

Have the Mind of Christ at the Workplace

A Talk on Christian Character at Work

Sermon Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life 24 October 2008

1 Corinthians 2:16

Philippians 2:5

Matthew 5:40-42

Mark 12:31

Matthew 6:3-4

Matthew 5:36

Luke 12:25

Psalms 37:5-6

1 Corinthians 14:33

Proverbs 1:5

James 5:12

Mark 11:25

Matthew 5:13-16

Warm-Up

I try, as a rule, to avoid repetition in my talks. This year's theme, "Have the mind of Christ," being something of a follow-on from "Living as the people of God," which we considered last year, I mean to make some concessions to that principle; those of you who joined us at last year's camp will, I hope, bear with me.

We asked ourselves a question right at the beginning last year, without ever quite settling it: do we, in our Christian lives, sometimes behave as two entirely different people — one at worship, and another the rest of the week? It is worth returning to that question here.

Between the two camps, and looking at the matter strictly from a spiritual perspective, it does appear to me that most of us exhibit two rather distinct personalities: one at worship, and another the rest of the time. We forget the gospel almost as soon as we have heard it; we detach ourselves from the body of Christ and become mere onlookers from the outside; living, as we do, in a country where Christian believers number less than three per cent of the population, we are often unsure how to conduct ourselves by Christ's own teaching, and so live as an uncertain minority rather than as the confident people of God; and we live, in effect, with two altered selves — one at Sunday worship, another once we are outside the gates of the church. "What happens on Monday has no relationship to what took place on Sunday" is a statement made often enough, and sadly true for many of us.

Many Christians show exactly these symptoms — behaving quite differently at worship than outside the doors of the church.

Introduction

Enough of that; let us examine the matter strictly from the standpoint of our faith. One of the most frustrating situations in Christian ministry — our bishop and several of our own clergy would, I think, agree with me here — is trying to help fellow Christians in whose lives the gospel never seems to have truly taken hold. It is a problem in nearly every

congregation: how do we motivate believers who remain, in practice, worldly? Why do some who profess belief, who repent and are baptised into Christ, go on living as though they still belonged to the world?

Most Christians, I think, do not fully understand that God has practical, realistic principles that apply to every area of our lives — not least to our business and our workplaces. As Christians, we need to fulfil God's mandate at work just as we do at worship. Many of us are not aware of the basic standards and values we ought to be practising there — values that are not merely suggestive, but instructions and commandments from God. We are faced daily with situations and decisions that must be made, and, as Christians, we ought to make them by God's rules, not man's — however controversial, or "politically incorrect," those decisions may appear; we must first seek to please God.

This brings us to the question: have we the mind of Christ? Do we see the beauty of a holy life as Jesus saw it? Do we see lost people through His eyes? Do we grasp the eternal purpose of God with the same conviction that Jesus had? These are among the questions we need to ask ourselves, to know whether we truly have the mind of Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Paul says that the believer in Christ has received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by Him (compare verse 12). We have the mind of Christ because we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us; being, therefore, new creatures in Christ, our habits of thought need to be like His. Paul's word for "mind" here carries the sense of understanding, intelligence, and presence of mind — the whole knowledge of Christ, including our emotions and our will, so far as these rest upon thought.

Our Lord Jesus Christ saw everything in perpetual relationship to His Father. He saw the whole universe as related to the Father, and for that reason gave His life in obedience to Him; the master passion of Christ Jesus was to glorify His Father in saving sinful humanity. We have the mind of Christ when we see the Father in the fullness of His holiness; we have the mind of Christ when our own sin grieves us, as it grieves a holy and righteous God; we have the mind of the Saviour when we understand that the penalty for sin had to be paid in full by a divine, sinless substitute; we have the mind of Christ when we feel the passion of His soul, submitted to the will of God even unto death. I dare not go further than this in describing the mind of Christ, and shall leave the rest to our bishop and our ministers to expound further.

How Do We Put On the Mind of Christ?

The answer is found in Philippians 2:5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" — and we are to deploy it in everything we do.

But this can only be done once we understand our Lord's own teaching, His outlook, and the life He demonstrated; we need to internalise these, and make them part of our normal habits of thought. Let me offer an example.

A colleague approaches you for financial help, to see him through a medical emergency at home — just a day before you are due to leave on a long-planned family holiday in the hills, for which you have been putting money aside for over a year. How would you respond? If Christ's teaching is truly at work in your mind, it will come to you the very moment your colleague asks for help, and you will not resent the missed holiday.

Faced with a situation of that kind, ask yourself simply: what would Jesus do? The moment we ask that question in earnest, the Holy Spirit will show us the answer, often by bringing to mind the very Scripture that fits our situation. In this case, it might be: "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matthew 5:40-42); or "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:31, and see Matthew 22:39), placing ourselves in his shoes and imagining his plight; or, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:3-4).

Many Christians read the New Testament, and especially the Gospels, again and again, year after year; we ought to practise recalling their teaching at every turn, consciously at first, until, over time, applying Christ's principles becomes second nature. That is what it means to have the mind of Christ, provided we go on and put into practice what we have learned. Where doubt remains, asking ourselves what Jesus would do, in a given situation, will carry us through even the most difficult of circumstances; we need only remember that we have His Spirit dwelling in us, and that with God all things are possible.

Let me assure you that this is no mere theory; it is thoroughly practical. I have tried to practise it throughout my own career, at first out of compulsion, and later almost by habit. I would be a hypocrite to claim perfection; I fall short of it often enough, especially, I confess, while driving on the roads of the National Capital Region. But the trick, I have found, is to recognise the mistake, accept it, and make amends where we can — since it is far better to avoid these lapses altogether than to leave a debt behind that we never get the chance to repay.

The Mind of Christ at Work

Let us now consider what it means to bring the mind of Christ into our

own workplaces.

Our Gifts, Set against Christ. Here we see how easily we deny the mercy we have received from our loving God. God has granted each one of us several competencies, if I may borrow a term from human resource management, and we may, indeed, have worked to develop them through school, college, and professional training. But we so quickly forget how any of that became possible for us. No amount of money would purchase us skill or ability, unless it were first willed by our Lord.

We celebrate our own success as though it were earned purely by our own capability; we congratulate ourselves on a job well done, and want others to commend us for it. Yet what has Jesus to do with a balance sheet, a fine presentation, or a successful operation performed by a renowned surgeon? Though we rarely put the question so bluntly, we tend, in practice, to keep the whole credit to ourselves. We forget that Jesus led us to it; that He directed the path that brought us to success. He knows accountancy, He knows information technology, He knows taxation, He knows the surgeon's art as much as the plumber's or the carpenter's, botany, biology, zoology, astronomy — the list could go on without end, for He is the Creator of all things, and we can only make poor copies of what He has already made, and yet take pride in them. "Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black" (Matthew 5:36). "And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" (Luke 12:25). Everything is part of His greater plan, and every achievement of which we are proud is His blessing, freely given. To acknowledge this would take us a long way in connecting with Jesus, and walking with Him throughout our lives.

Jesus, the Greatest of Leaders. For business leaders, executives, and employees alike, our Lord has demonstrated a number of useful qualities. Remember that He gathered fishermen, carpenters, and tax collectors from the marketplace, and made leaders of them; He turned Saul the persecutor into Paul, the great defender of the faith. He needed only two words, "Follow me," and we know that those who heard them became pillars of His Church.

What made Jesus the most powerful influence on people and nations the world has ever known? Studying the New Testament with that question in mind, I have come to identify a number of qualities that made Him the greatest leader who ever lived. Here are some of the most important of them, together with a few questions each of us might put to ourselves, whatever our own occupation.

A sense of destiny marked the whole of Jesus' life, ringing through His words and shining through His actions; part of His success as a leader lay in His ability to instill that same sense of destiny in others. Are we

living out of a sense of destiny, and is it visible to those around us?

He was, too, a man of action. It is easy, once we bear any responsibility for others, to become frozen in indecision — what some have called "the paralysis of analysis." Jesus never suffered from it. He spoke when words were needed, and acted when action was called for, with purpose and focus. In what situation do we find ourselves paralysed, when some action is called for?

He was, further, willing to be seen. No one hidden away ever became an effective leader; we cannot exercise influence without being seen or heard. Our Lord taught from mountainsides and from the bow of a boat; He spoke in crowded streets and in the synagogues, willing to stand out and to bear whatever criticism came his way, true to His own teaching that a light belongs on a stand, not hidden under a basket. What might we do to be more visible as leaders ourselves?

He showed unconditional love and compassion. Our own capacity to lead others grows immeasurably when those we lead know they are loved and accepted without condition. Jesus met rejection, criticism, and even betrayal, yet His acceptance of others never wavered. When those we lead know that our acceptance will not be withdrawn the moment they err or disagree with us, they respond to our leadership as never before.

He duplicated Himself in others. Few leaders are secure enough to want their own followers to surpass them; Jesus was just such a leader. "Greater works than these shall he do," He told His disciples of the one who believes in Him (compare John 14:12). His whole aim, as a leader, was to raise up others able to carry His mission forward. Wise leaders follow this same pattern; the insecure find it impossible.

He was transparent. Many suppose that leadership means never letting others see one's own mistakes or weaknesses; Jesus thought otherwise, and was willing to be open with His own disciples. A measure of self-disclosure builds an atmosphere of trust and honesty that no pretence of infallibility ever could.

He held people accountable. A common thread runs through Jesus' parables, especially those concerning delegated authority and money: accountability. In the stories He told, people were held responsible for the diligence they applied, and the results that followed. Great leaders do the same — not to assign blame, but to help those they lead to grow.

He set the example. No employee handbook creates a culture; the atmosphere of any place of work, or of any home, is shaped far more by what its leader does than by what he says. Jesus understood the power of example; a leader who demands punctuality, yet is himself chronically late, sends a message that will poison the very culture he is trying to build.

And He prayed for those in His care. There is a remarkable passage in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel, in which we find Jesus doing just that — praying at length for His followers. How might our own workplaces be changed, if we gave as much time to praying for our people as we give to poring over budgets and figures?

These qualities are not beyond us. If we are in Christ, He is in us (compare John 6:56), and we have His mind (1 Corinthians 2:16); we need only the courage to look honestly at where we stand today, and then make a settled decision to cooperate with the Spirit of God in bringing about the change He wants to work in our hearts, our thinking, and our habits. Let us begin that journey today.

Everything We Do Carries Eternal Consequence

We are not simply meant to be better business people or employees; we are meant to be genuinely different — and yet most Christians today are indistinguishable from the world in how they conduct themselves. Were this not so, would we not be the most sought-after of employees? Surely people would first wish to employ those known to be the most reliable, trustworthy, honest, creative, and healthy — Christians ought, in short, to be "the perfect employees," sought out for their work ethic and commended for their values. That we are not, I believe, simply reflects the fact that, inwardly, we have either lost our direction, or never grasped it in the first place.

We need to understand that our workplace is our mission field, and that how we conduct ourselves in our own business or profession is itself a test of our stewardship towards the unbelievers God has placed around us. We are God's own people, called in every situation to reflect Him, and, we may hope, to plant in others a desire to know Him. We are called to glorify God in our workplace — which does not mean going about preaching to everyone; we are not, after all, the plan of salvation, but a part of it. How we reflect God in our everyday dealings with others will do much to shape their own attitude towards the Christian faith. Many of our business associates and fellow employees, belonging to other faiths, will never darken the door of a church, still less come to know Christ as their Saviour; our own conduct may be their only contact with God at all. Can we not see, then, why it matters so much that we operate by God's own rules?

We cannot afford to remain ignorant of God's basic principles. Let us look briefly at a few of them.

Commitment. "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Psalm 37:5-6). If we have committed our lives to Jesus, that commitment takes in the whole of our lives, our employment included. One way we may show this is by

praying for our employers or our employees, asking the Lord to use us to bless them daily, and to reflect Christ in our own attitude. If we pray for them, we shall find ourselves encouraged to do our best; should we slip, the Holy Spirit will correct us, and help us when we are tempted to go off course. Such commitment opens the door to the Holy Spirit's own working in our place of work; where it is present, it will soon be evident — our speech will be positive, our attitude good, and we shall be valued rather than merely tolerated. There should be no need for us ever to be rebuked; and should we be treated unfairly, for whatever reason, we may trust Jesus both to defend us, and to shape our character through it.

Order. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Order simply means the right arrangement of things. Greater order in our lives brings with it greater productivity; this includes the small, personal order of our diaries, desks, files, and shelves. Walking into an environment of disorder causes stress and unease, and a lack of order is often, more than we realise, the root of poor attitudes among people. Christians, having the Holy Spirit within us — Himself a God of order — ought to be examples of it.

A Teachable Spirit. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (Proverbs 1:5). A teachable spirit is willing to change, to grow, to improve, and to take in new and useful information as it becomes available; it seeks constantly to be informed, and strives to be the best in its own field. Those who are well informed carry influence, and our own goal ought to be influence for Christ's sake.

Honour. "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (James 5:12). We ought not to make promises we cannot keep; broken commitments become serious obstacles in our own lives, and God holds us responsible for our word. As Christians, our word should bind us, whatever the circumstance; how else are we to be seen as different, if we simply follow the world's own example? Honesty and integrity of speech honour both God and one another. Money is one of Satan's chief weapons for discrediting Christians; wherever money is involved, we need to go the extra mile, and take particular care never to let God down.

Forgiveness. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). We are bound, sooner or later, to be wronged or offended; yet it is worth remembering that we gave up our right to take offence when we came to Christ, and so have no true right to nurse a grievance. Whatever the wrong done to us, we are obliged to

forgive, and to pray for the one who has wronged us; judgement, and its timing, belong to God alone, who may well choose mercy where we would not, and so we dare not carry unforgiveness in our hearts. Unforgiveness is a major stumbling block for Christians in business; we cannot expect God's blessing while we hold on to it, nor can we bear faithful witness to Jesus in our workplace while nursing a grievance against a colleague — others will notice it soon enough.

Excellence. One of the most powerful qualities by which a Christian can influence others for Christ is excellence — identifiable at once in how a person dresses, how he organises his affairs, and, above all, in how he treats other people. Excellence is not something we are born with; it comes as the fruit of being a good steward. It requires discipline, not least in our attention to God's word; it produces trust; it is a way of life, so that what we cannot do properly, we should not attempt at all; and those who pursue it will overcome what others merely complain about, seeking out solutions where the merely average sit and stare at problems.

Our Responsibility

Let us remember that how we represent God at work may be the only Christ our colleagues will ever see. It matters little whether our own work is cleaning a washroom or leading a great company; the mind of Christ we show in our daily conduct at work may be the only glimpse of Him that others around us ever have. Too often we give the mind of Christ a rest between the hours of nine and five, forgetting that God wants a part in the whole of our day.

We need to examine our lives regularly against God's own word, and, wherever we find ourselves falling short, to take responsibility for it, allowing God to cleanse us of what is wrong. To see the truth about our own conduct is necessary for our spiritual renewal and transformation. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

Do we truly exhibit the mind of Christ at our workplace? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). I want to leave you with a few searching questions, whose honest answers will show whether we really carry the mind of Christ with us into our work. Do we take the mind of Christ with us to work each day, or leave Him at home to rest until we return? Is pleasing God foremost in our minds while we work? Is our decision-making guided by the Holy Spirit, or

simply by what seems logical to our own minds? Do our words bring peace and resolution, or do they stir confusion and hostility? Would God be pleased with the language we use at work? Are the words we whisper about others words that encourage, or words that tear down? Could we have the very conversations we have with our colleagues, with Christ Himself present? And do we follow what God has commanded us to do, even if it means standing alone, or do we simply go along with the majority, because everyone else is doing so? Amen.