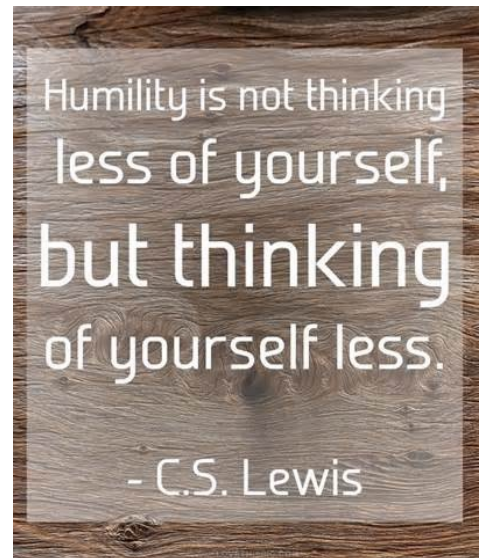


The Mind of Christ, Our Example "I've Got Friends In Low Places."

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:"
~ Philippians 2:5-8

"Let this mind be in you."



One of the major methods of modern counseling involves the idea that the way we think about things has a great affect on the way we feel. Albert Ellis, the founder of *Rational-Emotive Therapy*, said it this way: "you feel the way you think." "You are what you think" (Pro 23:7).

Ellis teaches that it is the job of the counselor to challenge what he calls, "crooked, irrational, self-damaging thinking" whenever it pops up. You can see how complicated this might become. However, what if there were a short cut we could take? Is there a pattern for good healthy thinking that we can use for a model, then just copy it? Yes, there is; it is the mind of Christ.

I want to suggest that spirituality has less to do with the rituals you perform and it has everything to do with the way you think. Means are no good if they do not take us to our goal. How does God think? That is the question. If we could know that, we could all be straight thinkers. If we could know the mind of Christ, then certainly we would know the standard for all true spirituality.

The fact is, that we do know the mind of Christ; it is given to us in the book of Philippians. The mind of Christ has a lot to do with humility; I cannot remember the church having a serious interest in humility since I was a boy. However, humility is the mind of Christ and it has everything to do with spirituality. If that is true, then the church must regain humility.

Why this Church at Philippi? Why pick the town of Philippi to talk about the mind of Christ? Well, there were no theological wars going on in Philippi. There were no big splits or fights to mediate, as with the other churches. There were no great moral problems in the Church at Philippi. There was only a minor difficulty between Euodia and Syntyche which was taken care of with a simple appeal to "get their heads together" on the project or whatever it was they were doing. There is also an admonition to the congregation to get behind them and help them in whatever it is was they were working on. The text does not allow us to say that the congregation was to get together and work *on* the ladies, but rather *with* the ladies. Help them, he says! Because of these ideal conditions Paul was able to go directly to spiritual themes in the letter.

No then, this church was started as a result of a Bible study group that Lydia held at a nearby river.

When Paul spoke at her Bible study group she was enlightened by his message and the "Lord opened her heart" to the New Testament Jesus. Not only was her Bible study group influenced, but she went home, told her family and they were all converted at her recommendation. This obviously included the men in her family, perhaps including her husband and her father, since families were extended in that day. It must have been a very nice family with men intelligent enough to listen to women --spiritual men. This Bible study was the basis of the church at Philippi. It had the best of all starts.

As Paul begins the letter he reminds them that he is in prison (Philippians 1:13), but not to worry because his being in prison was causing a lot of people within the palace to talk about Christ. Because of his courage many other people were getting courage. "My being here causes them to talk about Him." "In addition, I'm getting help from other people, some with pure, and some with impure motives" (Philippians 1:15). Some, he said, were "preaching Christ of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment" (Philippians 1:16-17). It will always be the case.

He goes on to say that he rejoices that, in any case, the Gospel is preached. We often take that as a reason to overlook sincerity and pure motive in Gospel preaching. O well, we say, at least the gospel is being preached. If we do that, we miss the entire message of the letter. If you read the rest of the letter you will see that he uses this as a launching pad to talk about spirituality --the mind of Christ. It is important to minister, but it is also important to do so for the right reasons and out of pure motive. It is not spiritual to minister out of *rivalry, envy, selfish ambition, bitterness. or to get even with Paul.*

The recommendation will be just the opposite. "Have the mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:5). Paul encourages, "May this drive your personal ministry and your church." To think the way Jesus thinks. We like to start with verse 5, but let's start with verse 1:

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests; but, look to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:1-5). I don't think we can find a better definition or description of spirituality.

Now, let's look at the rest of the passage, because it tells us what the mind of Christ was like: "who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death --even death on a cross (more the ignominy of the cross, than the pain of the cross). Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:6-11).

If you have the mind of Christ you will not live under self-interest.

In the order of human nature, the young people have most of the ambition; therefore, they need to watch out for this more than the old people. Can we really get to the point where we rule out "what's in it for me?" Can this really be done? Will you survive if you do this? I think so. I started a little piece of longitudinal research at the beginning of my adult life. This research has included not just the ministry but every job I ever worked on. I decided at the beginning of my working life that I would never ask for a raise from anyone --ever. I have followed through with that as a sort of test of God's care and as a way to place myself more directly under his providence. We're not getting rich, but we're surviving quite well. If you judge wealth by books, or by flowers, we're doing better than most anyone. There is no question that we have a lot more than "food and raiment."

We need to think about our lives as a chance to be helpful to others, not just a chance to help ourselves. When you try to do this, other good things come into play --like sharing and a sense of "fair play" within other people. As you help them, God will work in them and they may help someone else. You get a chance to *connect with* or *commune with* other people. We can awaken this within one another. It is a part of the mind of Christ --spirituality.

If you live for yourself, then when you die everything that you lived for will be gone. Paul said, "For me to live *is* Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). In human thinking your life is the most you can lose; however this is changed if you recognize that "Christ is the most you can hope to gain." You can lose your life; but, you can never lose Christ --He is more than life.

How did Jesus live? Do you know what is a big issue with almost all people? "I'm not getting ahead." Ahead of what? Ahead of who? This is an important issue in the church today. It is a central issue of spirituality.

The mind of Christ saves us from appearances. It saves us from the "show" --the "show off" --the "I've got to look good." Certainly, spirituality must be more than show; it must have a realness about it and a substance to it. What the church does must be more than PR; what *you* do must be more than PR. The mind of Christ releases us from the control of "empty show" --the "How good do I look?"

If we were to take inventory, how much of the Christian mail that we get would be PR for the ministry, rather than ministry itself? Does the church require us to "look good." And if so, how does that contribute to spirituality? I venture to say that it has an opposite and an artificial effect.

Christ didn't look good. He was called a "wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and harlots." He was poor, he had little education, and very few friends in high places. He had no throne, no army, no religious position. In the end, he was crucified as a heretic and blasphemer on a cross. When I was younger, I preached through Charles Spurgeon, Lehman Strauss, Warren Wiersbe, Arthur Pink, Bishop Ryle, John Wesley, Martin Luther --who are considered the orthodox of the orthodox. Still, there were people who claimed they loved these preachers; however, they thought I was a heretic when I repeated what they said. I always assumed that they never really read any of them; they just

liked to say their important names. There is no greater harm you may do a minister of Christ than to infer that they're not preaching the Gospel.

Now then, Christ must be thought of as the ultimate theologian; is there a way to bring him lower than to call him a heretic? That is exactly what the religious people (the Pharisees) did. He must be thought of as the ultimate in character. Is there a way to bring him lower than to hang him as a criminal? Christ didn't look good in our terms. He gave up his reputation. Not his goodness –just his reputation.

"Let this mind be in you?" Yes, if you want to be spiritual. If you are required to look good, then you'll never be able to repent, apologize, say you're wrong, plead ignorance, say you're sorry, or change your mind. You'll never be able to say you don't know or that you don't understand. Spiritual people must reserve the right to all of these things. These are the requirements for spirituality. I think they have been disallowed and also required at the same time. We call this a "double bind;" it is a wonder that it doesn't drive the church crazy.

Is it possible to do what is right even if it makes us look bad? Christ emptied himself of everything because he was more interested in our well-being than he was in his own.

Can a person live this way? We're not very often willing to look bad in order to save someone else. Christ was. We're quite worried about looking bad.

I think this can work. Now, I want to tell you a secret. Gloria and I have been in the ministry (the "goldfish bowl") now for over 60 years. In that 60-plus years we have lived through a great deal of personal danger. We never had any level of psychological comfort in the ministry until we were willing to lose, and until we were willing to fail. If you are willing to appear as a failure, then there is nothing more to take from you and you are safe --you are safe at the bottom. For the first time you will find yourself free to work on more than PR and defense. This is the mind of Christ. "He did not open his mouth in self defence." "He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death --even death on a cross." We're not talking physical pain here; we're talking insult and humiliation --big-time pain. Don't worry so much about looking good for the other Christians.

The mind of Christ releases us from a complaining spirit. "Do all things without murmuring" (Philippians 2:14).

The mind of Christ releases us from an argumentative spirit. "Do all things without murmuring and arguing." A confrontational style is of very little use to Christ. He never bothered to enlist a battery of lawyers onto the staff of his church. Why? "So that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world" (Philippians 2:15). People don't get to see humility and peacemaking very often --when they do, we *shine like stars in the world*. It is so unusual that you cannot mistake it for anything less than the work of God.

Were there people like this? Paul said, yes --Timothy. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know" (Philippians 2:19-22).

This is more than just a good idea or a good ideal. Timothy was an actual example of this. We get there by the grace of God --by trusting God to take care of us. "for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Is it safe to make our mind the mind of Christ? There is nothing safer. Spirituality must begin with the mind of Christ. There is no better place to begin. I think the world is getting sick and tired of important people. They're unapproachable, too high to reach, too complicated to understand. Even important Christians are too much for us.

If you ever watched any major interviews with Jimmy Baker, the tel-evangelist, you know that this was one of the hardest things for him and it was really his downfall. He was sick and tired of people looking down on Christians as inferior. I know the feeling he was talking about; none of us like to be thought of as dumb or inferior. Because of this deep resentment, Jimmy deliberately set out to show differently. Well, we will show them! We'll dress in expensive clothes, drive expensive cars, and we'll have power - -we'll even have power with senators --we'll buy a few senators. We'll build deluxe, expensive buildings, and have posh Christian resorts. God's people are going to go first class, he said. So, how well has all of that worked? We did all of that in the dark ages when the church took over the state. Remember? The mistake is, that it is just the opposite of how Christ did his work --he came *down* to save the world. We want to go *up* to save the world. It didn't work for Jimmy; why do we think it will work for us? Nearly every preacher who gets full of pride or resentment does a "crash and burn."

Is the world ready for this kind of message? You bet! How do I know? Well, Garth Brooks did pretty well singing , "I've got friends in low places." Why do you think that is? The world is sick and tired of snobbery and snobs. The last thing the world needs is a bunch of "high class" Christians to lead the way. We really don't need, one more "important person."

That is the essence of the mind of Christ, "We've got friends in low places." That has long ago ceased to be the message of the Church. ***"Where in the world is Humility?"*** If we don't find it soon the genuine church will cease to be. Do you know what I think Jesus said to the Father when he got back to heaven? "I've got friends in low places, and I've just gone *down* in order to help them *up*." That is spirituality. It is the way Jesus thought; it is the way to think. "You are what you think" (Proverbs 23:7).

Why not think like Jesus, if you intend to be a Christian?