

“The Mind of Christ”

Be a Christian! That’s what the Apostle Paul is saying here in our text for this evening. Be who you are – one who is united to Jesus Christ by faith. “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” – that is, lets your life be in sync with the Gospel.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Well, according to Paul’s words here – it means not only to believe in Jesus, but also “to suffer for His sake.” And what he highlights in these verses is that – being a Christian means having the mind of Christ.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which IS yours in Christ Jesus.” You HAVE the mind of Christ – it IS yours. But there’s a problem (otherwise Paul wouldn’t have to say a word about it). The problem is that there is a struggle, a battle, and conflict that the Christian has (just as Paul did).

The Christian, in this life, is at the same time a sinner and a saint. His sinful nature adheres to his flesh as long as he lives in this world, until the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day – and, at the same time – he is redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ – a saint, a “holy one” – holy in Christ Jesus.

St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of this conflict that the sinner-saint Christian faces. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood [that is, against other people], but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

The Christian’s battle is a spiritual battle – against the devil and all his hordes. And in this spiritual battle, the devil uses your sinful “flesh and blood” against you.

Our three great enemies are the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, writes Luther in the Small Catechism. These enemies have a different mind – and different way of thinking – a different worldview. And it is not Christian! That’s why St. Paul says: “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” – or, as I’ve mentioned – be a Christian!

The Christian's life is one of repentance and faith. As the baptized children of God, by daily contrition (sorrow for our sins) and repentance, the Old Adam is drowned, put to death – and the new man arises to live by faith in Jesus Christ – with a new mind, the mind of Christ.

So, what is this “mind of Christ”? As St. Paul says, it is one of humility. Like Christ, it is one in which we sacrifice our SELF – our sinful SELF with all it's evil desires.

Jesus Christ not only sacrifices Himself on the cross of Calvary – He sacrifices Himself throughout His life. He sacrifices His place in heaven. He, the Son of God, leaves His heavenly throne to take on our human flesh and blood – for the sake of sinners.

Christ makes Himself to be nothing. His mind is not one of “rivalry and conceit” – one where He stands up for Himself – one in which all He does is to provide for Himself – a rivalry of outdoing and one-ups-manship – playing the comparison game in order to exalt Himself.

His focus is not on Himself – but taking the form of a servant – His focus is on the ones He serves – His focus is on you! He counts you to be more significant than Himself – the saving of your life more important than saving His own life.

He looks to the interests of others – to His Father's will – and the sinners needs. His prayer is “thy will be done” – not, “my will be done.” This is the mind of Christ.

This mind of Christ “is yours in Christ Jesus” – and yet, you live in conflict. The devil, the world, and your sinful nature are turned against you – waging war – teaching you to live and pray, “my will be done.”

That is why Jesus has taught you to pray “thy will [Our Father's will] be done.” That's why the Christian prays that Our Father would break and hinder me – my sinful nature, that which lives in conflict with God our heavenly Father.

And that is what the Lord is doing, continually doing, through Holy Baptism – drowning our Old Adam through daily contrition and repentance – so that the new man, with the mind of Christ, might live.

Be a Christian! Be aware of when you are contending with God Himself – when you are not living with the humility of Jesus Christ. Pay attention to your words. When your conversations are full of “I” and “me and my” – “my money, my time, my turn, my energy” (and so on) – then your manner of life is not worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Where is your focus? Do you pay attention only to yourself? Do you view the world as if it all should revolve around you and what you WANT? Is it myopic, self-centered? What do you see, and focus on – when you get up each day – when you go about your daily tasks – when you lay down at night? [P]

Dear Christians, you are taken care of – fully served by Christ. Your encouragement is in Christ. Your comfort is in His love for you. You are led by the Holy Spirit. You are the recipient of God’s affection and sympathy.

With Christ, your eyes are turned outward. Stop each day and look around. Who do you see? These people are the ones that the Lord has given you to serve with the humility of Christ Himself. With the mind of Christ, you humble yourself in service to them.

You sacrifice yourself for your spouse – looking to see what she needs. Rather than talk about yourself, you speak for the sake of your children, for their benefit. Seeing that you are provided for in Christ Jesus – you look to the needs of your neighbor.

And that’s not easy, it’s a daily battle – for your sinful nature wants to see others as not worthy, not as significant as yourself – so that you live only for yourself. The mind of Christ leads you to sacrifice your SELF – your sinful nature – confessing your sins, trusting in Christ’s forgiveness – and living for the sake of others.

Dearly beloved, it is truly amazing that God Himself always has you in mind. What a great treasure you have, that God is “for me” – not just that He notices me – but knows me and loves me in spite of rebellious sin – humbles Himself “for me,” even to the point of death.

In our final hymn this evening, you will sing with Christ – “all this I gladly suffer” – gladly setting aside yourself in order to love your neighbor – because God, in Christ, loves you. This is what it means that you “have” the mind of Christ – this is what it means to be a Christian. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.