

Thinking the One Thing by Taking Christ as Our Pattern¹

Scripture Reading: Phil. 2:1-9, 12-13

JOINED IN SOUL, THINKING THE ONE THING - Among the Philippians there was dissension in their thinking (4:2), dissension which troubled the apostle. Although they were one in spirit, they were not striving together with one soul. Although they all loved the Lord, they were not thinking the same thing. This caused Paul's heart to be heavy. So, Paul appealed to them and begged them to respond to his fellowship, i.e., that they would think the same thing, even the same one thing, that they might make his joy full. He had given them such positive fellowship in the preceding chapter. Now he wanted them to return this fellowship. Such a return of fellowship would be the believers' support to the apostle. Paul was not troubled by his imprisonment, but he was troubled by the situation among the believers in Philippi. He was very concerned about their spiritual condition. Therefore, Paul appealed to the Philippians to make him happy to the uttermost.

The way the Philippians could make Paul's joy full was to think the same thing, even the one thing (2:2). According to the context of the entire book, the one thing must refer to the subjective knowledge of Christ and experience of Christ (1:20-21; 2:5; 3:7-9; 4:13). Christ, and Christ alone, should be the centrality and universality of our entire being. Our thinking should be focused on the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and the experience of Christ. Anything else causes us to think differently and thus creates dissensions among us. Thinking the same thing is related to having the same love. Paul's word about "having the same love" indicates that, because of their dissenting thinking, the Philippian believers had different levels of love. (2:2) They did not have the same love toward all the saints for the keeping of oneness. It is possible that we in the church life today may not have the same love for all the saints. Instead, our love may be on different levels. As a result, instead of practical oneness, there will be dissension. Paul also speaks of being joined in soul. This indicates that the dissension among the Philippians was due to their not being joined in soul, not thinking the one thing in their mind, the leading part of the soul. Their problem was not with their spirit, but with their soul, especially with their mind. They had Christ in their spirit through regeneration, but they did not have Christ fully in their soul through transformation.

RIVALRY AND VAINGLORY VS. LOWLINESS OF MIND - The dissenting Philippians were doing things out of rivalry or vainglory, both of which cause dissension among believers. (2:3) Rivalry and vainglory may lie hidden among us. Even when we testify in the church meetings, there may be rivalry. Such a word may not be uttered, but this thought may be in the heart of those brothers. Rivalry and vainglory are often found together. Where there is rivalry, there is usually vainglory. Paul was happy that they loved the Lord and that they were standing there in Philippi for the Lord's testimony. He rejoiced, but his rejoicing was not yet full. It could not be full as long as rivalry existed among them. Furthermore, some of them were seeking vainglory. If they had any consolation of love toward him, he pleaded that they should please make his joy full by not doing anything by way of rivalry or vainglory. Instead, in lowliness of mind, count others more excellent than themselves. In 2:3 Paul speaks of lowliness of mind. Lowliness is versus both rivalry and vainglory. The kind of lowliness Paul speaks of is not our natural lowliness; it is the lowliness of Christ, as illustrated in verses 7 and 8. Paul's use of the word mind here is another indication that the problem of dissension among the Philippians was a matter of their untransformed mind. They needed to have the mind which was in Christ (2:5). In 2:4 Paul says, that we should not regard only our virtues and qualities, but also the virtues and qualities of others.

MAKING THE APOSTLE'S JOY FULL - Making the apostle's joy full involves more than just having a proper attitude. The only thing that could make the apostle's joy full was for the saints to take his word to experience Christ adequately and normally. In 2:2 Paul tells the saints to think the same thing and the one thing. To think the same thing is to have our minds occupied with Christ, saturated with Him, and allowing Him to spread from our spirit into our mind and to take full possession of our mind, even to saturate our mind with His. If our mind is saturated with the mind of Christ, our mind will be wholly set on the spirit. Then we shall be those who have been occupied, permeated, and saturated by Christ and with Christ. If this had been the condition of the believers in Philippi, Paul would have been extremely happy. His joy concerning them would have been full. Paul's desire was that all the saints would be occupied with Christ and thereby think the same thing. Christ is unique, central, and universal. When in an experiential way, not just in a doctrinal way, Christ becomes our centrality and universality, we shall automatically think the same thing. We can test whether or not we truly think the same thing by checking if we have the same love, are joined in soul, are free from rivalry and vainglory, count others more excellent than ourselves, and regard the virtues and qualities of others. These matters will always test to what extent we have actually been occupied by Christ, taken over by Christ, and saturated with Christ.

CHRIST AS THE PATTERN WITHIN US OBJECTIVELY & SUBJECTIVELY- In 2:5-8 Paul presents Christ as our pattern. This pattern is not only objective, but also subjective. Verse 9 indicates clearly that God has highly exalted Christ. Thus, there can be no doubt that as

¹ This outline is excerpted from the Life Study of Philippians, by Witness Lee. The adapter is solely responsible for any copy or editorial errors.

our pattern Christ is in heaven. He has been exalted to the highest peak in the universe, where God is. This is related to the objective aspect of the pattern. However, if Christ were only in the third heaven objectively, how could we take Him as our pattern today? How could we, who are on earth, follow One who has been exalted and who is now in heaven? It would be impossible. In order for us to take Christ as our pattern, this pattern must be subjective. Verse 12 indicates that the pattern is subjective. How is it possible for us to work out our own salvation? If we could work out our salvation, would that not make salvation a matter of our own works? Since salvation is not of works, but of grace, what does Paul mean by telling us to work out our salvation? Salvation here is not salvation from the lake of fire. The words so then in verse 12 indicate that what Paul says in this verse is a consequence of what has gone before. Working out our salvation is the result of taking Christ as our pattern, as seen in the preceding verses. As our pattern, Christ is our salvation. However, this salvation needs to be worked out by us. The salvation in 2:12 is actually a living Person. This Person is the very Christ whom we live, experience, and enjoy. A pattern which is only objective could not be our salvation in this way. The fact that salvation is a living Person and that this Person is our pattern indicates that the pattern is subjective as well as objective. God's operating in us is related to our working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. God operates in us both the willing and the working for His good pleasure. Yes, in ourselves we are not able. But God, the One operating in us, is able. Our responsibility is to cooperate with Him. When we cooperate with God's operation in us, we take Christ as our pattern.

THE MIND WHICH WAS IN CHRIST OUR PATTERN - Verse 5 refers to the *counting* and *regarding* in verses 3 and 4. This kind of thinking, mind, attitude, was also in Christ when He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and humbled Himself, being found in fashion as a man (vv. 7-8). To have such a mind requires us to be one with Christ in His inward parts (1:8). To experience Christ, we need to be one with Him to such an extent, that is, in His tender inward feeling and in His thinking. The Greek word rendered *subsisting* (2:6) denotes existing from the beginning. It implies the Lord's eternal preexistence. The word form refers to the expression, not the fashion, of God's being (Heb. 1:3). It is identified with the essence and nature of God's Person and thus expresses His essence and nature. This refers to Christ's deity. In verse 6 Paul tells us that Christ did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Although the Lord was equal with God, He did not consider this equality a treasure to be grasped and retained. Rather, He laid aside the form of God, not the nature of God, and emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave.

When Christ emptied Himself, He laid aside what He possessed—the form of God. (2:7) The word *form* here is the same word as used for the form of God in verse 6. In His incarnation, the Lord did not alter His divine nature, but only His outward expression of the form of God to that of a slave. This was not a change of essence; it was a change of state. The word *becoming* indicates entering into a new state. Christ became in the "likeness of men." The form of God implies the inward reality of Christ's deity; the likeness of men denotes the outward appearance of His humanity. He appeared outwardly to men as a man, but inwardly He had the reality of deity. When Christ became in the likeness of men, entering into the condition of humanity, He was found in fashion as a man by men. The word *fashion* implies the outward guise, the semblance. What Christ looked like in His humanity was found by men to be in fashion as a man.

Being found in fashion as a man, Christ humbled Himself. First He emptied Himself by putting aside the form, the outward expression, of His deity and becoming in the likeness of men. Then He humbled Himself by becoming obedient even unto death. Christ was God with the expression of God. Although He was equal with God, He put aside this equality and emptied Himself by taking the likeness of men. This indicates that He became a man through incarnation. Then, being found in the appearance of a man, He humbled Himself. This means that when He was a man, He did not insist on anything. Rather, He humbled Himself to the point of dying on the cross. This is Christ as our pattern. Humbling Himself was a further step in emptying Himself. Christ's self-humbling manifests His self-emptying. The death of the cross was the climax of Christ's humiliation. To the Jews this was a curse (Deut. 21:22-23). To the Gentiles it was a death sentence imposed upon malefactors and slaves (Matt. 27:16-17, 20-23). Hence, it was a shameful thing (Heb. 12:2). The Lord's humiliation involves seven steps: emptying Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men, humbling Himself, becoming obedient, being obedient even unto death, and being obedient unto the death of the cross.

LIVING A CRUCIFIED LIFE- The pattern presented in these verses is now the life within us. This life is what we call a crucified life. The seven steps of Christ's humiliation are all aspects of the crucified life. Although Christ had the expression of deity, He laid aside this expression. However, He did not lay aside the reality of His deity. He laid aside the higher form, the form of God, and took on a much lower form, the form of a slave. In this, He emptied Himself. Surely this is a mark of a crucified life. Then, after becoming a man and being found in the appearance of a man, Christ humbled Himself even unto the death of the cross. This was the crucified life lived out in a full and absolute way. Christ is not only an outward pattern for us; He is also the life within us. As this inner life, He would have us experience Him and thereby live a crucified life. In this crucified life there is no room for rivalry, vainglory, or self-exaltation. On the contrary, there is self-emptying and self-humbling. Whenever we experience Christ and live Christ, we automatically live such a crucified life. This means that when we live Christ, we live the One who is the pattern of a crucified life. Then we also shall empty ourselves and humble ourselves.