

# The Message of Philippians

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the mind of Christ, which is characterized by love, self-emptying, and sacrifice, and encourages believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.*

**Scripture:** Philippians 1:9-10, Philippians 1:27, Philippians 2:3-11, Philippians 2:14-15, Philippians 3:13-14, Philippians 3:20, Philippians 4:4, Philippians 4:6-8

**Topics:** "The Mind of Christ", "Living a Life Worthy of the Gospel"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the central teaching of Philippians, which is the mind of Christ, urging believers to adopt this mindset characterized by love, humility, and self-emptying service. He illustrates how Christ's attitude led to His ultimate exaltation and encourages the church to reflect this same mindset in their lives, resulting in joy and authority. Morgan highlights the importance of working out one's salvation and living a life worthy of the Gospel, marked by rejoicing, forbearance, and prayer. The letter serves as a love letter from Paul to the Philippians, revealing profound truths about the Christian consciousness and the necessity of embodying the mind of Christ. Ultimately, the message calls for a deep identification with Christ, leading to a life of joy, service, and triumph over circumstances.

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## Transcript

### A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

#### I. The Central Teaching. The Mind of Christ

##### i. Of Christ Jesus.

##### a. The mental Attitude.

"Counted it not a prize . . ."

##### b. The consequent Activity.

"Emptied Himself . . ."

##### c. The resultant Crowning.

"God highly exalted Him."

ii. Of the Saints in Christ Jesus.

a. The mental Attitude.

1. Love abounding more and more.

2. Sincere and void of Offence.

b. The consequent Activity.

1. Manner of Life worthy of the Gospel.

2. Children of God blameless . . . harmless.

c. The resultant Crowning.

1. Present Victory over Circumstances.

2. Ultimate Realization of Divine Purpose.

II. The Abiding Appeal. "Have this mind In you"

i. The Resource.

"To me to live is Christ."

ii. The Responsibility.

"Work out . . ."

iii. The Rules.

a. Rejoice in the Lord.

b. Forbearance towards Men.

c. The Life of Prayer.

d. The Life of Thought.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

The Measure of the Church's Authority is the Measure of her Conformity to the Mind of Christ.

That Mind is Love.

Its Consciousness is joy.

Its Expression Sacrifice.

II. To the Individual Believer

The Mastery of Christ.

Individual Capture by Christ.

The one Desire for others.

The Philippian letter is a revelation of the Christian mind. It is largely without system, and extremely difficult to analyze. Who can analyze a love-letter, and that is what this letter is, which Paul wrote to his children at Philippi; and whereas in the deepest fact of his spiritual love this great apostle had no favourites, in the affections of his emotional nature, his children at Philippi were certainly his chiefly loved children. He had come to Philippi in answer to the call of the man of Macedonia. When, crossing over the Aegean Sea, he reached that city and began his work by the riverside, there almost immediately followed that wonderful experience in the prison. With feet fast in the stocks through the brutality of the jailer, at midnight Paul and Silas had sung praises to God. This letter to these Philippian Christians was written in prison, and it seems to me as I read that Philippi was always to Paul the place of prison and the place of song. These children at Philippi were near and dear to his heart. They ministered to his need, as he says, once and again; and the letter which he wrote to them from prison is a letter brimming over with love.

If there be no definite system in the letter, some of the profoundest and most wonderful things that ever came from his pen are to be found therein. That marvellous and matchless passage describing the whole mission of the Son of God, from His Self-emptying, through all the experience of His sorrows, back to the throne of heavenly empire, is in this letter. That autobiographical passage is here also, in which Paul gives us the story of his own life in brief sentences, every one of which is full of light and full of colour; so that if we want to know the truth about Paul we turn to this wonderful piece of self-revelation.

The supreme value of the letter is that of its revelation of the true Christian consciousness. Notice the recurrence of the word mind, or of cognate words. "To be thus minded" i. 7 ; "Be of the same mind" ii. 2; "Lowliness of mind" ii.3 ; "Have this mind" ii.5 ; "Let us . . . be thus minded" iii.15; "Who mind earthly things" iii, 19 ; "Of the same mind" iv.2 ; "Your mind of me " iv. 10;-though our translation, neither Authorized nor Revised, shows the fact, when the apostle spoke of their care for him he used the same word, mind. That of course is a grouping of phrases with no apparent connection; and there are some senses in which there is no connection between them. Our only purpose in thus grouping them is that we may notice how the word repeats itself. The fact that these words do not form a key to the analysis is all the more remarkable. They are incidental words arising out of an attitude of mind, and revealing that attitude, as the apostle wrote from his prison-house to his children at Philippi. In every chapter, and in every division, the word is to be found.

The Greek word so translated is one which signifies consciousness, either as the cognitive faculties, or as impression made on the mind. In the Thessalonian letter, we find an analysis of personality by this same apostle,-spirit, soul, and body. Spirit is the essential fact in a man's life; the body is the probationary dwelling-place of the spirit, the instrument through which the spirit communicates with others, and receives communications from others; the soul, or mind is the consciousness; and it is fleshly, or spiritual, according to whether the flesh or the spirit is dominant in the life.

The central teaching of this letter is suggested by the phrase "the mind of Christ." It reveals the mind of Christ. First the mind of Christ personally; and secondly the mind of Christ in the saints. The supreme appeal of the letter is that of the apostle's injunction, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Thus if we are to understand the message of the letter we must first discover what it reveals to us

of the mind of Christ Himself; then what it reveals to us of the mind of Christian men and women. The appeal of the letter will then be seen to be patent, and necessary; "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

When we attempt to examine this unveiled mind of our Lord, we are at once brought into the presence of light and glory that surprise, and arrest us, in adoring wonder. The gospel stories tell us of His words and His works, reveal to us His character, and the influence produced upon men by that character; but when we want to see the mind of Christ we turn to the Philippian letter. Herein is revealed that conception, that consciousness, of the Christ of God which lay behind all His words and works, inspiring them.

In the contemplation we first discover His mental attitude, that which caused everything else; then we see the activity springing out of that attitude; and finally we see the victory and crowning following that activity.

The attitude of mind is described in these words; "Being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God." That is the mind of Christ Then follows a statement of the activity resulting from that attitude of mind; "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross." Finally the issue of the activity is declared; "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The crowning of Christ proceeded from the activity of Christ. The activity of Christ was the result of the mind of Christ. To know the mind of Christ then we must observe His activity. First He emptied Himself. To understand that we must watch the steps that follow. Every sentence tells of a downward movement. He emptied Himself in the infinite heights; and took the form of a Servant in the universe in which He had been Sovereign. He might have taken the form of the highest Servant in the universe, angel, archangel, seraph, or cherub; but He was made a little lower than the angels, and was made in the likeness of men. He might have come into human life at its highest and best, in the midst of ease and comfort; but "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even' unto death." As a man He might have died, surrounded by those who loved Him, ministering to Him to the last, and helping Him through the hour of weakness; but He died the death of the Cross.

Whence sprang such activity? The first words tell the story, "Being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God." That is the mind of Christ; it is the mind of lowliness; it is the mind of pure and absolute love. "Love vaunteth not itself." The thirteenth chapter of Corinthians in its description of love is but the description of the mind of the Master. Though in the form of God, of the nature of God, on an equality with God, He had no conception of such a position as to make Him value the position for the sake of the position. When there was a race to be redeemed, the position must be laid aside in order that the Person of such mind might stoop to unutterable depths in order to lift out of ruin those who had been involved therein. That is the mind of Christ.

I am quite well aware that these words of mine are of the poorest, for what expositor can help men to understand this thing? We can only understand it when we have done listening to men and reading books, and when we sit in solemn loneliness in the presence of the unveiled glory of the mind of Christ. I take up this little New Testament, every book of it precious, every page of it invaluable, every pamphlet having some message; but not from Matthew to Revelation have I anywhere else such an unveiling of the mind of

Christ, as I have in this one short paragraph, over which we have passed with almost rude footsteps in our attempt to understand it.

This letter reveals also the mind of the saints who are in Christ Jesus. We will take the same three divisions; the mental attitude, the consequent activity, and the resultant crowning; for as these are the great things revealed concerning the mind of Christ, all its preciousness, its values, its virtues, its victories, are at the disposal of the children of God. Even though we descend from the height of ineffable glory and splendour to the level of our own halting and failing experience, nevertheless we find that the true mind of the saint is the mind of the Lord.

What then is the true mental attitude of the Christian man? At the beginning of the letter, Paul prayed for his Philippian children that their "love may abound yet more and more," not emotionally merely, and certainly not ignorantly, but "in knowledge and all discernment." Then he prayed that they "may be sincere and void of offence." I lift my eyes amazed, to the wonder and glory of the mind of Christ; and with all reverence, for one is almost reluctant to do this, I say that His love is the revelation of our love. Being in the form of God He did not count such relation a prize to be snatched at for Himself and His own enrichment, though it was already His. That is love abounding, love sincere, love void of offence. That mental attitude of Christ is to be the mental attitude of the saints. Consequently the saint will be mastered by love, and therefore, although we are so far from the heights we must take the measurement of the heights, for whatever position of privilege the child of God occupies within the economy of God, it must not be held as a prize to be snatched at for self-glorification. That is the mind of Christ.

Had Paul the mind of Christ? I affirm that he had. We see it supremely manifest when he wrote these words, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Ghost, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh." That is the mind of Christ; the mind of the man made one with Christ. He had written immediately before, Nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; but he did not count that as a prize to be snatched at for his own enrichment, but could wish that he were anathema from Christ for his brethren's sake. That is the mind of Christ.

What then is the consequent activity? Following still the method of examination afforded by the unveiling of the mind of Christ, I take two of Paul's descriptions; "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" ; and " blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world." That is the activity growing out of the mind. The manner of life worthy of the Gospel is that of holiness, purity, truth; but these words do not touch the deepest note. The life must be worthy of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of God's grace bringing salvation to all men. Life is worthy of that when it suffers to carry that news, when it enters into travail and pain in order to bring men under the sound of it, and under the power of it, that they may be saved by it. That is the manner of life worthy of the Gospel. It is not merely rectitude of conduct or of character, it is not merely personal; the manner of life worthy of the Gospel is life driven by the Gospel in order to make it known, to proclaim it. That is the activity resulting from the mind.

Again, Children of God, blameless and harmless; blameless, that is the relationship to God; harmless, that is the consequent relationship to men. Once again I lift my eyes to the splendour of the unveiled activity of Jesus resulting from His mental attitude, and I see Him emptying Himself, taking the form of a servant, made in the likeness of man, humbling Himself, becoming obedient to death, the death of the Cross. That

is the meaning of life worthy of the Gospel; that is the Son of God blameless and harmless. The mind that was in Christ is to be in the saint; and the mind that was in Christ being in the saint, is to produce in the saint the activity which was produced in Christ. How much do we know about emptying ourselves? How much do we know about humbling ourselves, about being obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross?

Looking thus at the mind of the saints, let us observe, not only the attitude, and the consequent activity, but also the resultant crowning. Of Christ it is said, "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name." So also with the saint. Whenever we find this mind and this activity resulting, we find triumph. This whole letter is a triumph; triumph over circumstances calculated to make Paul feel he was being defeated; the intrepid missionary, the pioneer evangelist; the regions beyond, the perpetual watchword of his strong endeavour; was now in prison and everything was against him; circumstances were combining to crush him. Nothing of the kind. He sang in prison in Philippi long ago; he will sing in a letter to Philippi out of the Roman prison now; that is triumph over circumstances. That is not seen in this letter only, but also in all the letters. This man never called himself a prisoner of anybody save Jesus Christ, he said he was His prisoner; he did not consent to refer to Nero; Nero was out of sight entirely. He had no thought for the jailer by his side, except one of compassion and endeavour to bring him into that bondage to Christ which meant real liberty. He did once say in human weakness, "Remember my bonds" ; but he also said that his bonds " have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel." Where there is the mind of love, and the consequent activity of self-emptying service, there is perpetual and glorious triumph over circumstances. Any man can sing when he escapes from prison; but this man sang in prison. God has highly exalted Paul and given him a throne of power because of the activity growing out of the mind of love. He triumphed over all circumstances and lifted his eyes, not doubtingly, but courageously, to the ultimate realization of the Divine purpose, so that he said in this same letter, " Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: . . but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on towards the goal" ; that goal is the hour in which He "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory." The mind of Christ in the saint is the mind of royalty, of authority, of power.

In the light of that attempt to understand this unveiling of the mind of Christ, we hear the abiding appeal, "Have this mind in you." If that is the abiding appeal, think what this letter teaches us concerning the resources, responsibilities, and rules of the Christian life.

What are the resources? Why should I use the plural form? I will give you the whole story in one little word, "To me to live is Christ." "Have this mind in you." How can I? By imitating it? Surely not. By endeavouring to cultivate it? Certainly not. How then? By entering into the meaning of that "To me to live is Christ." This man said, I only have one life, and that is Christ. As he said in another epistle, "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." "To me to live is Christ."

"Christ! I am Christ's! and let the name suffice you;

Ay, for me too He greatly hath sufficed:

Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,

Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

Christ's vision; Christ's virtue. This man saw God as Christ saw God. This man saw man as Christ saw man. This man saw ruin as Christ saw ruin. This man saw God's purpose as Christ saw God's purpose. Christ's outlook, Christ's vision! But more, Christ's virtue, Christ's strength, Christ's ability in the presence of the difficulty. These are the resources. If we would have the mind of Christ, we must have the life of Christ, not by imitation, not by cultivation, but by identification. That is the secret of having the mind of Christ.

What is our responsibility if we have this life and so have this mind? "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you." Our business is to work out what God works in. The apostle shows us how to work out, not in immediate teaching, but in illustration, the illustration of his own life in the autobiographical chapter. How did he work out the salvation which God wrought in him? First by keeping clearly before him the vision of the ultimate. With that vision of the ultimate before him what were his attitudes? Towards the past, abandonment; "I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward." Towards the present, effort: "I press on towards the goal." "I press," the Greek word so translated might be rendered I persecute, for the word is exactly the same as that used of this same man when he was persecuting the Christians. The significance of this is that it shows us that into this business of pressing towards the goal Paul put all the passion and fervour which, in the olden days, he had employed in his determined effort to stamp out the name of Jesus Christ. That is the kind of loyalty we need. Why is it that when a man steps over the line and finds Christ he so often leaves his passion, a good deal of his common sense, and much of his business ability behind him? When Christ arrests a man, He wants the whole man, every part of him, every ability he has. Our responsibility is that of absolute dedication and unfailing endeavour.

What are the rules? At the end of the letter we find them. First, "Rejoice in the Lord." Is that a rule? I maintain that it is. Paul does not speak of joy as a privilege but as a duty. It is our duty to rejoice; we ought to sing, we ought to be glad. We owe it to our Lord to go through the streets of London on a foggy day with a smiling face. We ought to be the most cheerful people in the world. There ought to be in our very attitude the manifestation of perennial gladness. That is the rule, and Paul knew that all down the centuries there would be people who would forget, so he added "again I will say, Rejoice."

The other rules all follow; "Let your forbearance be known unto all men" ; "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" ; "Think on these things."

The application of this message to the Church to-day is that the measure of the Church's authority is the measure of her conformity to the mind of Christ. The Church of God is authoritative in proportion as the Church of God has the mind of Christ. We depend on all sorts of things to give us authority. The mind of Christ is the only thing that makes us truly royal. Of the mind of Christ the essence is love, the consciousness is joy, the expression is sacrifice. Let the Church of God be mastered by love, filled with singing and with joy, perpetually serving, and she rises to a throne of power and authority in this, and in every age.

If that be the application of the message to the Church, what is the application to the individual? The supreme thing is that we should be wholly, absolutely mastered by Christ, that we should be captives of the Lord. That is the ideal. The Ideal of the Son should be our only ideal. The resources of His power should be all we ask in order to fulfillment of the ideal. The certainty of His ultimate victory, in us and everywhere, should be the inspiration of our unceasing, undying song. The present joy of life should be

that of constant and immediate comradeship with Him. If I can once learn this secret I shall learn how to sing, and how to smile; how to love, and how to serve.

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