

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