

## The Mind of Christ

by John Angell James

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

You know full well, that the seat of all true religion is in the soul; and that it forms the character and guides the conduct by the power of an inward principle of spiritual life. True godliness is, in short, being *right-minded*. A question, however, arises as to what a right mind really is, and what kind of prevailing disposition the gospel requires in those who profess to believe it. This is answered by the apostle, where he says, "Let *this* mind be in you, which was *also in Christ Jesus*," Phil. 2:5-9. And he then goes on to show what Christ's mind was. This whole passage deserves your closest attention, both on account of its doctrinal truth and its practical bearing, for it shows in a very striking manner the intimate connection between Christian **truth** and Christian **practice**—and how the truth is employed by the sacred writers to enforce Christian practice. **The most sublime doctrines of our holy Christian religion, are all practical in their design and tendency**—they are not mere theory or academics—but are all of them "*the truth which is according to godliness*." If there is any mystery of religion which is great and high above the thoughts of men and angels, it is, without doubt, the incarnation of the Son of God; and if there be any place where this important truth is clearly and magnificently represented, it is this passage. The terms are at once so sublime and majestic, that it is impossible anything more sublime or majestic could be said; the meaning is so noble and so well established, that nothing more powerful could be imagined.

The design of the passage is to enforce the injunctions of the preceding verses, that is, to repress all selfish considerations of our own rights, interests, and dignity, and in the exercise of a kind and condescending regard to the welfare of others, to forego for their advantage what we might claim for our own. "Look not every man on his own things—but every man also on the things of others." The disposition which the

apostle enjoins is that particular species of Christian virtue which stands opposed to a stiff and tenacious maintenance of outward distinctions, personal rights, and social rank and precedence; and which consists of a meek humility, and benevolent condescension for the sake of promoting the comfort and interests of our fellow Christians. And because this is the most difficult lesson for our proud and selfish hearts to learn in the school of Christ, he enforces it by the power of the most cogent and splendid example which the universe contains, I mean that of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever, therefore, is the right view of the passage must of necessity contain an instance, on the part of Christ, of great and striking condescension, and of profound humility, or it would not be relevant to the occasion. Whatever exposition of it leaves out this, or does not bring it prominently forward, cannot be the right one.

Whoever will attentively, and without the bias of preconceived notions or systems, consider this passage, will observe that the apostle points out three different states or conditions of our Lord Jesus Christ—

1. The first is a state of *antecedent infinite dignity and glory*, expressed in the words, "Who being in the form of God."
2. The second is a state of *subsequent humiliation*, described thus, "but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant."
3. The third is a state of *consequent exaltation*, set forth in what follows, "Therefore God has highly exalted him."

Now the obvious design of the apostle's argument is to prove the benevolent and condescending humility of Christ, by descending from the first of these states to the second. Had there been no previous dignity and glory, there could have been no subsequent condescension, because condescension necessarily involves the idea of a stoop or descent from some previous dignity or elevation; a resignation of some claim to a superior station, a foregoing of some advantage or pre-eminence. And, at the same time, it is necessary that such humiliation should be perfectly

voluntary. So that in our Lord's case, if there were any condescension at all, he must have had a previous and dignified existence, from which he stooped in becoming man; and in which he must have acted with perfect freedom of choice, without being under any other obligation than the constraint of his own benevolence. If there had been no previous state of glory; or allowing there had, if he had been under any obligation in doing what he did—either of authority or justice—there could have been no benevolent condescension.

It ought to be observed also, that his antecedent state of glory, and his acquired or consequent state of exaltation, are two perfectly distinct and separate states. The opponents of our Lord's true and proper Divinity think it enough to say, in answer to all the arguments for this truth brought from the glory and power ascribed to him, that he received all this at his resurrection and ascension, and that this power and glory are not his natural perfections—but his acquired honors, and of no more ancient date than the work of redemption. "But this is to confound the distinct states of glory which belong to him; the glory which he had *with* the Father before the world was, and the glory which he received *from* the Father at the redemption of man; one the glory of nature—the other the glory of office; one the glory of the eternal Logos, or Word—the other the glory of the Son of Man; in short, one the glory of his eternal Divinity—and the other the glory of his mediatorial Person, as God-man."

Let us now attend to a brief exposition of the different parts of this wonderful passage.

**"Who being in the form of God."** What is meant by the form of God? Not, as some assert, his power to work miracles. This power is nowhere else so called—if this were its meaning, the apostles were as truly in the form of God as Christ himself, for *they* also wrought miracles as well as he. Whatever it means, it was possessed previous to his being in the likeness of men, and laid aside when he became in fashion as a man; but Christ was in the likeness of men thirty years before he wrought any miracle, and, in fact, never to the last laid aside this power. Moreover, as the

"form of a servant," and "the likeness and fashion of a man," signify true humanity—the form of God, to which these expressions are put in contrast, must mean true and proper Divinity. It refers, then, to the visible manifestation of the Divine glory in heaven, similar—but transcendently superior, to the Shekinah, or symbol of the Divine presence, in the Holy of Holies, upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubim.

**"Thought it not robbery to be equal with God,"** deemed it no usurpation to receive the honors, and exercise the rights of Deity. This expression is rendered by some expositors thus, "He did not covet to appear as God." If this *be* the true interpretation, it rather strengthens than weakens the argument for Christ's Divinity. For if he were not God, what condescension was it in him, as man, not to covet to *appear* as God? Is it any condescension in the constable of a village not to covet to appear in the state and character of royalty?

**"But made himself of no reputation,"** or as the words literally rendered mean, "*he emptied or divested himself*" of this manifestation of his glory; he laid it aside, as a monarch might the robes and regalia of his state, as a sovereign. Of his Divine *nature* Christ could not divest himself—of his Divine *state* or manifestation, he could.

**"And took upon him the form of a servant,"** by serving not only God—but others.

**"He was made in the likeness of men."** Instead of appearing as God, he came as man; for being made in the likeness of men, signifies that he was truly human.

**"And being found in fashion as a man."** In what fashion should, or could he be found, if he were *only* man? What was there wonderful, or worthy of remark in this, if he might not and could not have appeared in some other fashion?

**"He humbled himself."** How? By becoming "**obedient unto death.**" Here is the proof and display of his humility, his being obedient unto death, his being willing to die, and submitting to the stroke of mortality. His death was a

voluntary act; he chose to die, and it was condescension in him so to do. But it may be well asked, "If he were nothing but man, what choice had he in the matter, or what condescension did he display in submitting to it?" If he were only man, mortality was his lot, his condition, and in no sense his choice, and could not, therefore, be any voluntary humility. How is that to be humility in Christ, which is necessity in every one else? Only on the ground, that while in one view of his Person he is truly and properly man, in another view he is more than man.

***"Even the death of the cross."*** Crucifixion was the most torturing and degrading method of execution; being accursed by the law of the Jews, and ignominious by that of the Gentiles; the punishment of the lowest slaves, and worst of felons.

Now, then, look at the mind of Christ as set forth in this most wonderful transaction. He who was truly and properly God, who manifested himself by a visible glorious light in heaven, and received the adoration of the celestial hosts, instead of coming down upon earth for our redemption in the splendor of Divine majesty, took upon him a servile condition, and displayed his condescension by becoming man—but though man, yet being also Lord of all things, he was superior to the necessity of dying, and became subject to death only because he chose to die. To die was, therefore, in him astonishing humility; but the climax of all this stupendous condescension, was his submission to *the death of the cross*. If we take into consideration, then, the Deity of Christ, the argument of the apostle is conclusive, and his example complete; but without this, you will hardly find either his argument, or the humility of Christ Jesus.

"The Divinity of Jesus Christ is, in the system of grace, the sun, to which all its parts are subordinate, and all their stations refer; which binds them in sacred concord, and imparts to them radiance, life, and vigor. Take from it this central luminary, and, the glory is departed. Its holy harmonies are broken—the elements rush to chaos—the light of salvation is extinguished forever." (Mason)

Before I come to the practical application of the passage on

which I have dwelt in this address, I will give a summary of the Scripture evidence of the fact of Christ's true and proper Divinity. The argument is this— Inasmuch as every title, attribute, work, and honor belonging to Deity is, without limitation or reserve, ascribed to Christ in Scripture, he, in addition to his being in one view truly and properly man, must, in another, be as truly and properly God. He is thus God and man, in one mysterious Person.

### ***TITLES of Deity ascribed to Christ***

Jehovah; Isaiah 6 compared with John 12:41.

Isaiah 45:22-25, compared with Romans 14:10-12. Jer. 23:6.

God; John 1:1-4.

God with us; Isaiah 7:14.

Mighty God; Isaiah 9:6.

God over all; Rom. 9:4.

God manifest in the flesh; 1 Tim. 3:16.

Great God; Titus 2:13. True God; 1 John 5:20.

### ***ATTRIBUTES of Deity***

**Eternity.** Isaiah 9:6. John 8:58. Heb. 1:12; 13:8. Rev. 1:8.

**Omnipresence.** Matt. 18:20.

**Omnipotence.** Matt. 28:18. Heb. 1:3. Rev. 1:8.

**Omniscience.** Rev. 2:23, compared with Jer. 17:10.

### ***WORKS of Deity***

**Creation.** John 1:3-10. Col. 1:16. Heb. 1:2.

**Preservation of all things.** Heb. 1:3.

**Government of the universe.** Dan. 2:9-14. Matt. 28:18. 1 Cor. 15:24-27. Ephes. 1:20-23. Philip. 2:9-11.

**Regeneration.** John 5:25, 26.

**Resurrection of the dead.** John 5:28; 11:25.

**General Judgment.** John 5:22. Acts 17:31. Rom. 14:9-10. 2 Cor. 5:10.

### ***HONORS of Deity***

**Chief end of the Creation.** Col. 1:15.

**Worship, Prayer.** Acts 7:59. 2 Cor. 13:8. Rom. 1:7; and the benedictions and salutations, at the commencement and conclusion of most of the epistles.

**Praise and Adoration.** Rev. 5.

These are but a selection from the passages of Scripture which assert and prove the Divinity of our Lord. In fact, this great truth is so interwoven with the very texture of revelation, and occurs incidentally in so many places, that it appears to me impossible to separate it without destroying the whole. Let these passages be well studied, and accurately stored in the mind, both in their own words and meaning. I now return to the passage which has been the subject of previous remark, "*Let the mind which was in Christ be also in you.*"

Jesus Christ is the only Teacher who ever made a similarity of disposition to himself—a test and badge of discipleship. He is not only the teacher—but the pattern of his own religion. His example is an essential part of his system. A man might be a philosopher of any school, if he only embraces the principles of his master, although in temper and spirit he be as opposite to his leader as the east is from the west. But this is not enough to constitute a man a Christian; for he must not only receive the doctrines of our Lord—but must imbibe his very spirit. He must not only believe all he taught—but he must live as he lived, think as he thought, and feel as he felt. Christ's mind must be in *his* mind, as far as he can contain it, and Christ's heart must be

in *his* heart. I really know nothing more instructive, or more solemnly impressive than this. To be a Christian, it is not only necessary we should adopt Christ's doctrines, comply with his ordinances, observe his sacraments, associate with his church, and espouse his cause; no, nor even conform outwardly to his conduct—but we must have his very mind in us. The prevailing spirit and disposition of *his* mind, must be *ours* also; and unless the eye of man sees the image of Christ upon our character, and the eye of God see the mind of Christ in our soul, we are not acknowledged as true Christians.

And what was the mind of Christ? Who shall describe it? Only the apostles who have written his life. How *holy* was his mind! Not the shadow of sin, nor the least taint of moral evil ever passed over it, to becloud or pollute its immaculate purity. His **mind** was the seat of the most ineffable *benevolence*. His **heart** was the very temple of love—nothing malevolent, vindictive, or cruel, ever found a place there. All his **actions**, words, and feelings were the workings of incomparable love. His *humility* was equal to his purity and benevolence—and it is more especially to the latter of these triune graces that the apostle refers when he says, "Let *this* mind also be in you." It is the Savior's condescension which is especially commended to our attention and imitation. And none ought to be so distinguished for this virtue as the advocates for the Divinity of Christ. It comes upon them with the weight of a peculiar obligation. It is their appropriate duty, and ought to be their distinction.

See, my dear friends, what true religion is—not, as I have had frequent occasion to remark, mere churchmanship or dissent; not episcopacy, Presbyterianism, independency, Methodism, or baptism; not orthodoxy of creed, or gorgeousness of ceremony; not a matter of church government, or of spiritual organization. No! No! True religion is having the mind of Christ. Did it ever occur to you to examine how little is said by the sacred writers, about observing the sabbath and the sacraments; about public worship and religious ceremonies; compared with what is said about holiness, benevolence, and humility? But, alas! alas! how much more eager are the multitudes of professors

about the one than the other, inverting Christ's order, and setting forms above spirit—just because it is so much more easy, and so much more congenial with all the feelings of our proud and corrupt nature, to hear a sermon, observe a sacrament, and repose for safety upon the trueness of our church—than to mortify the corruptions of our own mind, and to transplant into it the virtues and the graces of the mind of Christ.

For what purpose have four different pens been employed by the hand of inspiration, in writing the Gospels—but to show us the mind of Christ for our imitation, as well as his atoning work for our salvation, and by this quadruple delineation of his beautiful character, to impress us not only with its charms—but with the necessity of our resembling it.

See how the life of piety is to be promoted—by reading the Gospels, and that not only to learn how sin is to be pardoned—but what holiness is, and how it is to be promoted. Religion in us is no fancy sketch; no original picture; but a copy, and Christ is the original. To this we must sit down, with the determination, and the hope, of producing, by the help of Divine grace, something resembling it in ourselves; and like artists keeping their eye constantly upon the original they are copying, not for the purpose of admiring it merely, though they do this, and their admiration helps their object in copying—but for the purpose of producing as perfect a resemblance as possible. So must we, in reading the Gospels, keep our minds intently fixed upon the conduct and spirit of Jesus, not merely to see and say, "How beautiful!" but to copy it!

If nothing short of this be true religion, how comparatively little of it is there in our world. If the mind of Christ in us be necessary to make out our claim to the character of a Christian, how many must forego the honor. It is enough to make us all tremble for ourselves and one another. Where and in whom is to be seen the union of holiness, benevolence, and condescension, which formed the character of the Savior? Is this **holiness** to be found in those professors who, though they are free from external vice and immorality, allow the corruptions of their heart to go unmortified; and who indulge, instead of crucifying, the

passions and lusts of the flesh? Is his **benevolence** to be found in those who are so fond of the world, so grasping, and so hoarding, that little or nothing can be extorted from their reluctant hands for the salvation of sinners, and the glory of God? And then where is his **humility** to be seen in his followers? Is it to be found in those who will never forego a single point of precedence, or one punctilio of etiquette; who *will* have their rights, and *all* their rights, at whatever cost of principle or peace; who are so tenacious of *all* that belongs to them, not only in the way of property—but of influence and respect, that they will not brook the least slight—but resent the smallest possible neglect of their claims, or infringement of their prerogative, or opposition to their will, with all the boilings of wounded pride, and mortified vanity? They are so filled with high notions and excessive admiration of their own fancied greatness and excellence, that if they are not flattered and caressed, they will feel as if they were robbed of their rights, and retire in disgust and indignation.

Oh, is *this* the mind that was in Christ? It is matter of little astonishment that the people of the world should not evince the Christian temper; but that the professed disciples of Christ should be so lacking in it, is as surprising as it is painful. It might have been expected that in the school of such a Master, self-denial and humility would have been accounted by his disciples cardinal virtues; that all would commence the cultivation of these Christlike virtues the moment they took their place at his feet; and that the post of honor and ambition with them, would be the lowest instead of the highest place. Yet how widely different is the case. It would seem as if men had yet to learn either what the mind of Christ really is, or that this mind was binding upon them; and as if it were the design of Christianity to form the proud, intolerant, and selfish ecclesiastic professor—rather than the holy, meek, and humble Christian.

It would appear from the spirit and conduct of some, as if to be zealots for a creed or a church, were the true signs of discipleship, instead of the temper of Jesus; and yet an apostle has told us, that "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Rom. 8:9. Many had need study

afresh the elemental principles of our holy religion, to learn in what it truly consists. And if they will allow Christ and his apostles to teach them, instead of fathers and doctors, councils and convocations, they would learn that the creeds and the ceremonies of the church, are poor substitutes for the mind of Christ.

Therefore, my dear friends, I entreat you cultivate the Christian temper; seek for the spirit of Christ, and be content with nothing short of the mind that was in him. Let me entreat you to contemplate him—first upon the **throne of glory**, adored by angels; and then upon the **cross of Calvary**, despised, rejected, insulted, murdered by men; and when you have been filled with astonishment at the grace that induced him thus to humble himself, examine yourselves as to what you know of the holy and humble benevolence which dictated this wondrous, yes, this ineffably mysterious condescension. Confine your attention for a while to this one point of inquiry—let go everything else for a season; drop creeds, sacraments, sabbaths, ordinances, alms-deeds, and press right home to your conscience the question, "*What do I have of the mind of Christ?*" Does my heart answer, does my disposition correspond, to the holy, meek, humble, forgiving, benevolent, patient, self-denying mind of Christ? Do men who know the beauty and glory of the original, as it is delineated on the page of the gospel, when they see me, say, "There is the image of Christ!" Or do they look skeptically on, and after standing in silence for some time, profess they can see little or no resemblance? Can you hold up *your* spirit and disposition to the world, and say, "Behold the mind of Christ?" Will Christ acknowledge *your* mind to be his mind? Oh, be satisfied with nothing short of a copy of Christ's heart into yours. You must go lower, lower, lower yet, in self-denying service for God and his saints.

I need scarcely point out to you again the intimate connection between the **practical principles** of Christianity, and the **great doctrines** of Christianity. Take away the incarnation of our Lord, his sacrifice upon the cross, and his atoning death, and the gospel loses its glorious peculiarities. And if you blot out his Divinity, his atonement loses its efficacy, and his example its power. "If we take away his

divinity," says Mr. Hall, "this great example dwindles into nothing. Rob him of his Divinity, and you divest him of his humility. It is this which renders his sacrifice of infinite value, his cross so inexpressibly awful and interesting, and to his people so ineffably precious. **The cross of Jesus Christ is the appropriate, the appointed rendezvous of heaven and earth**—the meeting place between God and the sinner. Deprive Jesus Christ of his divinity, and all these momentous truths dwindle into inexpressible futilities. Doctrines meant to warm and kindle our hearts, fill us with perplexity. When we look for a glorious mystery, we find nothing but the obscurity which makes men rack their invention to find out the meaning of those passages, which it is plain the apostle poured forth in a stream of exquisite affection and delight."

And never, never forget, my beloved friends, that the Divinity of Christ, however firmly it may be held, is never properly felt, never rightly improved, nor truly enjoyed, until it is experienced to be a doctrine that fills the soul with a vivid resemblance to that holiness, benevolence, and humility, which were so conspicuously displayed by Him, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God—but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men—and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

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