

The Christian Temper as Exemplified in Christ

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the same mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus, and how this can be achieved by letting Christ live out His life within us and receiving His power, wisdom, and love.

Scripture: John 13:3, Philippians 2:5

Topics: "Humility", "Surrender to Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the importance of embodying the Christian temper as exemplified by Christ, urging believers to adopt the mindset of humility, surrender, and obedience that Jesus demonstrated throughout His life. He illustrates how Christ, despite His divine nature, willingly humbled Himself, surrendered His rights, and ultimately sacrificed His life for humanity's redemption. Simpson encourages Christians to recognize their own dignity as children of God, which empowers them to serve others selflessly. He concludes that true imitation of Christ is not merely about following His example but allowing Christ to live through us, transforming our hearts and minds. The essence of the Christian life is to let the mind of Christ dwell within us, enabling us to reflect His character in our daily lives.

Transcript

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2: 5).

Every great creation must have an arch-type and pattern. Many a waiting year and many a patient effort is spent in perfecting the model of some marvelous invention which is to revolutionize modern mechanics or industrial art. After the model is made it is not hard to reproduce it in millions of copies. It is the first machine that counts. The others are but copies.

God spent four thousand years showing the inadequacy of all human types of character. Then, after an Adam, an Abraham, a Moses, a David, and even an Elijah had failed, He revealed the Man for whom the ages had been waiting, the perfect Pattern and Type of human character, by which all others were to be molded and fashioned. As He looked upon Him on the banks of the Jordan He exclaimed in approving love, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Henceforth all redeemed men are to be conformed to that Divine Pattern, the image of His Son, the First Born among many brethren.

Even Paul is a secondary example, and we are to follow him only as he followed Christ. All other lights are but reflected lights receiving their illumination from Him, and shedding it in return on others. With glowing love and admiration the Apostle proceeds to delineate His heavenly character and example.

1. The conscious dignity of Christ is the starting point of the description. While it is a picture of humility and voluntary humiliation, yet it begins with a height of glory transcendentally beyond any human character. He was "in the form of God." The language has the force and bears the construction that He was equal with God, that He was a possessor of the very nature of God, was Himself a divine Person. It was because of His high dignity and His consciousness of it that He was able to stoop so low. It is the lofty character that is able to condescend, while the person ambitious of vain display and earthly honor is always trying to hold up the little reputation he has. One of true rank is easily indifferent to outward appearances because he knows that his dignity cannot be questioned, and mere adventitious circumstances cannot take it away.

This is very strikingly illustrated in the thirteenth chapter of John in the account of the washing of the disciples' feet. It was because Jesus knew that He came from God and went to God, that without any thought of His own honor or dignity, He rose from supper and immediately began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

And so, before we can imitate Christ's example of humility, we must know our high calling and heavenly dignity as the sons of God. Then it will not be hard to stoop to the lowest depths of self-abasement and self-sacrifice.

2. Voluntary surrender. The translation of the next clause is a little unfortunate. He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," has been rendered by the common consent of scholars, "He counted it not a thing to be eagerly grasped." He did not hold on to His rights and honors, but willingly yielded them. It was His rights that He yielded, the things that He might have retained, and no one ever questioned or gainsaid His holding to His high prerogative. But He suspended His deity for a time and took the place of a servant and a man.

3. Complete surrender. Not only did He give up something but He gave up all. "He made himself of no reputation" is better rendered, "He emptied himself." He let all go like Boaz, who sacrificed his own inheritance and family name and became merged into the family of Ruth because he loved her. So Jesus Christ became a part of humanity and is forever known in heaven as a man.

4. He surrendered His own will. This is the last thing we let go. Man would rather be a king in a cottage than a servant in a palace. But Jesus, who had created all things and ruled the whole creation, stooped to be a servant in His own world; to be controlled by His Father's will and the will of others; to hold Himself in constant subjection to the people around Him; to comfort the disciples who leaned upon Him and claimed Him as a brood of children would a fond mother; nay, even to submit to the very enemies that at last deprived Him of His liberty and His life. And He yielded all, step by step, sacrifice by sacrifice, until at last He was "led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Like Him, the Christian temper enables us to yield our personal will, to be subject one to another in the fear of God, and to count ourselves the servants of God, waiting on His bidding, hearkening to His word, and surrendering all to His supreme command.

5. Lower still He descended, to be found not only in fashion like a man but the lowest of men, the humblest of the race; not a child of wealth or royalty or honor, but born among the poor and lowly, and of a maiden mother, whose peculiar situation even threw upon His birth a shadow of suspicion and dishonor.

6. And even this lowly and humble lot was at last surrendered, when He "became obedient unto death," and gave up His very life in complete sacrifice for the world's redemption.

7. His final sacrifice was rendered as humbling, as painful and as full of reproach and shame as it was possible. It was no heroic death. It was no illustrious tragedy. It was no such passing out of existence as the military hero whose fame is chronicled to latest ages; but it was as a criminal, as the off-scouring of the world that Jesus died. Carried outside the city gate as one vile enough to defile the whole precinct of Jerusalem by His execution, crucified between two thieves as if He were a common convict, and buried at last in a stranger's grave, the death of Christ was as humbling as His life had been, and His sacrifice was made complete from first to last.

There are thousands of people who are willing to make a sacrifice and to do some heroic thing if it brings them distinction. Men are dying today by hundreds on the battlefield, and proud and glad to have the honor of winning an illustrious name. If there can be something dramatic in our trials, some heroic luster, some halo of earthly fame, human nature will stoop to the very depths of sacrifice.

"Man for man will boldly brave

The terrors of the yawning grave;

And friend for friend, and child for sire

Undaunted and unmoved expire

For love or piety or pride;

But who can die as Jesus died?"

And yet this was the character of ancient martyrdom. The men and women who suffered in the Roman Colosseum were not slain as heroes of the faith, but as pests of society. Gentle women were charged with the basest crimes, treated with the foulest outrage, and cast to the wild beasts as monsters of iniquity; they knew that they had no glory in the minds of men for heroism or even decency.

And so, beloved, if you step out with your Master to humiliation and sacrifice, do not be surprised if the world misunderstands you, and if even the very people that call themselves Christians often misjudge your motives and character. The cross was not only painful but shameful, and the tests of Christian character which God gives will lead us all the way to Calvary. But if we have learned our high and heavenly dignity, we shall be so possessed with "the joy set before" us, and the vision of His glory, that we shall "despise the shame," we shall not fear the reproach, we shall not shrink from humiliation; but we shall rather rejoice that we are "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."

Such is the picture of the divine Pattern. But it is much more than a pattern, more than an example, more than a standard for our imitation. One of the greatest books of modern times has been written on "The Imitation of Christ." It is indeed a sublime theme, the work of a master spirit, and worthy of its circulation as the most widely-published book in the world except the Holy Scriptures themselves. But the human heart unaided cannot imitate Christ any more than the canary can imitate Patti or the babe can imitate a giant. 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 imitate Himself in us and 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 sanctifies, that fills, that keeps the consecrated heart. This is the only way

that we can be like Christ. And so we change the little song:

"Give me a heart like Thine;

By Thy wonderful power,

By Thy grace every hour

Give me a heart like Thine."

to:

"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 within us. It is the "expulsive power of a new affection." It is the divine transcending the human. It is the "Not I, but Christ who liveth in me." Even the teachers of holiness are in danger of substituting holiness for Him, a clean heart for the divine nature. The mystery of godliness is "Christ in you the hope of glory." The end of all experience is union with God. God has made everything 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 exquisite 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 within. Redemption is not the restoration of fallen man, but the new creation of a redeemed family under the headship of the second Adam on an infinitely higher plane than even unfallen humanity could ever have reached alone. "As is the earthy such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." We are first born of the Christ, then united to Him, just as Eve was formed out of her husband, and then wedded to Him. The redeemed soul is formed out of the Savior, and then united to Him in an everlasting bond of love and unity, more intimate than any human relationship can ever express.

It is not by a figure that Christ lives in us, in the sense of His truth, the ideas which He has inculcated in the Gospel, or the influences which He brings to bear upon us. The message of godliness is nothing less than this, that the very person of Jesus is revealed to and formed in the sanctified 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, so that it is literally true that "in him we live and move and have our being." Do we want humility? We receive the spirit of humility from Him, and let the same mind be in us which was also in Him. Do we want love? We open our hearts for 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, and "let this mind be in [us] which was also in Christ Jesus."

Does this destroy our individuality and make each 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 purpose 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 predestined powers when quickened by His life, and inspired by His presence, 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 not to struggle. We are not to try. We are not to do. We are not to be. 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 an effort through the spontaneous life which flows through all the beautiful organism of the plant.

The word "mind" here employed suggests that this is not only a spiritual experience but that it is also designed for our intellectual life, for our mental being, for our thoughts, affections, emotions, and all the sensibilities of the soul as well as the spirit. Indeed, we have learned that it includes the body too, and there is no power of our redeemed humanity which this blessed Christ cannot fill, and of which He is not fitted to be the fountain of life, and the source of all our power, and the supply of all our need.

What an exquisite simplicity this gives to Christian life. It takes all the complications out of it. It is not a thousand things we have to do, but one. We are occupied with Him, and He takes care of us. We are not watching ourselves and keeping ourselves in constant strain, but we are sweetly abiding in Him, and just as the water flows from the fountain into all the pipes, just as the law of gravitation goes out from the sun to the smallest world that circles in its orbit around that central sun, so while we are attached to Him and in touch with Him it is true every moment, "Because I live, ye shall live also." And thus we find such expressions as this, especially in the writings of Paul and John, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

In conclusion let us behold the divine Pattern in all its beauty and completeness, until it humbles us in the dust with the sense of our own failure. Then let us turn to the divine Original, and opening our hearts, receive Him with loving surrender and constant dependence. Thus shall this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus.

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