

Christ the All-Dominating Object and Prize

by T. Austin-Sparks

Christ should be the all-absorbing object and prize of the believer's life, leading to oneness of mind and singlemindedness.

Scripture: Philippians 2:5, Philippians 3:8, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Pursuit of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of having the mind of Christ as the central focus for believers, urging them to let go of earthly attachments and seek the ultimate prize of knowing Christ. He highlights the continuity of thought in Philippians, where Paul encourages unity among believers through a shared passion for Christ, contrasting it with those who prioritize their own interests. Sparks points out that true unity is not about uniformity but about a collective pursuit of Christ, which transcends individual differences. He reminds the congregation that their citizenship is in heaven, and this should shape their lives and priorities. Ultimately, the sermon calls for believers to allow their heavenly nature to dominate their earthly existence.

Transcript

What we have said about Christ as our mind leads us straight into chapter three of the Letter to the Philippians. Chapter three is the continuation of what is in chapter two. We recognize the convenience of chapter divisions, but we greatly regret them. They are not part of the original New Testament writings, but were only introduced by a man named Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century, just as the verse divisions were made by the Paris printer Stephanas in the seventeenth century. These divisions help us to find the place, but they are very artificial and really - in one way - are apt to rob us of real values. So very often it is essential to run straight on in the reading, ignoring the chapter division, in order to get the full value and meaning of the subject being dealt with.

There are few better examples of this than the one before us (as mentioned above). The continuity is found in this: "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus", who - in order to secure God's full purpose and realize God's full end - emptied Himself and let go of everything that He had, and humbled Himself, etc. The goal and prize of all this was His full and final exaltation and glory. This was the mind of Christ.

Now Paul goes on to say that that mind had been planted in him and - in the much lesser way - he had let go of the rich heritage which had been his and had counted it all valueless in view of the great "on high

calling" to "gain Christ". The loss of all things was incomparable to that great ultimate "gain", the fullness of Christ. Christ's supreme example, and Paul's own apprehension of Christ with this very practical effect, were the basis of his appeal for oneness of mind in believers. What Paul is really saying is that oneness, unity, and singleness among believers will be achieved by - and only by - THIS Christly disposition, and by Christ being the only and all-absorbing object and prize. He contrasts this "mind" with those who "mind earthly things" (4:8) and who "seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ" (2:4,21).

We could include MANY things in that "all seek their own", for apparently this referred to the Judaizers, who were wanting to change Christianity. Maybe 'their own things' were just "things" in which THEY were interested in Christianity. It has turned out in Christianity that the means to the end have become more than the end. Hence jealousies, rivalries, vested interests, the clientele, support, the 'Mission', the 'Denomination', the Institution, etc., and if anything seems detrimentally to affect it, a bitter spirit arises, and charges of 'sheep-stealing', divisiveness, and so on, split the spirit of Christ. If everything were looked at as to whether it has a contribution of Christ to make to believers, rather than how it affects our particular interest, Christ would be the unifying object.

Paul was not saying that there must be uniformity of mind on all particular points, for "there are diversities of gifts", and functions, but that in right and proper diversity there should be one all-unifying "mind"; the passion for Christ transcending and dominating all else, and arbitrating in all issues.

Paul's own life, a life so capable of versatility, variety, many interests and possibilities, was unified by this "one thing" (3:13). We must keep clearly in mind that in what Paul is saying here he is not thinking of salvation, but of the purpose of salvation, which is so very much more than escaping eternal judgment and getting into heaven. I do not think that the deep concern and exercise shown here by the Apostle meant that he feared for his salvation, but, as he says, "If by any means I may attain" - unto what? Being an eternally saved soul? No! But "that I may apprehend THAT FOR WHICH I was apprehended": "The prize of the on-high calling".

The stress - if that is the right word to use - the intensity exhibited by Paul is not because God has made it difficult, but because every art and artifice, every means and method of Satan, every danger in his own reactions to suffering is encountered especially by those who are set upon, and in the way of that on-high Calling! The enemy knows the ultimate peril to his kingdom involved in this utterness for Christ, for the on-high calling is to reign, and there is an "If" attached to that. So this oneness of mind is an immense potential!

In his appeal the Apostle reminds his readers that this motive comes from the very fact that their "citizenship is (now) in heaven" (3:20) and therefore the "on-high" or "heavenly" calling should be in the very constitution and disposition of a heavenly people.

May our true heavenly nature assert itself more and more powerfully so that

"the things of earth (do) grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace."

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