

# The Christian Temper as Exemplified and Illustrated in Paul

by A.B. Simpson

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*The Christian temper is exemplified in Paul's life, characterized by affectionateness, Christian fellowship, cheerfulness, unselfish prayer, victory over difficulties and trials, victory over people, devotion to Christ, holy indifference, and sublime confidence.*

**Scripture:** Romans 12:10, Philippians 1:3-21

**Topics:** "Christian Character", "Devotion to Christ"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the Christian temper as exemplified by the Apostle Paul, highlighting his affectionate spirit, deep Christian fellowship, and unwavering cheerfulness despite trials. Paul's devotion to Christ is central, as he expresses that living is for Christ and dying is gain, showcasing a life of selfless prayer and victorious faith. Simpson illustrates how Paul's character reflects a holy indifference to personal gain, rooted in a sublime confidence in God's purpose. The sermon encourages believers to embody these qualities, following Paul's example of love and devotion to Christ.

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## Transcript

"I have you in my heart" (Phil. 1: 7).

"To me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

The first chapter of Philippians gives us a portrait of the Apostle's own heart and character. It is drawn by his own hand. Yet he is free from egotism, and even unconscious of himself while so fully unfolding his inmost heart. It is possible for us to reveal ourselves in perfect transparency, and yet have no thought of ourselves at all, even as a little child most completely reveals itself and yet most completely forgets itself. A letter has this advantage over a sermon, in that it lets out the heart of the writer, and the teachings of the New Testament are not sermons or homilies, but letters of affection.

1. The first trait that strikes us in this sketch is the affectionateness of Paul's spirit. Sanctification does not take out of our hearts the spirit of tenderness and love. It purifies and intensifies every heart-string. "I have you in my heart," he says, and "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." The very cords of his sensitive being were alive with tender yearning; for these beloved friends are children in the Lord. The nearer we get to Christ the nearer we get to Christian people, and the tenderer is

every holy tie. And so in that exquisite picture of consecration that he has given us in the twelfth chapter of Romans we find such passages as this, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." And here we find him saying a little later, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

2. Christian fellowship is next recognized, especially in connection with his relations to his beloved Philippian brethren. There are some natures that are coldly isolated and independent. They naturally and instinctively stand apart in their joys and sorrows, refusing to open their petals to the sunshine of love, and dwelling in a little world of their own. This is not the genius of Christianity, nor was it the spirit of Paul. His heart was open as the full-blown rose, giving and receiving the sweetness and fragrance of love in relation to all. And so he speaks with the deepest thankfulness of their "fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now," and adds with deep appreciation of their sympathy and help, "both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." He recognizes their help to him and he rejoices in his power to be a blessing to them. God has thus linked us one to the other even as the members of the human body are linked by joints and hands, and made us members one of another so that we can share each other's blessings, we can feel each other's sufferings, we can enrich each other's experience. Christian fellowship is God's ordinance, and every true heart should be able to join in the ancient creed with true wholehearted fullness, "I believe in the communion of saints."

3. The next quality we note in this portraiture is the spirit of cheerfulness, hopefulness and thankfulness. There is no depression about it. There is no reproachfulness about it. There is no shadow of discontent, criticism or gloom, but it is all appreciation, thankfulness and confidence. "I thank God upon every remembrance of you." The very recollection of them brings pleasure to him and as he looks forward to their future he has no premonitions, doubts or fears, but he can say, "Being confident of this very thing, that he that hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ."

This is a beautiful quality in Christian character. There are some people who make us tired by their concern for us, their fears for our future, their criticisms of our faults. If Paul had any suggestion to make to his brethren he always first bathed them in an ocean of love and then they hardly knew that he was even criticizing. In one of his most beautiful passages he bids us to "admonish one another with hymns and spiritual songs." Sing to our friends our counsels and admonitions rather than scold them.

We find this in a very marked way in the epistles of our Lord to the seven churches of Asia. His first word is always commendation, and after He has recognized at their full value the things that are excellent, He then tells them of the things that should be changed. God give us the love that "believeth all things and hopeth all things," as well as "endureth all things."

4. We next note the spirit of unselfish prayer for his brethren. In all this epistle we do not find Paul offering a single prayer for himself. In fact, he tells them a little later that he has no needs, "I have all and abound." He has enough to give away, and his one thought is to bless others. We find him praying for them with every breath and every remembrance, "always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy."

And yet his prayer is not a mere redundancy of words or emotions. It is an intelligent, discriminating, positive and most helpful petition for real things, things that they actually need. "This I pray," he says, "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ." He wants them to have

real and very definite blessings, to be clear-cut in their character and experience, and to reach the highest possibilities of Christian perfection, so that in the day of Christ he may be able to present them blameless and harmless, and may rejoice that he has not run in vain, neither labored in vain.

5. The spirit of victorious faith over difficulties and trials. His was no soft, effeminate character languidly developed by easy, sentimental associations, but it was disciplined in the sturdy conflict of adversity and suffering. As he wrote these exquisite lines of courage, thankfulness and love, he was himself a prisoner in the Roman barracks, sleeping every night between two soldiers, and waiting to be brought before a cruel and wicked judge to be tried for his life. Yet he is so afraid that they may be discouraged by his difficulties that he hastens to have them understand that "the things which happened unto me have fallen out unto the furtherance of the gospel," and that his very bonds and afflictions have really led to more glorious results for the Master's cause. The soldiers that have been chained to him have been converted through his influence, and the brethren that were timid before have been encouraged by his brave example to give a bolder testimony for Christ. None of his trials move him or even depress him for a moment, but he rises supreme above them all in the singleness of his desire to glorify his Master. Brave, glorious spirit, undaunted, unintimidated, undiscouraged by the persecutions of earth or the hate of hell, shining like a glowing star the brighter for the darkness around him, blooming like a sweet rose amid the glaciers of the Alps, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

6. Victory over people. More trying even than circumstances, are human hearts, natures out of sympathy with us, souls that seem especially adjusted to irritate, lacerate and rasp our most sensitive feelings.

Paul speaks of some who "even preach the gospel of envy and strife," and, under the very guise of goodness and service, aim only to humiliate and injure him. It is very hard to rise superior to people who misrepresent our best endeavors, oppose us in our holiest efforts and in the very name of religion are but emissaries of hate and evil. But Paul could stand even this so long as they preached Christ. Though it were for "contention," and in "pretense," he could say, "Therein do I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." If the Master was glorified, if the truth was spread, if the Gospel was made known, that was his one concern and his supreme satisfaction. Surely this is a nature larger, nobler than all the petty jealousies and rivalries of sects and parties. The thought may well cover with a blush of shame many who have used even their Christian work as a means of self-glorification or the gratification of bigotry, prejudice and controversy.

7. Devotion to Christ. The secret of all this was his single-hearted devotion to Jesus Christ. The one thing he cared for, lived for, and was willing to die for, was that "Christ might be magnified in his body whether by life or by death," and the one illustrious sentence in which he emblazons it forth like a passion sign of love is this immortal epigram, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This is the secret of every glorious soul and every earnest life, intense, fervid devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the one ambition of Paul's life, and like a great volcanic torrent it swept away everything in its current, transfused everything into its own burning flame, and made him the bond slave of Jesus Christ.

"The love of Christ constraineth me." It was not mere love to Christ, but devoted love. It was not mere consecration, but entire consecration. It was not living for Christ, but it was living for Christ alone.

8. A holy indifference. Paul's supreme motive of love to Christ raised him above every selfish preference and enabled him to care little for gain or loss, life or death for their own sakes. When he stopped to think whether he preferred to live or die, he was at a loss to determine. Personally he preferred to go and be

with Christ, and yet when he thought of his work and his brethren he longed to remain with them. He was in that state of mind where the world could neither attract him nor distract him. Like General Gordon, when the Mandi threatened him with death, he smiled in his face and said, "You could not do me a greater favor than thus quickly to introduce me into the presence of my best Friend, and the enjoyment of my highest reward." Such men have nothing to lose, nothing to gain, nothing to fear. Life has found a perfect equilibrium by being poised from the center and fixed forever on its true axis in devotion to Christ alone.

9. A sublime confidence. His very indifference gave him faith. Because he did not care for life for its own sake, he knew that he should live, and was able to claim it, not for himself but for Christ and for others, and so he could add, "Having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith." The way to have faith for healing is to give up your life for Christ, and then take it back from Christ for Christ. While we want even life for its own sake, we shall not be able to believe for it; but when it ceases to be our own and becomes a consecrated trust for Him, then we can say with him, "I know I shall abide and continue" until my life work is done.

Thus we have glanced all too briefly at the unconscious portrait which this simple-hearted yet glorious saint has given of his own heart and life. His qualities as we have already said are not ordinary qualities. They represent a very high plane of Christian experience. We shall find the secret of them in the next chapter, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

It is a comfort to know that not only has this life once been lived by Christ, but it has also been lived by Paul. It is not only a divine pattern but it has been a human experience. Not only has the Son of man walked through the path of time in these beautiful habits of loveliness and grace, but another man, animated with His Spirit, united to His life, and exposed to all the trials and hindrances which could beset a human existence, has trod the same path and has passed on to a triumph unsullied by failure and a glory unalloyed and everlasting. Let us not be slothful, "but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Let us look at our shortcomings and failures in the light of these sublime examples, and then sinking into the nothingness of our insufficiency, let us claim His all-sufficiency and let Him live out in us His own victorious life, even as He lived it in this blessed pattern man, who speaks to us down through the ages, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

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