

# Characteristics of the Mind of Christ

by Dennis Kinlaw

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*Having the mind of Christ means to think and act like Jesus, putting the needs of others before your own and being humble and obedient to God's will.*

**Duration:** 58:11

**Scripture:** John 3:15, John 3:17, Galatians 2:19, Galatians 2:21, Philippians 2:5-11, Philippians 4:10-13

**Topics:** "Mind of Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the topic of grumbling and complaining, emphasizing that it goes against the teachings of Scripture. He highlights four characteristics of a person who has the mind of Christ, two of which are mentioned before a hymn and two after. These characteristics include avoiding selfish ambition and vain conceit, refraining from complaining and arguing, and embracing the cross and despising shame. The speaker reflects on how Jesus exemplified these characteristics and challenges listeners to strive for a selfless mindset. Additionally, the speaker shares personal anecdotes and observations about complaining and finding contentment in one's circumstances.

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## Transcript

Will you pray with me for a moment? Our Father, we turn to your word. What a gift it is. We want you to know our gratitude for giving it to us.

And we want not only to possess it in a book, but we want to know its truth within our hearts. And we want to understand and live according to the word which you've given us. We thank you for the way you can take a written text and bring it alive in our hearts and minds and in our personal beings.

Somehow let this text come alive in us tonight, and we will give you praise in Christ's name. Amen. Our scripture tonight is in the book of Philippians, chapter 2. I think you knew we would get here, so here we are.

Hear the word of God as we read a good portion of this chapter. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interests of others. My text says your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ. You remember the more traditional translation that says, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

A literal translation would be to be minded the way Christ Jesus is minded. And it is the same verb as was used in the text we used last night from Mark 8 where Jesus said to Peter, Peter, you don't think the way God thinks, you think the way man thinks. Now he says, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life, in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you, so you too should be glad and rejoice with me. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare, for everyone looks out for his own interest, not those of Jesus Christ.

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me, and I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. One of the things that I have noticed about me in my study of Scripture across the years is that I have found that there are certain passages that come alive for me and they become very precious to me.

Over a period of time I learned that as I would re-read Scripture and find myself moving toward those special passages, my mind would sort of run over the stuff that was in front of me in anticipation of what was coming. Sort of like you forget about the foothills when you see the mountains in the distance. And as the years passed, I began to find that some of those what I thought were foothills were pretty good mountains in themselves.

And I remember when I was in the pastorate, I decided to preach a series of sermons on great texts before great texts. And then I decided to preach a second series on great texts after great texts, because you will remember that John 3.15 is a great text. Also John 3.17 and Galatians 2.19 and Galatians 2.21. Now because of that, for a long time, the book of Philippians never quite opened up to me.

Because when I would get through the early part of it, I knew what was coming in Philippians 2, 5 to 11. This incredible passage on the Incarnation. This incredible passage on Christ, His emptying Himself and becoming one of us.

And so I didn't pay too much attention to what Paul said before that. Then one day as I was working my way through it, it dawned on me that Paul didn't write Philippians in order to give us 2, 5 to 11, because that hymn to Christ is in a sense an illustration. It is not the sermon.

And you know, on occasion I've had people come to me when I had preached what I thought was, hoped was a worthwhile sermon, and they'd say, that was interesting. Will you tell me again that story you told? And I knew that was all they remembered was the illustration. And I had one guy come to me, a professor at Asbury Seminary, and said, what did you tell that story for? What was the purpose? So I knew I had missed it.

But in Philippians, that hymn is the illustration, and there is a sermon connected with it. Now I want to talk about why he put that in there, what goes before it and what goes after it. Because it is in what goes before it and what goes after it that I find out what it means for me to have the mind of Christ, while in 5 to 11 I find out what it meant for Christ to have the mind of Christ.

And those are two different things. Now, you know that the Philippian letter is a very tender letter. It was written by Paul to the church that he probably loved the most of any of the churches that he ever served.

You will remember the story in Acts, how he was turning eastward and the Spirit checked him and said, no, I don't want you to go east. And because of that, you and I have received the gospel and much of the east only now is having the gospel opened up to them. But in that moment when God had stopped him from going east, you will remember he had a vision.

And in that vision there was a man from Macedonia who stood in thread with him saying, come over and help us. And so he turned his steps west and came into Macedonia and he came to Philippi. And when he got there, he looked around for someone with whom to worship.

You know enough to know that Paul looked when he did that for people who used the Old Testament as their frame of reference. And he found, interestingly enough, a group of ladies, a ladies' prayer meeting. And they met down on the river bank.

And when he got there, the leader among them was a woman named Lydia. And as he began to preach Christ to those ladies, they knew enough to know that what they were hearing was the fulfillment of the Old Testament which they believed. And so Lydia said, will you baptize me and my house? And when he baptized them, she said, now I want you to go home with me.

And she opened her home and he was the guest in Lydia's home. You will remember before it was over with, they had a riot and Paul and Silas ended up in jail. They were mercilessly flogged and put into stocks.

And you will remember in the middle of the night an angel came and you will remember the Philippian jailer, an earthquake and the Philippian jailer was converted. But then before it was over with, you will remember the authorities were pleading with them to leave the city. Now, there's no way that could be wiped out of Paul's mind.

Now, many years later, Paul's in prison again, except this time he's in prison in Rome and he's in chains. And he's thinking about when this happened to him before and he has very tender thoughts about the Christians in Philippi who had loved him. And over the years since had regularly been his supporters, sending contributions to him to help him.

And so he writes and you sense the tenderness. He says, every memory that I have of you brings me joy and I thank God on every remembrance for you. But then he says, I've got something I want to say to you.

And so he says, he begins in the second chapter to give the heart of what he wants to say to these Philippian Christians. He has said, where I am, God has been very good and I can rejoice in my chains and in my imprisonment because through this the Word of God is being given even to the palace guard. And you'll find Paul rejoicing in the privilege of being in chains and a Roman prison.

And now he says, well, what about you? He says, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if there's any encouragement comes to you because you know Christ, if there is any comfort that comes to you from his love, if there is any fellowship with his Spirit, if there is any tenderness and compassion, then I want to tell you what will make my joy totally complete. And now he deals with what his concern is. He says, if you want to make my joy totally complete, I want you to have the same mind.

Now this translation says like-minded. Now immediately you know that what he's dealing with is the fact that he's heard there's division among these dear friends of his in Corinth. And the body of Christ is not supposed to be divided.

So he says, let me tell you what my prayer for you is, that you will have the same mind. And the word which is used there is the same Greek root as is used in let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Now let me say at this point, the word phroneo, either singly or in combination, occurs only thirty times in the New Testament.

And it occurs ten times in the book of Philippians, which lets you know that what Paul is thinking about is the mind and the mind of Christ. And he wants these dear brother believers, sister believers, to know the mind of Christ, to have it. So he says, I want you to have the same mind.

And I want you to have the same love. And the word love is the Greek word agape. He says, I want you to be one in spirit.

And there Paul makes a word. He creates a Greek word. He takes the preposition sum, which means together with, and adds the word psuche, soul, psyche, to it.

And he says, I want you to be, the translation which is given here, one in spirit. And he says, goes again, and he says this time, I'm not interested just in your having the same mind. He uses the word for mind again.

And he says, I want you to have one mind. Now the will of Paul for these believers, friends of his, beloved ones, is that they have one mind. So now he says, I told you the positive.

And that's always nice. But you know it's the negative that lets you know where the trouble is, doesn't it? So now he goes negative. And he says, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

But in humility consider others better than yourselves. Now obviously he is putting his finger to a problem in Philippi that he feels needs to be addressed. And whatever he means by selfish ambition, he doesn't want them doing it.

And I would assume he's heard something to make him think that somebody is. And whatever he means by vain conceit, he's heard there's some who might be moving in that direction, and he doesn't want it

there. But he says, instead of that in humility, consider others better than yourselves.

In fact, he says, each of you should look not to your own interests, but even to the interests of others. You should be other oriented. Now let me illustrate what I mean.

You should think the way Christ does, who was sitting in the glories of heaven at the right hand of the Father with all that goes with that. And he saw us down here and cared enough about us that he cared more about our well-being than he did his own. And he gave up everything heaven had to offer to come to our world with all its limitations, become one of us so that we could have the advantages that he left.

Now he says, if you will look at verse 14, he continues it. Do everything without complaining. Now I think he has found that there were some believers in Philippi that were like some of us, that they knew what it meant to grumble on occasion.

I heard somebody say that that's our favorite indoor sport except when we're out of doors. And you will find there's a great deal in Scripture about it. But he says, I don't want you grumbling or complaining.

And I don't want you arguing. Now we don't have time to go in great detail through it, but let me tell you what I have become convinced. I am convinced now that Paul says there are four characteristics of the person who has the mind of Christ.

And two of them are given before the hymn, and two of them are given afterwards. And the first two are, I don't want you doing anything out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. And he said, I don't want you doing anything.

I don't want you complaining. And I don't want you arguing. Now when I got that far in my dealing with this, I thought, well, that lets me off the hook because I was using this translation.

And do you know when he says, do nothing out of selfish ambition, when you're as old as I, that doesn't have anything to do with you. Because you see, when you get to my stage of the game, you're in this part of the arc of life. You're not in this part of the arc.

And you and I think of ambition when you're in this part of the arc and you still are moving, you see. So I thought, good, I'm clean on that. But unfortunately I picked up a Greek New Testament and read it.

And do you know the word has nothing to do with ambition? But do you know what it does have to do with? It has to do with self-interest. In fact, it's a very interesting word. It's a word originally that had no negative connotation about it.

It had to do with a laborer working for wages. That's a legitimate thing, biblically. Nothing wrong with that.

But then in Greek literature, it developed the connotation of getting more interested in the wages than you were in the work. So you were doing it for what you could get out of it. One of the next steps, which you find in Aristotle's politics, is where a politician bribes or is willing to accept a bribe.

Then it is used for a harlot who wants to seduce a man for what she can get. So slowly it developed the connotation of what's in self-interest, what can I get out of this? And as I thought of that, you know, age doesn't have anything to do with self-interest because you can be as old as Methuselah and be selfish. And that's what we're talking about in the passage, not just ambition for the people on the rise.

So I thought, now, how can I boil that down to where I understand what it really means and should mean to me? And I think of it this way. So let me put it this way. What he is saying is, I do not want the mental attitude that says, looks at any situation and says, what's in it for me to be the thing that determines your attitude or your conduct.

And, you know, age doesn't deliver you from that. So that's the first mark of the mind of Christ as far as I can see in this Philippians passage. If you're going to have the mind of Christ, you're not going to look at a new situation or even an old situation with the attitude of, what can I get out of it, what's in it for me? Now, that was certainly true of Christ.

What motivated him was not what he could get for himself out of it. What motivated him was our need. Now, you will notice that that fits the context here because Paul says, I don't want you to do anything out of that except interest.

I want you to, in humility, to consider others better than yourselves. And each of you should look not to your own interests, but you should look to the interests of others. So what we're talking about is other-orientedness, isn't it? Where the need of the other determines how you are going to respond, not your need.

Now, that's the first mark. That brought it a little closer to home. Now, the second thing, which in this translation says, do nothing out of vain conceit.

And my first reaction was, that's no problem for me because when you're as old as I am and you've been beaten down as many times as I have, the conceit's fairly well knocked out of you a bit. So I, unfortunately, read the Greek text. And do you know what you have in the Greek? It is the word *kenodoxia*, which is made up of two elements.

The *kenos* part has to do with emptiness. You know, just nothing there. And the *doxia* part has to do with appearances or shows.

So he says, don't do anything because of empty appearances. And as I wrestled with that, I began finding myself saying, what does that mean? I think that means that you don't do anything with the motivation or with the attitude in you that moves you where the thing that determines what you do is when you raise that inner question, how am I going to look if I do this? Now, I notice that age doesn't take you away, doesn't solve that problem because appearances mean as much to old people as it does to young people. And Paul is saying, I don't want you under the tyranny.

How am I going to look if I take this stand or if I do this? Because do you know, if that tyrannizes you, you'll never stand with Christ. I think that's the reason, one of the reasons Peter and the disciples forsook him on Good Friday, who wants to be identified with a criminal like this. And you can count on it that there will always be a bit of the crucifixion of pride within us and public identification with the ultimate will of God.

Paul knew that. Paul, you know, he had university training. He was a sophisticated Jew.

He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was arrogant and proud. And then God said to him, but if you're going to follow the truth, you're going to have to go the way of the lowly Nazarene and it will make you an object of contempt and scorn in the minds of all of the people whose favor you have sought.

And Paul says, I don't want you under the tyranny of appearances. I want you free on that score. I thank God that Jesus was free on that score.

How do you think he felt when he was being led naked through the streets and pinned naked on a cross? But how he looked didn't determine what he did. And so we find redemption in him. Now, the third one comes after the hymn.

And that's where he says, don't do anything through grumbling, complaining. Now, I didn't have to read the Greek text to understand what that meant because it's very clear. But, you know, one of the things that as I looked at it, I thought it's interesting that you score people for complaining a bit.

What's wrong with grouching? But I dare you to go through the Old Testament and study grumbling in the Old Testament. If you will go through the Old Testament and study grumbling in the Old Testament, you will find that God takes it very seriously. Do you remember when they found themselves in the wilderness and there was nothing to eat except manna and quail? And they said, we'd like some of that food we had back in Egypt.

And God said, I take that personally. I dare you to read the passages in Exodus and Numbers and you will find that on occasion it was a deadly insult to God because God says, I'm leading you into redemption. You're exactly where I want you and I'm doing with you exactly what I want to do to get you to where you're supposed to be and you're sitting around grumbling and complaining about it.

And as a result, not one of that generation got into the promised land. Grumbling will keep you out of the blessing of God. And the one thing you never got on the lips of Jesus was grumbling or complaining.

In fact, we're told, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. It was not a delight to him, he endured it. But for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame.

Now, the fourth characteristic of the mind of Christ is, the Greek word there is an interesting word. It is the word from which we get the word dialogue, dialogismos. And it has to do with reasoning.

Now, I know that God is not opposed to our reasoning because he put a reasoner in our heads. He gave us the gift to reason. Now, I tried to figure my... I think what you've got there is one of those words again that originally in Greek had no negative connotation whatsoever.

You see a new situation, you see a problem, you take your reason, you try to think your way through it, and you try to solve that problem in the most intelligent way. But over a period of time, it began to be used in a different connotation, with a different connotation. And it meant you saw a certain situation and you said, wait a minute, this could make me look bad.

Now, how shall I react to it to protect my refutation? And the truth is not the central thing but my appearances. Or you look at a situation and you say, what am I going to get out of this? And something inside you says you're not going to get much. And so you begin to say, reuse your reason to say, do I want to get into this or don't I want to get into this? So, one of the translations uses the word arguing.

Now, let me tell you the way it comes home to me. Have you ever noticed how you can talk with somebody and you want the other person to go along with you and the person wants your approval and so the person will say, why yes, but. And when the yes is said, your hope, have hope, and then when the guy says, but, you sense the resistance that's within him.

Now, I think that's exactly what he's talking about with God. Where God says, Tenor, here's my will for you. And I say, who am I to oppose you, Lord? Sure, but.

And there's a minority vote inside me that says, let's see if there's a way to get out of this one. So, it is that yes, but mentality. Now, that is a very interesting thing when you speak about Christ in relation to it, isn't it? That he embraced the cross, despising the shame.

Now, with those four characteristics, I found myself saying, is it really possible for anybody to be like that? To get to the place where you look at something and you don't say, what's in it for me? No self-interest. I am a self. And as a self, any situation that develops, I respond to it as a self, because there ain't nobody else in me except a self to respond to.

And so, I have to look at it, and that question is going to arise. I thought about how Jesus faced these four kinds of things. What's in it for me? How do I look? The complaining, boil that down to this.

You know, why do I complain? I meant to say this earlier and forgot it. I noticed one thing about me. I never complain when I'm getting better than I think I deserve.

As long as I figure I'm getting better than I deserve, I never complain. It's no problem whatsoever. But it's when I think I deserve better than that, that I get unhappy and begin to expostulate.

That's interesting, isn't it? I deserve better than that. You notice the pronoun. Notice these first three.

What's in it for me? Notice how will I look? I deserve better than that. And implicit in the whole thing is that I in that yes-but mentality. Now, with that in mind, I tried to look back and see how Jesus lived in our circumstances.

And I noticed that he had some problems. I read the passage in John 12 where the Greeks came and wanted to see him. And Jesus knows that if the Gentile world is to hear the gospel, there's no way except the cross.

And you will remember Jesus lifted up his voice and said, What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. I don't know about you, but when I read that passage, I can find in him a recoiling from what's coming. But then he says, But, Father, for this purpose came I to this hour.

And he looked at the negative, because he was a human being recoiled from, and said, But I won't let my feelings determine what I do. This is why I came. And though I don't want it, and everything within me cries out against it, I will embrace the cross.

Now, I'm grateful for the stories we have of Thursday night and Gethsemane. Now Jesus is a few hours from the cross, and he goes to talk to his father about it. And you know, you remember he came back, and he hadn't settled it.

So he went back and prayed again. And when he came back after the second time, he hadn't settled it. And so he went back and prayed the third time.

But when he prayed the third time, it was settled when he came back. Now, I appreciate that, that the eternal Son of God didn't want the Father's will for him. And he found within himself stuff that recoiled against it.

But it wasn't the recoiling that determined what he did. He faced all of the trauma of it, all the negatives, and then in spite of the horror of it, put his arms around him and said, Father, not my will, but yours be done. There is no mechanical, automaton kind of obedience here.

And I want to say, if Jesus didn't have grace to glibly and casually do all the will of God instantly and without thought, I don't believe there's grace for you to keep you from some Gethsemane. So Paul is not saying, I don't want you to be where you never have a Gethsemane. I just don't want your Gethsemane to stop you from doing the will of the Father.

Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, which can look at the worst that can come. And if it's the will of the Father, you can say, Lord, if it were left to me, this is one I'd never choose. But if it's your will, I know there's something good to come through it, and I will embrace it.

Now, that's the way Jesus did. Now, I notice that Paul also did some things like this. I remember that in the 1 Corinthians letter, a passage that really I missed for many years.

It's so simple. And maybe I didn't want to see it, but it's in the 10th chapter of 1 Corinthians where he is talking about how to live in a pagan society, an idolatrous society. And he says, everything is permissible.

Whether meat's been offered to an idol or not doesn't change the character of the meat. That if somebody sees you eat meat that's been offered to an idol, they'll think you are worshiping that idol, and you're party to that. And if that's a temptation for them, you may be the means of somebody else stumbling.

So, he says, very simply, one of the strongest words in the New Testament, verse 24, nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. Now, what fascinates me on that is that there's no equivocation, and there's no condition attached to it. He just simply bluntly says, nobody should seek, and the Greek says, nobody should seek the things of himself.

The word good is not in there. It just simply says, nobody should seek the things of himself, but every person should seek the things of another. Now, you say, who under the sun is ever going to live that way? Well, let me come down to the end of the chapter.

Now, here is where one of my popular misunderstandings about Paul got exploded. Because, you know, I'd read the literature where Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. That was very encouraging to me.

I figured there was substantial hope for me if he was the chief of sinners. But then I noticed this. Look at the tail end of this chapter.

So, he says in verse 31, So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Don't cause anyone to stumble, whether it's a Jew, a Greek, or somebody in the church, even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Do you know what he's saying? That the law of his life is not self-interest. And it is the well-being of somebody else that determines who Paul is. Then he says, did you notice this? Follow my example.

So that when Paul says, nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others at the beginning of that passage, the conclusion is, Paul says, you do it because I'm doing it. And do it like I'm doing it. Now, that is an astounding testimony to me.

But of course, Paul was a rather remarkable man, wasn't he? And maybe he knew something about grace, I don't know. But before I go to that, let me tell you that the very thought of what Paul is proposing is very difficult for Christians to accept. Now, let me give you an illustration of what I believe is a clear illustration of it.

Look very carefully at your text there in Philippians 2. Now, I'm talking beyond my knowledge. Let me say that. But I'll tell you why I came to my conclusion.

You will notice if you've got an NIV, look at verse 4. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. I told you that I was comfortable with this passage until I looked at the Greek. And when I looked at the Greek, do you know what surprised me? I couldn't find the word only in there.

I'd be interested, those of you who have Bibles in front of you, how many of you have the word only in verse 4? Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Isn't it interesting how different the presence of that word only makes? Because if you leave only in there, that gives me every right to look to some of my own interests. So when I looked at the translation in English and then looked at the Greek, what you've got in the second section is the word chi.

And I began debating with that because the only isn't there. So I thought, could it really mean each of you should look not to his own interests, but even to the interests of others? Because chi can be translated both also and even. Now you've got a mess of a time knowing how to prove that it should be one or the other.

So I thought, Ken Law, you don't know enough about this. So I went to our classical Greek professor at the college. And I said, now I want you to translate, and I pulled that verse out just by itself, and made him translate it, and he translated it without the only in there.

So then I went to Dr. Robert Mulholland, who's the provost here at the seminary, and he's got a good Harvard PhD in New Testament, and I said, Bob, would you translate this verse for me out of the Greek? And he translated it without the only. Now you hear the difference. Each of you should look not to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

And so I said to him, Bob, that's not the way the translation's translated. So I showed him, he pulled out a translation, and noticed the only. And then he went to his shelf and began pulling down his grammars and his lexicons, and he came back to me and said, you know, Dennis, I don't believe it belongs in there.

Now I raised that with a friend of mine who's a better New Testament scholar than I am, he is a New Testament scholar, who was one of the translators of the NIV. It was interesting, he got very upset with me. Do you know it's hard to translate the Bible honestly? It's hard for you to translate the Bible honestly, just the same way it's hard for me to translate the Bible honestly.

Because the standard just ain't reasonable, is it? Not for fallen creatures like you and me. So I thought, well now, Paul said that he was not under the tyranny of what's in it for me, or how will I look, or I deserve better than this, or yes, Lord, but. Don't I have a little to say about this, you know? Then I read the rest of the chapter.

You know an interesting thing? Look down with me at verse 19 following. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I don't have anybody

else like him who takes such an interest in your welfare, for everybody else looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

But you know Timothy, he has proved himself as a son with his father, he served with me in the work of the gospel. I thought for heaven's sake, Paul got there, and Paul lived with Timothy, and Paul said Timothy had gotten there, where the law of his life was not self-interest, but whatever was the will of Christ and the well-being of others. And I thought, well, I wonder how they got there.

Timothy's not that exceptional. And then I read verses 12 and 13. Therefore, my dear friends, as you've always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

And I thought, you know, I don't believe Paul got there because he was exceptional. I think he got there because of grace. And if Timothy got there, I don't think I've got an excuse for not getting there.

Because if the grace of God can bring Timothy to where he's not under the tyranny of what's in it for me, or how will I look, or I deserve better than this, or yes, Lord, but, and we can put our arms around life and accept it as God gives it to us, it will be the grace of God that enables us to do it. And what a difference it would make if a person would let God liberate him or her to live that way. Because that's the way Jesus lived.

And when he lived that way, a world had an opportunity of redemption. And, you know, I've found as I've lived, there have been a few people that I've bumped into across the years whose lives have illustrated this kind of thing. Let me make one other comment about Paul himself.

Do you notice the fourth chapter of that letter? Look at the fourth chapter. I find myself laughing when I cite this. Because I memorized one of the verses, the capstone verse in the paragraph, memorized it for decades.

I never looked at the paragraph. And interpreted it radically out of context. I did that as a seminary professor.

Look at verse 13 of chapter 4, where he speaks and says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Have you ever heard a sermon on that? Do you know what that text is? That text is a testimony to what Paul's been talking about. Because look at the two verses before it.

He says, I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you've renewed your concern for me. The word *freneo* is used in there. Indeed you have been concerned twice, but you had no opportunity to show it.

I'm not saying this because I am in need. For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need.

And I know what it is to have plenty. I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. And the guy who's saying this is in a Roman prison in chains.

And he says, I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. And what's he saying? I can be victoriously content anywhere God puts me. Now, Don was raising the question today about the need for

emphasis upon the possibility of victory in the Christian life.

And that is exactly what Paul is witnessing to. I can sit in my chains and rejoice in my circumstances because my Father has given them to me and there's something redemptive in it all. Now, can you live that way? Well, there have been people that have.

I found myself looking for illustrations. We had Helen Rosevere at Asbury two or three times, ten or fifteen years ago. You remember Cambridge graduate, medical doctor, spent her life in Africa giving it for Africans.

And then one day there was an uprising and they came in and they brutalized her and they raped her, multiple. And as the horror of that descended on her, she said it was like the blackness of hell. And then she said, I heard a voice.

And the voice said, Thank you, Helen, for letting me use your body. It is not you that they raped. It is I. And she came through and came through victorious.

She said, I was home on furlough trying to put my life back together before going back. And she said, I was at one of the universities and she said, I was speaking. And she said, I noticed in that university crowd two girls, one of which I knew was far too young to be a university student.

She said, they sat on the end of a row of seats. And she said, I finished my lecture. When I finished my lecture, the audience left and I went back to get my briefcase.

And when I came back, I noticed the two girls had never moved. And so she said, I started back to them. And she said, as I did, she said, what was obviously the older girl came to me.

And she said, a few weeks ago, my sister who's here, long yellow hair down her shoulders, was raped. And from that moment to this, she's never uttered a word. She is in total shock.

Could you talk to her? Helen Roosevelt said, I turned. And you know, all of the horror of that experience must have flooded her again. But the memory of the presence of Jesus.

And as she started for the girl, the girl bounded out of her seat. And when she got to Helen, she didn't embrace her. She collided with her.

And Helen said, the two of us fell on our bottoms on the floor, wrapped in each other's arms. And she said, we wept for the better part of an hour. I deserve better than this? How am I ever going to look at Christ under any circumstances I ever meet? And with any honesty and integrity to say, I deserve better.

Now, if he's sovereign, and if he's Lord, and I give him my life, is there anything that comes to me that I can separate from his choice? And if he's the one giving it, don't tell me he doesn't give it with redemptive purposes in mind. I've come to believe that there is grace that can enable a person to live. Nobody's going to get to the place where he's not going to say, what's in this for me? But you don't have to be controlled by it.

You can analyze it out and say, not much from a human point of view. But Father, if it's your will, and you can put your arms around it in his grace and embrace it, how will I look? I don't like to look like a fool any more than anybody else. So you'll recoil from it.

But you say, Father, if it's your will, I can put my arms around it, because I won't have to go through it alone. And I deserve better than this? No, no, no. If I'm following him, how can that question ever be raised? But the big one is, how can I get to the place where the but doesn't follow the yes? And that's why I believe in the message of heart holiness.

I believe he can take the resistance out, the recalcitrance, where you look at all the negatives, and when you've looked at them, you say, that's all right, Lord. I consciously, deliberately choose it, because I know it's from you. And he delivers you from the but.

Now every one of us is in Christian ministry and Christian witness, everybody in this room. Do you know what your context needs more than anything else, and what my context needs more than anything else? It needs for you to have the mind of Christ and for me to have the mind of Christ. Because if we don't, when we get in the middle of it, our witness won't be the same as his.

And there'll be two witnesses instead of one. But if we let him bring us to the place where his will has become ours, and his mind controls ours, then we will find that any witness we have is identical with his. And a world can see who Jesus Christ really is.

Now that's the message for tonight. I don't know who you are, and I don't know where you are. But it may be that God has been getting, one of the things I know is that I'm never ahead of him.

None of us are ever ahead of him. We're never first with anybody else. And if it was his will that this be preached, he's been getting you ready for this just as much as he's been getting me ready for it.

And it may be that God has brought you to the place where you see how this applies to your circumstances and to who you are and who he wants you to be. And you're beginning to entertain the thought, can it be possible that I put my arms around his will for me and embrace it? If I do that, he's going to have to do something in my heart to enable me to embrace it. If you ask him, and ask him sincerely, he can do it.

He can do it. And what you will find is that when you have asked him and he has helped you to embrace what you don't want, you will find that he can take you victoriously through it. And out of it will come something redemptive.

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