

The Beauty of Christ

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the mind of Christ in us, which includes qualities such as humility, love, and service.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, John 13:34-35, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2-3, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 3:12-14, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 3:8-9

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Inner Beauty of Christ"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of embodying the inner beauty of Christ rather than focusing on physical representations. He highlights that true Christian life involves growing into the loveliness of Christ, which includes love, humility, and unity among believers. Miller points out that quarrels and divisions among Christians mar the spirit of the church, urging the need for harmony and mutual respect. He draws from Paul's teachings to illustrate that having the mind of Christ means living in love and service to others, reflecting Christ's character in our actions. Ultimately, Miller calls for Christians to prioritize the qualities of Christ in their lives, ensuring that their actions reflect His grace and compassion.

Transcript

We have no picture of Christ. There are many pictures of him which artists have painted, some of which are wondrously winning. But these are only men's conceptions of him whose life is so loving, so pure, so gracious, so true. And after all, it is not his physical face whose beauty we are to seek to get into our lives--but his inner, spiritual grace, the disposition, the qualities of mind and heart.

Perhaps we do not think enough of beauty of character and disposition, in forming our conception of Christian life. It is one thing to stand up among men and say, "I am a Christian!" and another thing to grow into the loveliness of Christ. Yet the latter is as important as the former. One may be altogether sincere in confessing Christ, may have come out honestly on Christ's side--and yet be full of faults, only a beginner, having everything of Christian duty yet to learn, and all the beautiful qualities of Christian character yet to acquire.

Paul tells us that we ought to have in us--the mind which was in Christ Jesus. That is, we are to be like Christ, to have the same spirit, the same temper and disposition, the same principles. The life of Christ as people saw it must be the pattern of our lives. We can learn what were the qualities of Christ's life, by a study of the Gospels. These little books not only tell us about Christ, of the facts of his life, the works he did, the words he spoke--they also show us his sympathy, his kindness, his helpfulness, how he lived, how

he endured his contacts with people, how he bore enmity and wrong treatment, unkindness, persecution.

One thing which Paul emphasizes as a characteristic of the mind that is in Christ Jesus--is a spirit of love among Christians. They should live together in peace, in true fellowship.

People differ in their temperaments. They have varying opinions on many subjects. Their tastes are not the same. Their circumstances are unlike. It is not easy for Christian people with such diverse lives--to live together always in unity. The church at Philippi seems to have been peculiarly happy in the harmony of its people--but even in this church, there were differences which marred somewhat the perfectness of the fellowship. Two women are named, who in some way had a fracture in their relationship. Formerly they had labored together in love--but something had happened, and they had become estranged. This difference between them was a blemish on the fair name of the church.

Quarrels between Christians, always sadly mar the spirit of a church. Those who love Christ, should never fail to live together in love. We should not insist on always having our own way. Perhaps the other person's way is as good as ours. Even if it is not as good, it will probably do less harm to take it--than to have our way prevail at the expense of contention and hurt feeling. We must be of one accord, of one mind--if we would have the divine blessing on our work.

Paul speaks with great earnestness on behalf of unity among Christian people. "If there is anything in the religion of Christ," he says, "I implore you to be of the same mind, to have the same love, to be of one accord." We know what it is to listen to discordant music, instruments not tuned to one chord, singers not singing in harmony. The discords grate painfully on a sensitive ear. So are wrangles, strifes, and contentions--to a sensitive heart. Think how differences among Christians, quarrels, bitter enmities, hatreds--must grieve Christ's great heart of love in heaven!

One of the reasons Paul gives why the godly women at Philippi should drop their contention, is that they may help make full his joy. Their strife grieved him. Pastors who have gentle hearts understand this. Quarrels among their people give them sleepless nights. No sweeter joy comes to a faithful pastor, than that which comes from knowing that his people are living and working together in love. "Make full my joy," cries this gentle-hearted pastor, from his prison at Rome, "by getting along together, by being of the same mind."

One writes of an artist with a quick eye for lights and colors, sitting one day in a cheerless room on the north side of a hotel. He was alone, far from home, and somewhat forlorn. As he sat and brooded that day, he noticed occasional flashings of sunlight coming through his window and falling upon the wall and ceiling of the room. He could not understand whence these flashes could come. He looked out, and presently saw a flock of pigeons flying in the air. The dim flashes of sunlight that he saw in his room were reflections from the birds' bright wings as they flew through the air. Paul was now in prison at Rome. His friends, away at Philippi, could flash joy into his dungeon to brighten the gloom. They could do it by loving each other. "Make full my joy that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

With very deep earnestness Paul lingers upon this subject. "Doing nothing through faction or vainglory." Faction is a quarrelsome spirit, a disposition to think too highly of one's self--to desire to rule, to have one's own way, not to yield to others, to claim a preeminence. Elsewhere the apostle urges Christians to be tenderly affectioned one to another, in honor preferring one another.

If we would keep this spirit in our hearts--we would never assert our opinion too persistently. Others may be as right as we are. We do not have all the wisdom, at least; if other people are obstinate and unreasonable, that does not give us a right to be obstinate and unreasonable too. Now is the time when we are specially to keep sweet. Sometimes we are advised in the interest of peace, when our friend is out of sorts and disposed to be exacting or disagreeable, to take special pains to be unusually good-natured and agreeable, making it impossible that there should be any friction between us. If other people are hard to live with--we must seek to be particularly cordial and genial. The best Christian is always the one who will bear the most--and keep the sweetest.

Another element in the mind of Christ is humility. "In humility of mind each counting the other better than himself." It is not easy to do this. We are apt to think we are wiser than others. Perhaps we are older, or have had longer experience. Or we have had a better education, or we are more talented, or we occupy a higher position. But these may not be infallible tests. God may speak through the other person--as well as through us!

We know something of our own faults; we do not know the other person's inner life, and we are forbidden to judge. But suppose we are really wiser and better--that will not give us a right to assert our superiority, to take the higher places and thrust our neighbors down to lower places. Humility reaches its best when it is ready to serve the lowliest.

If a man is better than his neighbor, why, he is to do the more for his neighbor. Jesus showed us the spirit of humility when he, conscious of his own divine glory, knowing that he had come from God and was going to God, performed the lowliest service man could perform, for those who were immeasurably less worthy than he was. Superiority means obligation. The greatest have the most to give, and the best have the largest power to help. The lesson is a large one. We are to seek to have our life--in every way like Christ's. That is what it is to have in us, the mind that was in Christ. It is to have the same love, the same interest in people, the same spirit of condescension and service.

We cannot too often repeat the lesson of love as Paul wrote it for us:

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever!" 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

These words tell us what the mind of Christ is. They were transcribed from Christ's own life. He was patient and kind. He never had an unkind, proud, or envious thought in his heart. He loved on through all wrong and unkindness. Love in his heart never became embittered. We cannot too often study the life of Christ to see how he lived. He was always gentle. No line in all the story of his life--tells us of his ever being rude or discourteous. He never treated anyone unkindly. He never tired of helping others. In the mind of Christ, there was infinite gentleness.

In the way Jesus helped others, he showed the graciousness of his power. There is a way of doing good that is arrogant and prideful. Some people are glad to give relief and to do favors--but they lack delicacy, and do their kindnesses in a way that gives pain to sensitive hearts. But the mind of Christ shows us how to do good in gracious ways--humbly, sweetly, beautifully!

"Thorns are only leaves that have failed to grow, through excessive heat, or lack of water, or other unfavorable conditions." Thorns were meant to be leaves, bright, beautiful, useful--but they got a wrong touch and turned out sharp, cruel, and offensive. It is the same with some people's helpful acts--they were meant to be beautiful, to feed the hunger of hearts, to comfort sorrow, to cheer discouragement, to bless men; but they have missed their graciousness. Instead of being green leaves, they are thorns, and give pain to those they touch.

There is also perverted service. Here is a man who has the reputation of being generous, whose gifts to beneficence are widely announced from time to time; but it is known to those who are familiar with his private life--that he has a sister living in abject poverty, to whom he shows no kindness whatever. Recently it was announced in the papers, that a young woman had entered a 'sisterhood', devoting her life to it by a solemn vow, who in doing so left behind her an invalid sister with no one to care for her, and a brother with a family of little children and no one to do love's duty for them. This girl saw no absurdity in abandoning these members of her own family who needed her so sorely, in order to enter a public institution in the name of religion, and devote herself to what is called a consecrated life. Many times is similar inconsistency committed by others. The duty that is right by their hand, that is theirs, too, by every sanction human and divine, is neglected; while they go far away to seek something that is not their duty at all.

Someone says, "Every village has among its residents, the man who is ready to lend a hand in local celebrations, to hoe in a neighbor's garden, mend a gate for a neighbor, or split kindlings for his neighbor's wife--but who leaves his own garden choked with weeds, his own gate off the hinges, his own wife to make out the best she can with her kindlings without his aid!" Not thus did our Master give out his life in service of love. He never withheld his hand from human need--but he did not neglect his own mother--in caring for the needs of other homes. He did first duties first. We are to have this mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus.

It is the mind of Christ which we are exhorted to have in us. It is not enough to pick out little lovely things here and there in his life and imitate them, as one might tie bunches of leaves and flowers on a dead branch to give it the semblance of life.

There is a suggestive story or legend of Leonardo da Vinci. When his great picture, the "Last Supper" was finished, it is said there was much discussion among the monks as to which detail was the best. One suggested this and another that. At length they all agreed that the best feature was the painting of the table-cloth with its fine drawing and rich coloring. The artist was grieved as he heard what they said. It had been his wish to make the face of the Master so far the most winsome feature, that it would instantly and overpoweringly attract every eye to itself. But now his friends praised the table-cloth and said nothing of the Master's face. Taking his brush, he blotted from the canvas every thread of the cloth, that the blessed face alone might win the adoration of all beholders. Let it be so with us. Whatever draws any eye or heart away from Christ--let us blot it out! "Have this mind in you--which was also in Christ Jesus."

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