptied himself; rather, that his emptying consisted in taking the form of a servant. The phrase suggests that he gave himself wholly.

The world and the flesh have it all wrong!

- Jesus is God. This is who he is. He can be God serving us, just as he always does.
- So we can be who we are serving one another. It is the only way to be who we are because we are made in his image and can only be free being what we are created to be.
- But more...

Jesus humbles himself (v. 8).

- Not in being human but in being obedient, to death, on a cross—the sequence is inexorable.
- There is no limit to him regarding us as more important than himself.
- He washed feet—and insists that he wash us (John 13:6-10). We must have what only he can do.
- Here is the power of Christ's mind on our mind: if we see God's wisdom in Christ's cross, and the cleansing that comes to us from that, we 'have the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2:16).

Jesus is given the name above all names (vv. 9-11).

- It is this man that God exalts and gives 'the name that is above every name'. For a Jew, this would be Yahweh or, as here, the Lord (cf. Isa. 42:8; 45:22-23). Everyone will call Jesus 'Lord'—in its highest sense. Effectively, God is saying, 'This is who I am.'
- Jesus did not need to be made God but is declared to be such with the title of 'Lord'.
- The reason for Christ's exultation is not just the last event mentioned—the cross, but all that made Christ what he was—his mind and what it led to.

This is the encouragement we have...

- Comfort from love—our guilt is erased.
- Participation in the Spirit—we are children of God.
- Affection—we have abundant love to share.
- Sympathy—we can be tender towards others because of our own need for Christ, and his abundant supply.

Live in obedience (vv. 12-13).

- We can now move into life deeply settled, knowing who we are, not seeing our selfhood as something to be grasped but to be used in the service of others.
- Preferring others to ourselves can never diminish who we are as God's redeemed creatures—any more than Jesus could be diminished as God by serving us.
- Having the mind of Christ is now spoken of as working out our salvation. Getting on with each other is not just necessary part of being a Christian, it is nothing less than agreeing with God about who he is and how he acts, and representing that to one another. We are not just called to worship Christ but to be like him.
- We have learned from Christ because he is 'meek and lowly of heart, and have found 'rest for our souls' (Matt. 11:29).

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all my see I triumph
Only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the water fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.

May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

Kate Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)