

# *Bringing Inward Order into the Church in Philippi through the Organic Mind of Christ*

*by John Pester*

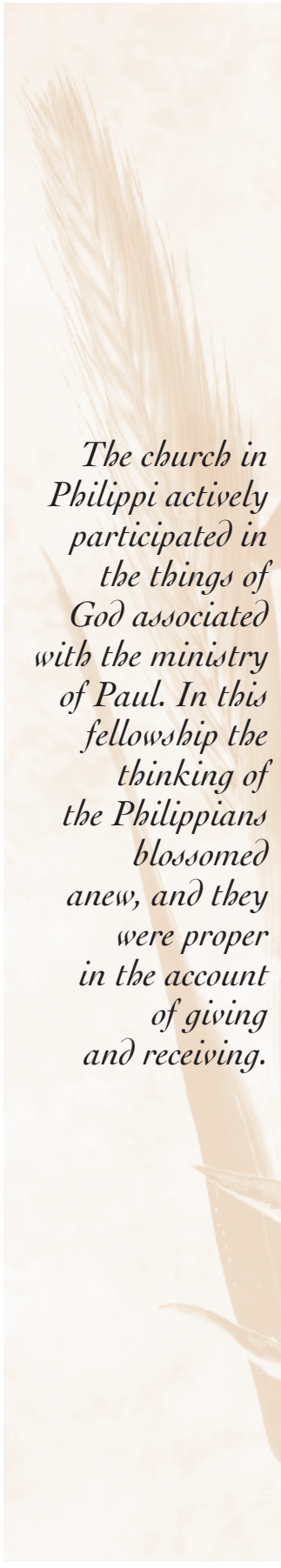
The church in Philippi is regarded as an exemplary church in the New Testament. In its outward order it had proper administrative arrangements, it had fellowship with other churches and the apostle, and it participated in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. However, there were inward obstacles that hindered the working out of the believers' ongoing salvation, both personal and corporate. By not standing firm in one spirit and not striving together with one soul, the church manifested an atmosphere of disharmony from not thinking the same thing, having the same love, being joined in soul, and thinking the one thing. They displayed selfish ambitions in the pursuit of vainglory by regarding each his own virtues rather than the virtues of others. These subjective obstacles, subsequently, filled the church in Philippi with murmurings and reasonings. In response to these conditions, Paul in Philippians 2 exhorts the believers to incorporate the organic mind of Christ, which issued in His humiliation and exaltation, that is, to let His mind become their mind, their organic thinking. Paul did not regard Christ's pattern in chapter 2 merely as an ethical model to emulate but as an organic pattern to experience. In chapter 3 Paul then demonstrates his incorporation of the mind of Christ in his own experience of humiliation and his hopeful attainment to the exaltation of the out-resurrection from the dead. For Paul, the progression from outward matters to inward growth through the corporate identification and subsequent organic participation in Christ's thinking, Christ's mind, is central to the church being the joyful testimony of Jesus.

## **Outward Order in the Church in Philippi**

In its outward condition there was an orderly testimony of Jesus in the church in Philippi, although it was limited in nature. There was administrative order through the offices of elders as overseers and deacons as serving ones: "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (1:1). The appointment of elders is a foundational development in the establishment of a local church, and when Paul revisited the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where he had previously spoken the gospel and gained believers to the faith, he appointed elders in these cities (Acts 14:21, 23).

All the churches here in which elders were appointed by the apostles had been established within less than one year. Hence, the elders appointed in these churches could not have been fully mature. They must have been considered elders because they were comparatively the most mature among the believers. They were...appointed by the apostles according to their maturity of life in Christ. They were charged by the apostles to care for the leadership and shepherding in their churches. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Acts 14:23, note 1)

The term *elder* relates to the person of an appointed believer, and *overseer* refers to the



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function of the appointed leader, that is, to oversee through care and shepherding. Philippians 1:1, “showing that a local church is composed of the saints, with overseers to take the lead and deacons to serve, indicates that the church in Philippi was in good order” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 1, note 4). In its outward arrangement the church in Philippi testified of the presence of the order of the Head, Christ, which brought in a furtherance of the gospel through the fellowship of the Body.

In Paul’s remembrance of the Philippians, a remembrance filled with petitions of joy, he specifically thanks them for their “fellowship unto the furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now” (v. 5). The saints in Philippi outwardly had fellowship unto the gospel, “participating in the furtherance of the gospel through the apostle Paul’s ministry. This participation included their financial contributions to the apostle” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 5, note 1). In *A Translators Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, I-Jiin Loh and Eugene A. Nida comment on the word *fellowship*, which they translate as “partnership”: “The context seems to indicate that Paul is using ‘partnership’ in a wider sense and hence refers to all the cooperation and share in the work of the gospel which the Philippians have shown, whether it be in the spreading of the gospel, in sympathy, in suffering, or in generosity” (11). In *Philippians in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, Kenneth S. Wuest notes that “the Greek word translated ‘fellowship,’ speaks of a common interest and a mutual and active participation in the things of God in which the believer and the Holy Spirit are joint-participants” (57). Outwardly, the church in Philippi actively participated in the things of God associated with the ministry of Paul. In this fellowship the thinking of the Philippians blossomed anew (4:10), and in contrast to the believers in other churches, they were proper in the account of giving and receiving, sending both once and again to meet Paul’s need (vv. 15-16).

Furthermore, the believers in Philippi were fellow partakers of grace with Paul in the defense and confirmation of the gospel (1:7). Outwardly, as Robert Govett suggests in *Govett on Philippians*, “the Apostle does not find any evil doctrine among the Philippians” (22). The confusion caused by the Judaizers’ insistence on the observance of circumcision, the doctrine that so plagued and influenced many Gentile churches (cf. Acts 11:2-3; 15:1-21; Rom. 2:25-29; Gal. 2:11-14; Col. 3:11; Titus 1:10), is not dealt with in any detail by Paul in Philippians. This would indicate that the Philippians were not greatly affected by this errant teaching. So rather than referencing and refuting the content of the Judaistic teachings circulating among the churches, as he did in the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul only reminds the Philippians of the character of the persons propounding these doctrines, encouraging them to “beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision” (Phil. 3:2).

Since no conjunction is used between any of these three clauses, they must refer to the same class of people. Dogs are unclean (Lev. 11:27), the evil workers are evil, and the concision are those deserving of contempt. (*Concision*, meaning *mutilation*, is a contemptuous term for *circumcision*...) The dogs here are the Judaizers. In nature the Judaizers are unclean dogs, in behavior they are evil workers, and in religion they are the concision, people of shame. In such a book concerning the experience and enjoyment of Christ, the apostle warned the Gentile believers to be wary of such unclean, evil, and contemptible people. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Phil. 3:2, note 2)

The limited reference to the content of the evil doctrines is an indication that the doctrines themselves had little influence among the believers in Philippi and that the believers had the capacity to defend against doctrines that would undermine the New Testament content of the gospel. Paul subsequently confirms that the proper content of the gospel is the incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (2:7-11), with these elements being bountifully supplied in and by the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:19). In their participation in this defense and confirmation, the Philippians also joyfully endured outward rejection and opposition. They were graciously granted

not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer on His behalf, having the same struggle which they saw in Paul and heard to be in him (vv. 29-30). “Paul was a pattern set up by God’s grace for His New Testament economy (1 Tim. 1:14-16). The New Testament believers should experience and enjoy Christ by living and magnifying Him as Paul did in his sufferings for Christ, that they may be fellow partakers with Paul of grace” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Phil. 1:30, note 1).

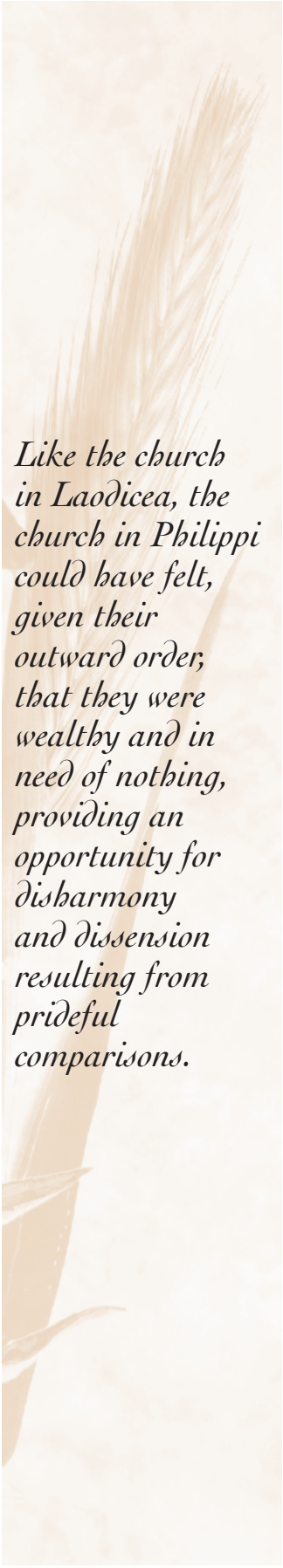
**D**espite all these commendable manifestations in the outward testimony of the church in Philippi—administrative order involving oversight and service, fellowship unto the furtherance of the gospel involving giving and receiving to meet the need of the apostle, and the defense and confirmation of the gospel involving rejection and suffering—there were strong indications of an inward disorder. The apostle addresses this inward disorder by pointing the believers in Philippi to the deeper experience of salvation that is available by letting the organic mind of Christ operate in them.

### Inward Disorder in the Church in Philippi

In many respects, the inward disorder in the church in Philippi was a consequence of their prideful response to their outstanding outward order. Like the church in Laodicea, the church in Philippi could have felt, given their outward order, that they were wealthy and in need of nothing (Rev. 3:17), providing an opportunity for disharmony and dissension resulting from prideful comparisons to become paramount in their natural thinking. Paul begins to touch the presence of this inward disharmony between the believers in Philippi obliquely; he prays, “That your love may abound yet more and more in full knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve by testing the things which differ and are more excellent” (Phil. 1:9-10). The phrase *yet more and more* is an indication of contentions related to a shortage of love, and the phrase *the things which differ* is an indication of the presence of differences in thoughts, actions, and preferences.

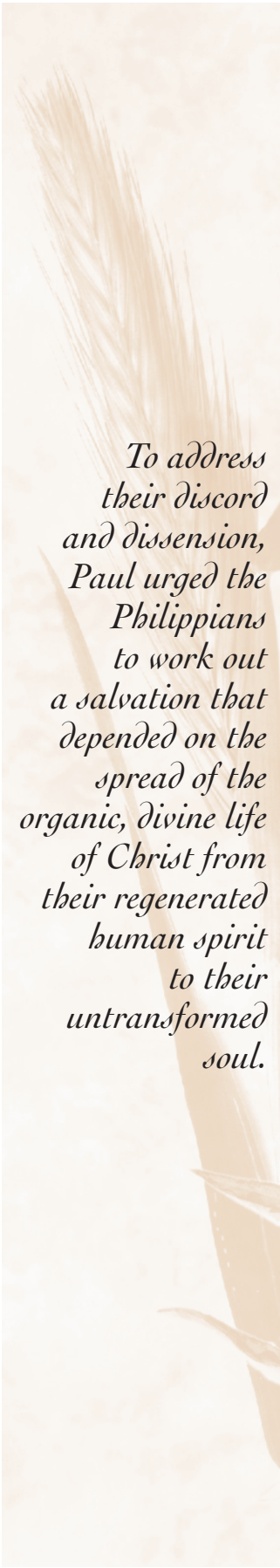
In verse 27 Paul directly addresses the Philippians’ condition of inward disorder, saying, “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, that whether coming and seeing you or being absent, I may hear of the things concerning you, that you stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together along with the faith of the gospel.” *Conduct yourselves* speaks of a lack of worthy conduct; *stand firm in one spirit* speaks of wavering conduct influenced by a lack of a proper focus on their shared divine life in the regenerated human spirit; and *with one soul striving together* speaks of disruptions in their working together because of natural, soulish tendencies. “In [verse 27] the Apostle glances at the internal danger threatening the peace of the Church there. He exhorts them therefore to unity. This prepares the way for his teaching in the next chapter on the tempers required in order to move together in harmony” (Govett 21). In response to this evident lack of unity, Wuest asks, “If each saint is indwelt by the Spirit, why is there not that unity among the saints, of which Paul speaks?” The answer is, that this joint-participation in an interest and a mutual and active participation in the things of God is produced by the Spirit, not by virtue of His indwelling but by virtue of His control over the believer” (58). The control of the Spirit over the conduct of a believer depends primarily on the degree of the transformation of his soul—a soul that expresses the rational focus of the mind, that chooses according to preferences informed by the mind, and that follows the affections of the emotions influenced by the mind.

As a result of not standing firm in one spirit and not striving together with one soul, there were factions in the Philippian church, as can be inferred from Paul’s exhortation. “The prohibitions in the Pauline epistles are an indication of what is wrong in the situation which the apostle wishes to correct” (Wuest 59). In chapter 2 Paul points to the presence of factions in his plea for harmony in both spirit and soul:



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to their  
untransformed  
soul.*

Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing, doing nothing by the way of selfish ambition nor by way of vainglory, but in lowliness of mind considering one another more excellent than yourselves; not regarding each his own virtues, but each the virtues of others also. (vv. 2-4)

*Think the same thing* indicates the presence of conflicting opinions; *having the same love* indicates the presence of preferential affections; *joined in soul* indicates the presence of divisions based on differing thoughts, choices, and preferences; *selfish ambition* indicates the presence of improper strivings for position; *by way of vainglory* indicates the presence of desires for personal recognition; and *in lowliness of mind* and *not regarding each his own virtues* indicate the presence of personal thoughts of high regard for oneself. In his exhortation to Euodias and Syntyche in 4:2, Paul employs phrasing similar to that used in 2:2, urging them to think the same thing in the Lord, from which we can infer that the two sisters' actions toward one another were directly associated with the disharmony in Philippi. "Euodia and Syntyche had once worked in perfect co-operation with Paul in the great task of spreading the knowledge of the Word. But now they were causing trouble in the Philippian church, leading rival factions" (Wuest 108). In *The Humiliated and Exalted Lord: A Study of Philippians 2 and Christology*, Donald Macleod says, "There is this Philippian church torn by strife and discord. What is the whole problem? Each of them is insisting upon his rights, insisting upon the fact of his own dignity, insisting upon his gifts, his ability, insisting upon recognition" (18).

The strife and discord between Paul's co-workers produced murmurings and reasonings (2:14). In the Bible murmurings are indicative of serious discord (Num. 14:27, 36; 17:5). The Philippians' discord hindered them from holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:16), from filling up their lack of service toward the apostle (v. 30), and from thinking the same thing in the Lord (4:2), which is "the one thing" (2:2). "Our thinking should be focused on the excellency of the knowledge and experience of Christ. Focusing on anything else causes us to think differently, thus creating dissensions among us" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 2, note 6). In order to address their discord and dissension, Paul urged the Philippians to work out a salvation that dealt with the soulish elements that were present and proliferating in the church in Philippi (v. 12). This salvation depended on the spread of the organic, divine life of Christ, as manifested in the mind of Christ, from their regenerated human spirit to their untransformed soul (Rom. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:9).

#### **The Organic Remedy for the Inward Disorder in the Church in Philippi: the Mind of Christ**

Immediately after describing the manifestations of disharmony in Philippians 2:2-4, Paul presents the pattern of Christ's humiliation and exaltation in verses 6 through 11, which is in direct contrast to the Philippians' situation. Paul prefaces his presentation of Christ's pattern, saying, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (v. 5).<sup>1</sup> The pivotal connection between verses 2 through 4 and 6 through 11 is Paul's call for the believers to let the mind of Christ be in them. This is because the remedy for the elimination of the soulish disharmony in Philippi was for the believers to not just appropriate a new way of ethical thinking but to let the active, ongoing thinking of Christ, as revealed in His pattern of humiliation and exaltation, organically fill their thinking, becoming their mind. In His pattern Christ Jesus,

existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (vv. 6-11)

Focusing on the deep Christological implications in this Christ hymn compared to the seemingly common problems in the church in Philippi, some commentators downplay any significant connection between these two sets of verses in chapter 2. Macleod responds, saying, “The whole of verses 1 to 4 is concerned directly with the problems of the church at Philippi: its divisions, its fragmentations, and the vain-glory that was marring and even ruining the fellowship. It is quite unthinkable that Paul would introduce these words in verses 5-11 with no relation whatsoever to the problem that he is considering” (1). He further states,

The great thing that stands out with total clarity is the imperative, “think this.” The passage that follows is exegetical of that *this*: *this*, which was in Christ Jesus, who did not grasp at His being equal with God but emptied Himself. “Think *this*” and think it among yourselves. The reference is plainly to their fellowship problems, the divisiveness and fragmentiveness of the *ekklesia* [ἐκκλησία, church] at Philippi. (3)

The passage in verses 6 through 11 presents the pattern of Christ, which issued forth from the mindful actions of Christ. It is the outcome of His actual thinking, a thinking that Paul desired would enliven and produce transformed thoughts in the Philippians through their cooperation with the inward operation of God.

### *The Mind of Christ as Revealed in the Pattern of His Humiliation and Exaltation*

In the thinking of Christ, there was a willingness, for the sake of humanity’s salvation, to not hold on to His deity. “The glory of God was the due of the Son of God. He might justly have held it fast, repelling all attempts to infringe, or abstract it” (Govett 27).

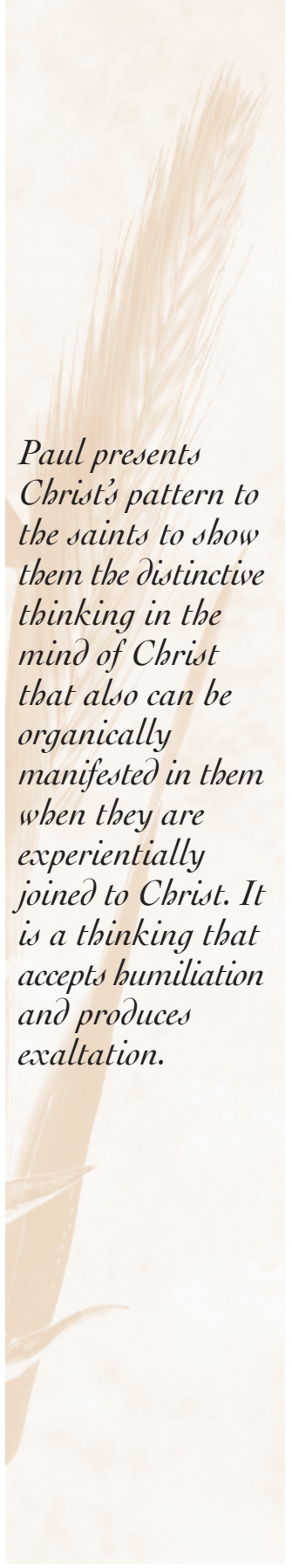
Instead of asserting His rights to be the expression of the essence of Deity, our Lord waived His rights to that expression, being willing to relinquish them if necessary. He did not consider the exercise of that expression such a treasure that it would keep Him from setting that expression aside, and making Himself of no reputation. (Wuest 65)

When Christ assumed the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men, He set aside the outward expression of His deity, not the inward reality of His deity. In His incarnation He willingly chose to be found in fashion as a man.

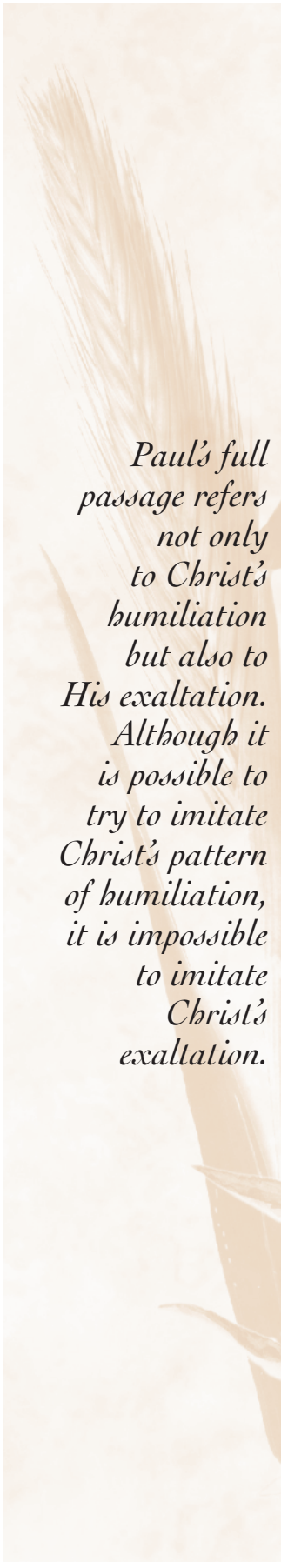
He was at once taken for a man by all who saw Him...But He was more than a mere man, as being the Christ.

So the word ‘Being found in fashion as a man’ is used, because the interior nature within the manhood was different. The Son of God became a man. “*The Word* was made flesh, and *tabernacled among us*, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth:” John i. 14. He was really a man; but He was more; and that is what is implied here. Of a mere man it would not be said, “Being found in fashion as a man.” It was the effect of His choice. (Govett 29-30)

The effect of Christ’s choice produced a pattern of humiliation, which was the issue of His thinking. The thinking within the mind of Christ produced a willingness to set aside the expression of His deity, a willingness to assume a lower status to serve humanity as a slave, and a willingness to die as a man to make the redemption of humanity possible and attainable. Paul presents Christ’s pattern to the saints in Philippi to show them the distinctive thinking in the mind of Christ that also can be organically manifested in them when they are experientially joined to Christ. It is a thinking that accepts humiliation, which, in turn, produces exaltation—in contrast to the Philippians’ pattern of pursuing vainglory and self-exaltation. A transfer from a pattern rooted in the natural mind to a pattern that emanates from the divine mind cannot be accomplished by outward



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imitation. For this, it is necessary to inwardly receive and experience the divine life in Christ, which is expressed through an ongoing realization of a pattern of humiliation and exaltation that is an abiding realization of Christ's way of thinking.

### *The Mind of Christ Being More Than an Ethical Pattern to Imitate*

Many commentators acknowledge that Paul's reference to Christ's pattern of humiliation and exaltation is related to his concern about the Philippians' soulish condition and that he presents this pattern to highlight their negative conduct. However, these same commentators fail to see the source from which Christ's pattern comes. Seeing Christ's pattern as a Christologically significant account but, nevertheless, an historical example, they interpret Paul's presentation as a call for the ethical imitation of Christ's example. In *Form of God, Form of a Servant: An Examination of the Greek Noun μορφή in Philippians 2:6-7*, Daniel J. Fabricatore says, "Paul is calling on the Philippian believers to develop an attitude or mindset in their own lives that models the attitude of Christ Himself" (142), and in *To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain*, Matt Chandler says, "The foundation, the motivation of a life of humility, is the example of Jesus Christ's humble life and sacrificial death on the cross" (76). Trying to develop an attitude that merely models another attitude is the essence of imitation. Ralph P. Martin clearly reinforces the thought that Paul was calling for the ethical imitation of Christ's example:

Of more permanent influence has been the approach to the Pauline *pericope* in the interest of finding here the ethical example of Christ. On this interpretation the Apostle is concerned with a Christian community where pride had raised its ugly head (Phil. ii, 3, 4. iv. 2, 5), and where the unity of the Church was being destroyed by division and quarrelling (Phil. i. 27, ii. 2-4, iv. 2). So he writes with the pastoral needs of the Philippians uppermost in his mind. To recall them to humility and unity he gives them a picture for their imitation; and what finer enforcement of his appeal could there be than the reminder of their Lord who was both humble and obedient? (68)

The thought of imitation that is prevalent among commentators has been labeled an ethical interpretation of this passage.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is assumed that Paul wrote this passage to present, by Christ's example, a set of moral principles for the Philippians to adopt, the adoption of which involves imitation. Although there has been more recent criticism of a solely ethical interpretation, with focus shifting to the more specific Christological elements in the passage, the ethical interpretation still has a prominent place. Macleod says,

It was assumed that his [Paul's] purpose was to bring the message of the incarnation to bear upon the divisions of the church at Philippi, to show them the example of the Lord Jesus in His humiliation and in His condescension, and to show the incongruity of divisiveness and egotism when placed in that particular light. This so called ethical interpretation is now more or less discounted universally...But with all due respect to the eminent scholars who advocate this negative, it seems to me absolutely impossible that we should depart from the "ethical example" interpretation. (1)

While it could be argued that verses 6 through 8 concerning Christ's humiliation present an ethical example to be imitated, the inclusion of verses 9 through 11 concerning Christ's exaltation argues for a departure from a purely ethical interpretation. Paul's full passage refers not only to Christ's humiliation but also to His exaltation. Although it is possible to try to imitate Christ's pattern of humiliation in verses 6 through 8, it is impossible to imitate Christ's exaltation in verses 9 through 11 because exaltation, by nature, is bestowed by one upon another; it is not anything that can be derived through personal imitative choices. Christ willingly submitted to a lower status in His humiliation, and as a consequence, He was highly exalted by God. He did not exalt Himself. To seek to imitate any form of exaltation would situate this effort within the same realm of



misdirected conduct that Paul is addressing in verses 6 through 8. This is because exaltation through imitation can come from only two sources: from the self, reinforcing self-seeking through self-effort, and from a like-minded group, reinforcing the presence of divergent preferences and factions. If Paul had the intention of presenting a purely ethical pattern for imitation, he would have excluded verses 9 through 11. His inclusion of these verses, consequently, calls for a different approach to understanding his intention in referring to Christ's pattern of humiliation and exaltation. Such an approach should begin with the recognition that the mind of Christ is actually the mind of Christ in its organic reality.

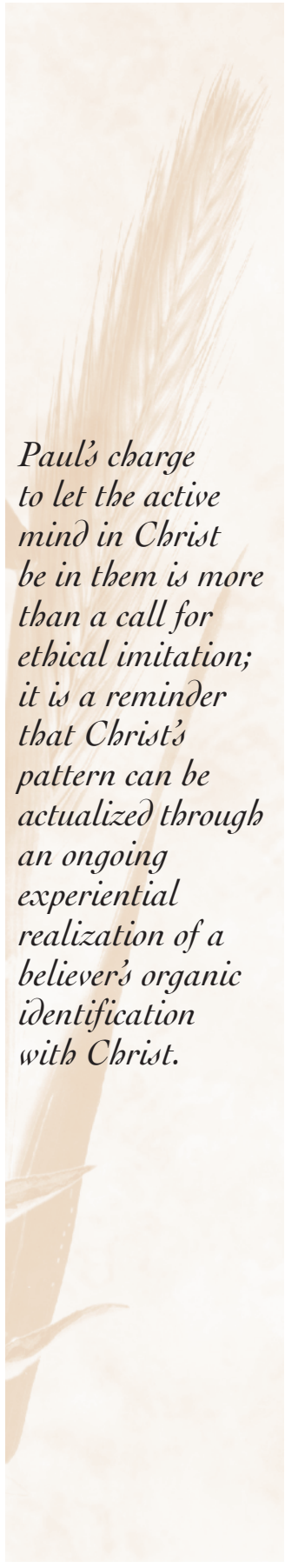
### *The Mind of Christ Being an Organic Pattern*

The mind of Christ is not separate from Christ; it is not an ethical construct to adopt but, rather, an organic instantiation of Christ as the living One (Rev. 1:18). As such, His mind is active, as seen in its being the source of ongoing counsel and instruction (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). Paul's charge that the believers let the active mind in Christ be in them is more than a call for ethical imitation; it is a reminder that the pattern in Philippians 2:5 through 11 can be actualized through an ongoing experiential realization of a believer's organic identification with and incorporation in Christ. To let the mind in Christ be in us requires that Christ be in us. This understanding of verse 5 is a more recent development in theological circles. In *Paradigms of Being in Christ: A Study of the Epistle to the Philippians*, Peter-Ben Smit comments on the movement from ethical interpretations of the pattern in verses 6 through 11 to interpretations based on incorporation: "Broadly speaking, exegetical preferences moved from generally assuming an 'ethical' interpretation, as [Ralph P.] Martin terms it, taking Christ as the example of the appropriate way of Christian life, to preferring an interpretation in terms of incorporation into Christ and the behavior belonging to it" (7-8).

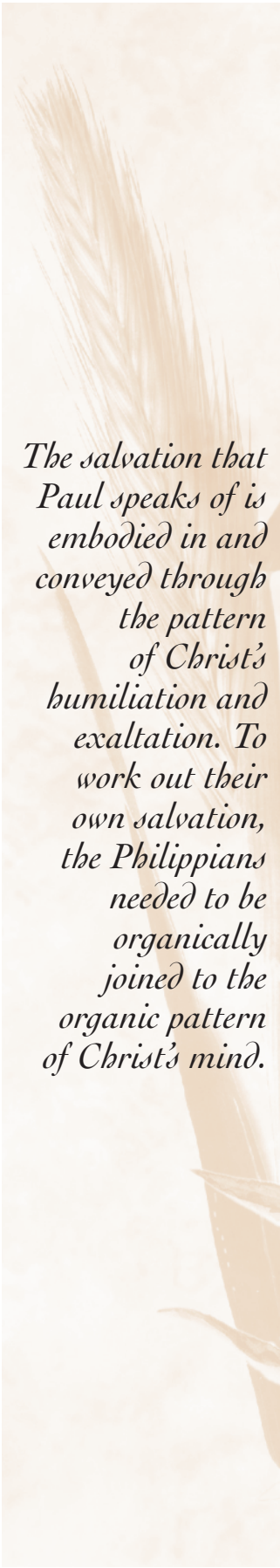
In *The Letter to the Philippians*, G. Walter Hansen considers the phrase *in Christ* in verse 5 to be a reference to union with Christ, saying, "The parallel phrase *in Christ* would also be understood as an equivalent expression referring to union with Christ" (119). Chandler also supportively comments, saying, "When the apostle says, 'Have this mind among yourselves,' he's not just saying, 'Try hard to think like Jesus.' He tells us that we have this mind. It is part of the gift of the gospel. It is an act of grace. He says that the mind of Christ 'is yours in Christ Jesus' (v. 5)" (77). Trying hard to think like Jesus is the essence of ethical imitation, while letting the mind of Christ be our mind in Christ Jesus is the essence of organic identification. In *The Life of Joy and Peace: An Exposition of Philippians*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones speaks of the scriptural and spiritual foundation for this organic identification:

We can only be like that [having the mind of Christ] when we receive his nature; when we are born again, when we are regenerated; when the Holy Spirit has worked the miracle upon us, and we are indeed partakers of the divine nature. That is the only hope of unity and peace and concord. Self must be crucified and got rid of, and the new self, the new nature given by the Son of God, must be received. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (147)

Our regeneration through the divine life that is in Christ and that is Christ Himself puts us in Christ positionally (John 3:6; 1:4; 14:6), and our subsequent partaking of His divine nature keeps us in Christ dispositionally (2 Pet. 1:4). This is the organic foundation that enables us to let the mind of Christ be active and operative in us. In "The Story of Christ and the Imitation of Paul in Philippians 2—3," Brian J. Dodd says, "It is precisely because the Philippians, like Paul, are 'in Christ' and have his resurrection power available to them that they are able to think as Christ desires and Paul exhorts, 'think this way among yourselves, which also [you are enabled to think because you are] in Christ Jesus' (2:5)" (160). In a footnote on Philippians 2:5, Witness Lee succinctly speaks of the organic



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prerequisite for letting the mind of Christ be in us: "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 this extent, that is, in His tender inward feeling and in His thinking" (*Recovery Version*, v. 5, note 1).

Letting the organic mind of Christ be in us is integral to the working out of our salvation through the God who dwells in us and operates in us both for the willing and working of His good pleasure.<sup>3</sup> Immediately after presenting the pattern of Christ, Paul urges the Philippians to work out their own salvation by positively responding to his admonition to let the mind of Christ be in them. He connects the incorporation of Christ's pattern (with the mind of Christ) and God's saving operation in us with the words *so then* in 2:12: "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The salvation that Paul speaks of is embodied in and conveyed through the pattern of Christ's humiliation and exaltation in verses 5 through 11. To work out their own salvation, the Philippians needed to be organically joined to the organic pattern of Christ's mind, which was within them.

The Apostle was not exhorting the members of the church at Philippi to produce their own salvation, or to arrive at it, but rather to work out the salvation they already possessed...

The New Testament talks about justification, sanctification and glorification; those are the divisions of the term salvation... Sanctification is Christ being formed in us, our nature being purged and purified and cleansed and perfected...

What the Apostle is concerned about here is the working out of the life which we have received, not our arriving at it. It is practising it because we have been given it. (Lloyd-Jones 164-166)

Practicing the salvation that we have received is integrally related to letting the mind of Christ operate in us according to the willing and working of God in His inner operation to spread His divine life from our spirit to our soul. Allowing Christ to make His home in our heart, in which there ought to be no elements of disharmony, vainglorious seeking, differing preferences, and contentious factions, is the focus of God's inward salvific operation. This experience is more commonly accessible than one would think, because all believers possess the divine life, which conveys the mind of Christ, imparting to them His pattern of humiliation and exaltation. This pattern was reproduced in Paul, and it has been reproduced in many believers.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Operation of the Mind of Christ in Paul**

The loftiness of the pattern of Christ's humiliation and exaltation in 2:6-11 seemingly places it beyond the range of a common believer's experience. As a counter to this thought, Paul recounts his own experience in 3:5-14. His experience mirrors Christ's pattern as it is applied to his own background, and it reflects his organic incorporation of the mind of Christ. This can be seen in Paul's reference to the mind of Christ in 2:5 and his reference to his mind in 3:15. Before speaking of Christ's pattern, Paul refers to the mind of Christ in 2:5, and after he finishes recounting his experience in 3:14, he refers to his mind in relation to the mind of Christ, saying, "Let us therefore, as many as are full-grown, have this mind; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, this also God will reveal to you" (v. 15). The phrase *this mind* in 3:15 refers to the mind of Christ in Paul, which corresponds to *this mind*, referring to the mind of Christ, in 2:5. Paul's experience mirrors the pattern of Christ's humiliation and exaltation because he let the mind of Christ be in him.<sup>5</sup>

Paul's experience corresponds, in principle, with the pattern of Christ's humiliation and

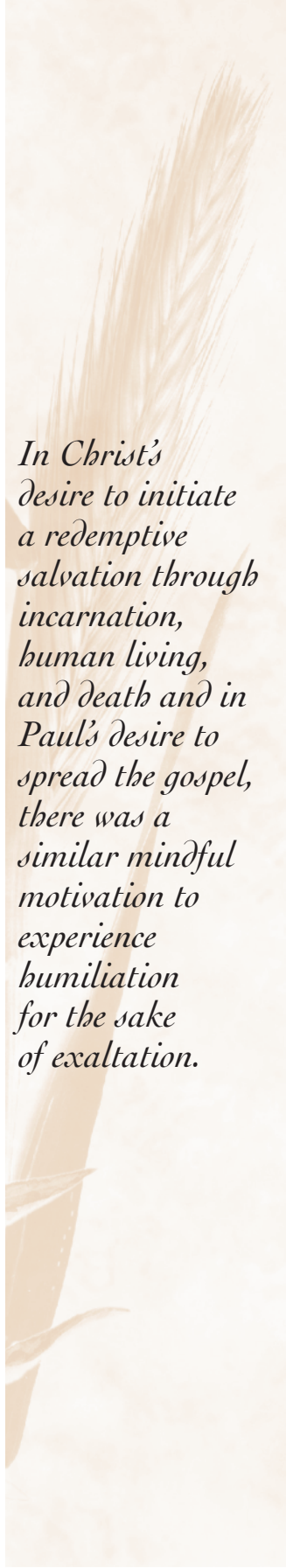


exaltation in every aspect. “Links between the hymn’s language and ideology and Paul’s autobiographical writing in this letter have often been noted” (Martin liii).<sup>6</sup> These links speak of the similarity in the choices that were the issues of Christ’s and Paul’s work. In Christ’s desire to initiate a redemptive salvation through His incarnation, human living, and death and in Paul’s desire to spread the gospel of Christ’s salvation (v. 22), there was a similar mindful motivation involving the willingness to experience humiliation for the sake of exaltation. In both Christ’s and Paul’s work there was the presence of both humiliation and exaltation, and even though the details of their experiences varied, the underlying, principal motivation was the same. This can be seen in their emptying themselves of their rightful status, their assumption of a lower status, and their humbling of themselves through the obedient death of the cross.

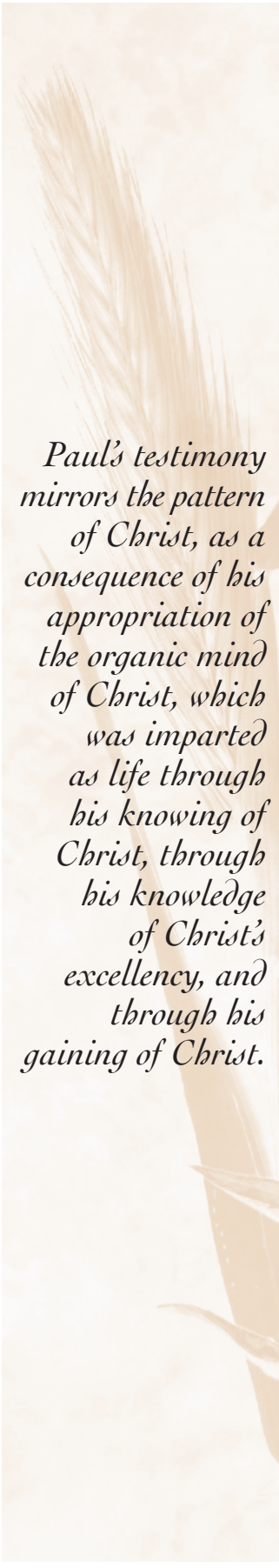
**F**or the sake of accomplishing redemption, which depended on the shedding of the blood of a perfect human sacrifice, Christ put aside any regard for the expression of His deity. “Existing in the form of God,” Christ “did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped” (v. 6). Although He was equal to God, both inwardly and outwardly, Christ willingly altered His outward status. What was rightfully His was of the highest value, but He willingly set aside His expression of deity in order to accomplish God’s chosen work for Him. Correspondingly, for the sake of spreading and imparting the gospel of our salvation (Eph. 1:13), Paul put aside any regard for the prominence of his Jewish attainments, which included being “circumcised the eighth day; of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless” (Phil. 3:5-6).

Prior to his conversion, Paul treasured these elements related to his Jewish heritage; they defined his identity. He valued his Jewish identification, which was confirmed by his circumcision on the eighth day as prescribed by the law. He valued his status as a son of Israel from the prominent tribe of Benjamin. “He belonged not to any of the ten tribes, that fell away to idolatry; but was one of the two that adhered to David and his house” (Govett 51). He valued his family lineage, having Hebrew ancestry on both sides of his genealogy. He valued his association with the strictest sect of the Jewish religionists. “Paul had in his possession certain advantages as a Pharisee. They were his to be used for his further advantage. But when he became a Christian he set these on one side” (Martin 145). He valued his persecution of the church in his effort to defend the tenets of his faith. And he valued the seeming success of his self-effort to uphold the law. However, he willingly set aside these elements of his identity to pursue and gain Christ in order to impart the excellent Christ to others.

For the sake of accomplishing redemption, Christ “emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men” (2:7). In His incarnation Christ assumed a lower status, a status that hid the inherent glory in His being (Matt. 17:2). Correspondingly, Paul assumed a lower status by counting the things that were gains to him as loss on account of Christ, even counting them as refuse (Phil. 3:7-8), indicating that he no longer had high regard for them. Rather, he willingly gave himself to the foolishness of preaching, becoming like the offscouring of the world, the scum of all things (1 Cor. 1:21; 4:13). While his heart never turned from his desire to save his beloved fellow Israelites through the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 10:1; 11:28), he fought against any insistence that the practice of Jewish ordinances, specifically circumcision, was a necessary means for obtaining salvation. “The expression, ‘for whom I have suffered the loss of all things [in Philippians 3:8],’ speaks of what Paul in his unsaved state gave up when he received the Lord Jesus as his Saviour on the road to Damascus” (Wuest 91). “When Paul decided to *consider everything a loss because of the surpassing knowledge of knowing Christ* (3:7-8), his attitude reflected that of one who *made himself nothing, . . . humbled himself and was obedient unto death—even death on the cross!* (2:7-8)” (Hansen 258).



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*Paul's testimony  
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of Christ, as a  
consequence of his  
appropriation of  
the organic mind  
of Christ, which  
was imparted  
as life through  
his knowing of  
Christ, through  
his knowledge  
of Christ's  
excellency, and  
through his  
gaining of Christ.*

For the sake of accomplishing redemption, Christ was found in fashion as a man, humbling Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross (Phil. 2:8). When people saw Christ, they saw a man but not a man of beauty, His visage being marred more than that of any man (Isa. 52:14). He had "no attracting form nor majesty that we should look upon Him, / Nor beautiful appearance that we should desire Him" (53:2). As a man, He became obedient unto death, accepting the will of God (Matt. 26:39). Correspondingly, after his conversion and after he began to appreciate the crucified and resurrected Christ, Paul was found as a man not having his own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith (Phil. 3:9). "Paul wants his life to demonstrate that he is in Christ. He wants to be found by observing men to be in Christ" (Wuest 92). In order to be found in Christ, Paul had to "know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (v. 10). Paul's conformation to Christ's death was the issue of his obedience to the death of the cross. Daily, Paul died under the killing operation of the cross (1 Cor. 15:31).

For the sake of applying His redemption, Christ was highly exalted in His resurrection and given a name that is above every name, the only name given among men in which they must be saved (Acts 4:12). The exaltation of Christ in resurrection was the issue of His accomplished work. Correspondingly, Paul hoped for and pursued the exaltation that would come from the out-resurrection from the dead based on the accomplishment of his God-assigned work:

If perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward. (Phil. 3:11-14)

The out-resurrection is an exaltation involving the bestowal of the reward of the millennial kingdom to overcoming believers. The out-resurrection is the "extra-resurrection, the resurrection in which the Lord's overcomers will receive the reward...of the kingdom. This is what the apostle Paul sought after" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Heb. 11:35, note 2). Whereas Christ's exaltation had been enacted, Paul's exaltation was still a hope that depended on his finishing faithfully the course of his calling. At the time of his writing the Epistle to the Philippians, he had a hope but not the certainty of the exaltation through the attainment of the out-resurrection from the dead, as indicated by the words *if perhaps* in Philippians 3:11. However, at the end of his life there was more confidence: "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Paul's testimony in Philippians 3 mirrors the pattern of Christ in chapter 2, not as a matter of mere coincidence but as a consequence of his appropriation of the organic mind of Christ, which was imparted as life into him through his knowing of Christ, through his knowledge of Christ's excellency, and through his gaining of Christ. Paul's experience mirrored Christ's because he was joined to Christ and Christ's mind was his mind (1 Cor. 6:17; 2:16). In the experience of our organic union with Christ, His pattern will also be applied to the varied treasures that we grasp; it will lead us to empty ourselves and go along with the lowly (Rom. 12:16); it will cause us to be found in a different fashion, a transformed fashion, but one still shrouded in the mystery of godliness; it will empower us to take up the cross of Christ in obedience to the righteous promptings of the divine life within us, and it will ultimately issue in exaltation in the out-resurrection of the dead as a reward. The organic pattern that issued from the mind of Christ became

Paul's pattern in his union with Christ. Paul presented this organic pattern to the Philippians because he realized that only through the application of this pattern would all the disorderly elements in the church in Philippi be eliminated, enabling the church's outward order to flourish more and more unto the furtherance of the gospel, making his joy full. **AC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Wuest provides an array of possible translations for the expression concerning the mind of Christ in verse 5. However, none of them speaks of the organic appropriation of Christ's mind with its intrinsic way of thinking. Wuest says,

The expression could be translated in a number of ways, each of which while holding to the main idea, yet brings out a slightly different shade of meaning. For instance: "Be constantly thinking this in yourselves;" "Be having this mind in you;" "Reflect in your own minds, the mind of Christ Jesus" (Lightfoot); "Let the same purpose inspire you as was in Christ Jesus" (Way). The sum total of the thought in the exhortation seems to be that of urging the Philippians to emulate in their own lives, the distinctive virtues of the Lord Jesus spoken of in 2:2-4. (61)

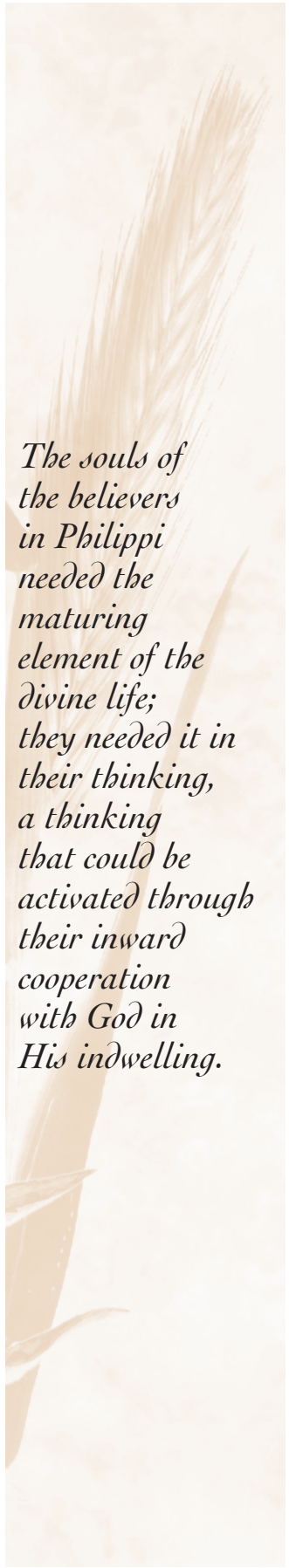
<sup>2</sup>Hansen acknowledges that "Christ's attitude portrayed in the hymn is viewed as an ethical paradigm of the attitude that Christians should express in their community," but then he refers to and begins to expound on the recent criticism of this view, saying, "Criticisms against this interpretation proceed along grammatical and theological lines" (119).

<sup>3</sup>God's good pleasure involves the conferral of sonship upon those whom He has predestinated: "Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5). Sonship is a recognition of maturity in the divine life, with this maturity affecting all three parts of a believer—spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23). In order for God to recognize a mature expression of the divine life in a believer, the natural soul of the believer must undergo sanctification and transformation. And it was precisely the souls of the believers in Philippi that needed the maturing element of the divine life; they needed it in their thinking, a thinking that could be activated through their inward cooperation with God in His indwelling. With such cooperation there is the salvation of the soul (1 Pet. 1:9). This will also fulfill the purpose of God's choosing, as revealed in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: "We ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved of the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

<sup>4</sup>The believers' experience of Christ's pattern of humiliation and exaltation varies according to their unique personal circumstances and diverse backgrounds. The Lord's call for us to lose our soul-life is a call to not grasp the unique things that our soul values. The termination of our ties to these "treasures" often involves a willingness to lower our human status. Indeed, many people reject the gospel because they know that there is a personal cost in receiving and following the Lord, and they are unwilling to pay the price of this loss, even when presented with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Commenting on the example of Mary's pouring out of valuable nard upon the feet of Jesus prior to His death and resurrection, Lee writes,

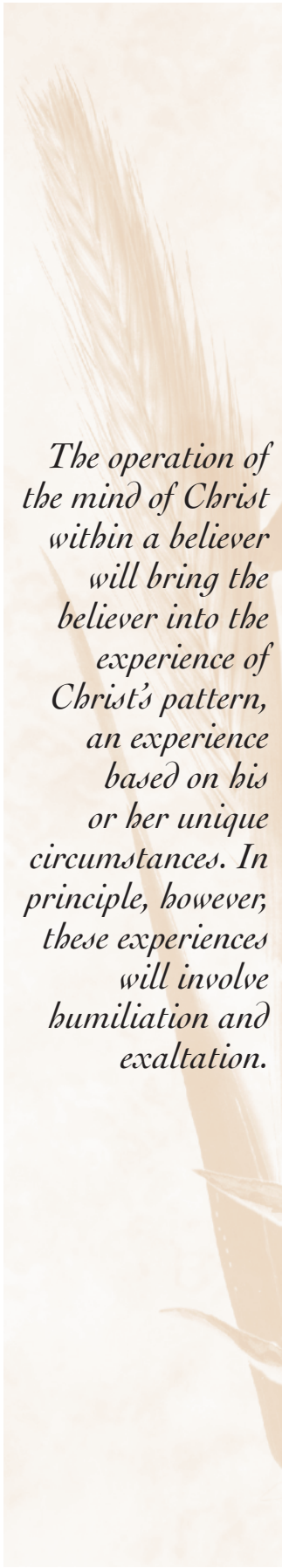
The disciples considered Mary's love offering to the Lord a waste. Throughout the past twenty centuries thousands of precious lives, heart treasures, high positions, and golden futures have been "wasted" upon the Lord Jesus. To those who love Him in such a way He is altogether lovely and worthy of their offering. What they have poured upon Him is not a waste but a fragrant testimony of His sweetness. (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 26:8, note 1)

The "wasted" life of a believer is a testimony of the operation of the mind of Christ within him, a testimony of a willingness instilled by the operation of the divine life to not grasp the "heart treasures, high positions, and golden futures" that are unique to every believer and, instead, to experience the killing of the cross applied to these elements. It is also a testimony of the hope of being exalted in the coming millennial kingdom.



*The souls of the believers in Philippi needed the maturing element of the divine life; they needed it in their thinking, a thinking that could be activated through their inward cooperation with God in His indwelling.*





*The operation of the mind of Christ within a believer will bring the believer into the experience of Christ's pattern, an experience based on his or her unique circumstances. In principle, however, these experiences will involve humiliation and exaltation.*

<sup>5</sup>The operation of the mind of Christ within a believer will spontaneously bring the believer into the experience of Christ's pattern in chapter 2, an experience that will be unique to the believer based on his or her unique circumstances. In principle, however, these experiences will involve humiliation and exaltation: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed upon us" (Rom. 8:18).

<sup>6</sup>Dodd acknowledges that many interpreters see a connection between Christ's pattern in chapter 2 and Paul's experience in chapter 3:

One telltale sign for many interpreters that the hymn has influenced Paul's self-presentation in Philippians 3 is how both Christ and Paul "regard" their former positions. In the hymn, Christ did not "regard" or "consider" his former status as something to cling to, but as something to yield in obedience to God (2:6; ἡγήσατο). It is then noted how Paul eschews his Jewish credentials, "regarding" them and "everything else" now as "loss" in comparison with the knowledge of Christ Jesus as his master (3:7-8). The use of the word "regard" three times in these two verses convinces some interpreters that Paul here intends for his audience to make an association between his mindset and Christ's. (155)

Nevertheless, after acknowledging that some interpreters see a connection, Dodd writes, "There are indicators that this is a faulty leap to make" (155). His scant evidence for deeming the connection a "faulty leap" is supported mainly by noting that *considered* in the phrase *considered it necessary* in 2:25, which speaks of Paul's sending of Epaphroditus, is not connected with the use of *not consider* in relation to Christ's pattern in 2:6 and is also unrelated to *counted* and *count* in Paul's example in 3:7-8. To Dodd the use of a similar word in 2:25, which is unrelated to Christ's humiliation and exaltation and Paul's experience, is apparently enough to obviate any consideration that there is a connection when the same word is used in the passages related to Christ and Paul.

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