

Christ Our Mind

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being of the same mind and prioritizing the love of God and the oneness of the saints, as Satan fights against this unity.

Scripture: Philippians 2:2

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "The Mind of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of adopting the mind of Christ, which is characterized by humility and selflessness, as outlined in Philippians. He highlights that true joy and unity among believers stem from being of the same mind, reflecting Christ's love and obedience, especially in the face of individual differences that can disrupt fellowship. The sermon warns against the divisive tactics of Satan, who seeks to undermine the love and unity within the Church, and calls for a commitment to love one another as a reflection of God's love. Sparks illustrates that the Church is being built amidst adversity, and the Cross is central to achieving this oneness in love. Ultimately, he urges believers to recognize their shared identity in Christ, transcending denominational divides and focusing on mutual love and support.

Transcript

The note in chapter two of the Philippian Letter is the Cross making Christ's mind ours - Christ our mind.

"...make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind." (verse 2).

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but 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. Wherefore also God highly exalted him" (verses 5-9).

"For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state. For all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ" (verses 20-21).

"I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord" (4:2).

The Street of Gold

When we reach the end of God's work in this dispensation and see that work concretely represented in its consummate form, SYMBOLIZED by the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, the specific features of which are described or mentioned, we see that one of those features is that the city has one single highway or street, and that street, that highway, that thoroughfare of the new Jerusalem, is said to be of pure gold. God will not begin to make His city at the end of the dispensation. He is making it now, and every part of it is now in process of constitution, and not least the street of gold. When we take up our New Testament and begin to read these apostolic letters - Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians - we are already in the preparation of the city, or the city is already potentially present, for the city is the Church, and we can see the street running through all these letters as the Church is in view, or we see God making His thoroughfare, preparing His gold.

But the city is being prepared, constituted and built amidst much adversity, just as much as - and I think a very great deal more than - Nehemiah had to contend with in building the earthly city, or its wall.

To come straight to the point: this street, this thoroughfare of pure gold, is where ALL the saints meet. If there is only one street that is the only place; people will not have outside streets and backways out of touch with one another. They will all be there together in one place, and this gold, this golden thoroughfare, is none other than the drawing together of the love of God. What we really have, amongst the many other things in these letters, is the way in which the Cross secures that love which constitutes the oneness, the fellowship, of the saints: for the Cross is so closely associated with the love of God. We know that quite well, and we know that for His love to be truly in our hearts is the result of a deep work of the Cross. The letter to the Philippians brings that into view in a very clear, precise way. We have seen how all these letters lead on and on, stage by stage, step by step, to final fullness, each one taking up what has gone before to carry it on to something greater, but we will look back over them just for a moment.

The letter to the Romans is a great letter on the love of God. We need not stay to argue that, but you will remember that it is there that we have everything presented in a full, comprehensive way. It is ALL gathered there; our salvation in its fullness, in its completeness from every angle, is all gathered into that letter. But when you pass on from the letter to the Romans, then you begin to take things up, shall we say, piecemeal. The thing has to be dealt with in parts, so that the next letter - the first letter to the Corinthians - is very significant from this present standpoint of our immediate consideration. You remember how, at the beginning of the letter, the Apostle deplored the slowness of growth, the poorness and meagreness of spiritual life, so that he was having to speak to babes and not to men; and then he put his finger upon the cause and spoke of divisions among them. 'One says I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; another, I am of Peter, and yet another, I am of Christ,' and all these positions were repudiated and rebuked by the Apostle. Here was a making of four thoroughfares where God intended that there should only be one! I suppose the people who said: 'I am of Christ' thought that their thoroughfare was the best of them all, but probably it was the worst, because it was making Christ an instrument for doing the very thing that He had come to try to make impossible, for bringing about something that was furthest from the thought of God. All this was a terrible contradiction of love! It was a contradiction of the nature of the one street of the city, so we are not surprised that, as the Apostle gets near to the end of that letter he, by inference, says: 'Your gifts may divide you, and because gifts may divide or be the occasion for one setting off another, or for setting himself off against another, all these gifts may just miss their objective, which was for the building up of the whole Body. Therefore, although gifts may be right, in order for them to reach their end there must be the one all-governing thing: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I

am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.'" So he covers the ground of gifts and says that love is the way, love is the street, love is the thoroughfare, for them to reach this end of building the Body.

Satan's Antagonism to Fellowship

We might pause there, because what we want to see at the outset is how Satan continuously fights this very thing because of the tremendous issue, the end of love. What we are going to see, or what we may see at once without any waiting is that Philippians 2 brings immediately the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the highest place of authority, power and dominion in every realm. That is what this chapter brings into view: the Name which is above every name, in which every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess to the glory of God the Father. That is the end - the city being the vessel of the glory of God, having the glory of God by the testimony of Jesus.

Now, says the Apostle, in order to reach that Throne, that highest of all places, the way is: "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus." What is this mind? Well, 'be of the same mind one toward another... I beseech you to be of the same mind'. It is oneness in love. "I have no man likeminded who will earnestly be concerned for your affairs: they all seek their own, not the things which are Christ's." You see that this mind of Christ is a oneness of mind which has no self in it - and that is chapter 2: "He emptied himself."

There was a great deal of self at Corinth. Satan continuously fights against the building of the city, and especially against the preparing of this highway of love. Sometimes it would seem that the objective of the devil is the destruction of the love of God's people one for another because of the great end in view through that love: "Love buildeth up". Dear friends, what do these things mean 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Peter, and I am of Christ'? Do you not think that it is very probable that those who said: 'I am of Paul' were really taken up with a line of teaching?

'That is Paul's teaching, Paul's interpretation, Paul's vision, Paul's conception, Paul's wonderful comprehension of spiritual things as such!' It was something peculiar to Paul's ministry that attracted them, and they made IT the thing upon which they fastened. Apollos - well, we have come to think of him as being a very eloquent man, a man of eloquence and burning zeal. According to the word in Acts 18 he was a learned man, he knew the Scriptures, was full of zeal and very earnest, but, again, it was something peculiar to a man and his ministry, or, shall we say, to a ministry.

Peter - what shall we say of Peter? It may have been that Peter, being the Apostle to Jews of the Dispersion, appealed more to those who had a Judaistic outlook and rather relieved the tremendous strain which Paul's heavenly position put upon them. Whatever it was, you see that it was a MAN'S line of things, given him by God, but something of ministry which appealed to them. What shall we say of the fourth group? 'I am of Christ!' Well, it may just have been this: 'I do not belong to your denomination, nor to your sect.

I do not belong to any denomination at all. I am above and outside.' Even such can make undenominationalism a denomination and standing apart, and be schismatic. That is why I said that perhaps this is the worst of all. We have to be very honest and faithful in facing things like that. These are the things that have been going on all through the centuries. The people of God have been broken up by teachings, ministries, personalities, and then by false conceptions of what a heavenly position is - perhaps as represented by the 'Christ party', FALSE conceptions of a heavenly position.

Oh, if the Lord will enable us to receive this word, it may make a lot of difference and provide a way, as we were saying earlier, for the Holy Spirit, a way for the 'supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ'. The Cross has to do something in this matter!

The Work of the Cross

Now first of all, you and I have to allow the Cross to smite and to slay everything represented by the first three, that is, teachings, interpretations, specific lines of truth, of ministries and personalities in ministry, so that in no way are we attached to these as things, but rather, in a true and right and spiritual way, it is Christ who is our focal point, our meeting point, our basis - Christ Himself. We may have Paul, Apollos and Peter and not grow one whit spiritually, like the Corinthians.

We may have all that they have to give us and still remain stunted because there is an 'it', a something, a line, a teaching, an interpretation, a ministry. We think, of course, that it is the Lord. Are we quite sure? That it really is the Lord is a matter about which we have to be made very sure. And then the Cross must deal with this fourth thing, or that which is represented by the fourth thing: 'I am of Christ!' I will be very practical and come right to the point. It is a false apprehension of a heavenly position for anyone to run down Christians because they are in denominations, and to have anything in them which separates them from children of God because they are in these things.

That is a false apprehension of a heavenly and spiritual position. I want to say that with great emphasis. Such people have not yet come to the place where they can discriminate between children of God and things in which children of God may be. You and I might come to the place where, more or less, we could not participate in the THINGS, and might see that the THINGS - call them what you like, 'sects', 'denominations', such things - are limiting things and are a contradiction to the thought of God.

We may come to see that there is all the difference between a very strong feeling and conviction about that, and allowing our feeling toward the thing to touch the people who are children of God. Dear friends, you have to keep a very wide gap between those two things, and when you meet someone who is in something, which THING you feel the Lord has delivered you from or led you out of or shown you to be not in accord with His mind, you must not allow your feeling toward that THING to touch that child of God.

Our attitude toward a child of God is to be the love of God for His children AS HIS CHILDREN wherever they are, and there are children of God in some extraordinary places and in things which may be unthinkable to us. You and I have to recognize children of God wherever they are, in whatever they are, and keep the street intact - one street, one thoroughfare. We walk with children of God as they walk with the Lord because they are children of God. Satan's business is to try and make that impossible and to split up this street into a thousand highways and byways and cul-de-sacs.

It is true! He is fighting against this all the time, and there is nothing too sacred for him. The tragic, painful, grievous story of the Church is just this - the story of Satan's mischief in dividing the Lord's people.

Well, Corinthians is basic to this matter. I would like to leave what I have just said and say no more, but if only the Lord would take hold of that and deal with us on this matter! It does seem to me, dear friends, that if we violate this it is as though we drew something across the thoroughfare and closed the way to our own progress and to our own testimony. If we cut short God's way, our way is cut short. Well, Satan fought it at Corinth in this way, and you see how Paul answered.

Paul fought it in another way at Galatia, but it was the same thing in principle. Here these Galatian believers had shown marvellous love, the love of Christ, at their conversion, toward the Lord's servant who was used as their spiritual father. He said: 'You would have plucked out your very eyes and given them to me!' Then along came the Judaizers with their pernicious work and they gave themselves over to the devil to do this very thing, and that beautiful love, which showed itself so wonderfully at the beginning, just passed out. These Galatians turned against the very man whom God had used to bring everything into their lives. Read the letter again in the light of Satan's work against the love of God, and see what Satan was after: 'Ye did run well. Who has cast the witch's spell over you?' 'Having begun in the Spirit, do you think you are going to be consummated in the flesh?' What is the devil after? Simply the arresting and turning back of these people in the way to God's purpose. And how did he do it? Well, you may say by Judaizers, by false teachers, by false brethren. Yes, but in main how? By interrupting the love between them and the one whom God had appointed and chosen to lead them on to His full thought.

We dare not pass through all the Epistles now! You notice that Galatians leads on to Ephesians, and Ephesians takes up Corinthians and Galatians. How wonderful is Ephesians on love! When you get to the end of the letter you have the great revelation of the love between Christ and His Church: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it." And you know that it is not long before you find yourself in the battle in the heavenlies. When you look very closely you will find that it is love that is very largely Satan's objective. Why do I say that? You look at the letter itself, and then go over to the first chapters of the book of the Revelation, where the Lord says to EPHESUS: "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." Satan has won!

You pass into Philippians, and it looks back and it looks on. It looks back to Corinth. How much there is in this letter to the Philippians that savours of what we have in Corinthians, although, of course, it is very much more beautiful here and things are on a very much more advanced level; and yet, you see, you get something coming down the way, a dim reflection of what was at Corinth. What is all this about? "Be of the same mind", "be of one mind... one love... one heart... one soul!" What is it all about? It is a Corinthian peril again at Philippi, and the need still is that the Cross should keep out all that ground which is contrary to love, the love of Christ, and hold the saints together unto the full end. There is a real backward look in this Philippian letter, as you will see if you only look at it.

And there is the onward look. After this we shall come to Colossians in this Divine ordering of the arrangement of the letters, and there we shall find ourselves in the presence of "Christ, all and in all" for the Church, that is, the Church now coming into the fullness of Christ. But with what does Philippians anticipate that? Oh, Satan's way of preventing the whole corporate expression of love by individual differences! That is what you have in Philippians. It seems that the trouble - what trouble there was - at Philippi was individual differences. Here are Euodia and Syntyche, two sisters, I presume, who had a difference. I think it is a very wonderful thing that the Apostle knew all about individual things at Philippi, and the state of things between individual believers! But there it was, and these individual differences were Satan's blow at the great corporate oneness in the fullness of Christ.

My point is this, dear friends: that it is no use our talking about the Church, the Body, or the city in these comprehensive terms and figures, and their wonderful representation and all that they mean, and be taken up with the great idea which makes its appeal to us and fascinates us. That all becomes nonsense if there are those in a local assembly who are not of one mind. It is all nullified by such people. The message of Philippians is just sandwiched between Ephesians and Colossians. Think of that! I always thought that there was a point where the arrangement broke down: Colossians and Ephesians ought to be right next to

each other, Colossians first and Ephesians next. That may be how they were written, but the Holy Spirit is quite right in the arrangement. Ephesians: the Body comprehensively presented with its great eternal calling and destiny; Colossians: the Church in relation to the Head in whom the fullness dwells, and sandwiched in between there is a little letter like this which says: 'Yes, these are great conceptions, immense Divine ideas and intentions, but do not forget that the whole arch rests upon one keystone, and the keystone is two of you - Euodia and Syntyche.' Very practical! My word, it brings us up sharp! I said earlier that this letter finds us out, and none of us can stand up to it.

Now, all that we think, all that we stand for, all that we speak of, all our vision, all the great language and phraseology - "the Church", "the Body", "the city", "the eternal purpose", "the calling and the destiny" - just come to be focused upon something between persons: "Be of the same mind." You see, when the city comes, it will be inconceivable that two people should be somewhere up in a corner or in a side road having a difference. We all have to move together on one thoroughfare, and the nature of that thoroughfare is pure gold - perfect love. That is what God is working at, and that is what Satan is working against. How very elementary we are! How at the beginning of things we are! But are we really? Philippians is well on, and it just says to us that perhaps it will be more difficult to show this mutual love and be of this oneness of mind at the end. Perhaps it will get more difficult as we go on. Perhaps Satan will have a great deal more to use and to play with, and will use it well. Perhaps the battle will become far more intense. Yes, I have no doubt but that Satan will persist in increasing force in his endeavour to divide and scatter the people of God.

Now, a great responsibility is thrown upon us by this very simple word. The whole testimony of Jesus just comes back again to become a matter between persons, and what this letter says to us, particularly in this part, is this: Wherever they are, in whatever they are, children of God are still children of God, members of the Father's family - a brother, a sister of yours and mine - and we must not be evilly affected toward anyone because of any of the reasons why they are where they are. They may not have seen what you have seen, they may not have had the advantage of the teaching that you have had. Oh, countless may be the reasons why they are there, but if they love the Lord it is not for you or for me to judge them. See how Paul takes this line all the time with those who did things which others thought to be utterly wrong! Some of us feel very strongly about the fundamentals of the faith, but many a man who would not be called a fundamentalist, and who by his very upbringing and training is a modernist, has been won by the love shown to him by others. Many who have gone away into that sort of thing have at the end come back by love being shown, and love can do a great deal more than argument. We must not hate PEOPLE away from the Lord by our hatred of their wrong ideas.

Now, we are not going to compromise with evil, and we are not going to say that wrong things are less wrong, but let us always keep that gap between a true child of God and the thing he is in. Many modernists are NOT truly born again children of God. Many HAVE a background to which they may return when suffering intervenes. In any case, let us not harden the situation by an un-Christlike spirit. Let us show love unto all, for there is so much hanging upon it. I am sure that if the Cross will do this work in us it will be cutting a channel for the Spirit, and He will have a freer way; and I am quite sure that the Holy Spirit is locked up and hindered where there is anything that is contrary to the love of God.

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