

"The Spirit of Christ"

by
James Richards

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His."
Romans 8:9

No, my dear brethren, he is none of his. Christ will never acknowledge him as such. If he has not the spirit of Christ, he is not Christ's disciple, Christ's friend. He can hold no fellowship with Christ in this world, nor will he be partaker of his glory in the world to come. If he has not the spirit of Christ, he is not a true Christian, whatever he may profess or whatever he may appear. He is still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; under the power of a carnal mind, which is enmity against God; not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. There are no exceptions to this statement, mortifying and painful as it is. Whosoever has not the spirit of Christ is unequivocally pronounced, by the passage before us, to be in a state of deep and total alienation from God.

But what is it to have the spirit of Christ? In the sense of the text, it is to have the Holy Spirit, the third person in the ever adorable Trinity, dwelling in us by his sanctifying or renovating power. This Spirit, which is so often called the Spirit of Christ because sent by him and acting by his authority, is given to all true believers, to abide in them as a perpetual source of life, while its operation in their hearts is compared to living water, and to a well of water springing up to everlasting life. It is so given to them, as never to forsake them, but by its sweet and invisible power to form them into the divine image and to make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

You have only to glance your eye upon this passage, in its connection, to perceive that the Apostle is speaking of the Divine Spirit, and of his sanctifying energy in the hearts of all true Christians. At the same time his words suggest another proposition, not less true or appropriate, viz., that if any man have not the temper or disposition of Christ, he is none of his. This proposition results from the former. For if a man cannot be Christ's without the sanctifying and indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit, he cannot be Christ's unless the very temper and spirit of Christ be in him. It is to form this temper that the Holy Spirit is given and that he dwells in the heart of the believer. And the only proof that a man can have of the indwelling of this Almighty Agent is that he is like Christ, or has the spirit and temper of Christ. Here then is a subject of deep and eternal moment to us all, a subject which may well demand attention at the close of a revival, when many are forming hopes for another world. The grand question now to be settled is whether we have the spirit of Jesus Christ or not, for on this depend the reality of our discipleship and our prospects for eternity.

Accordingly the single design of the discourse will be to point out the leading characteristics of Christ's spirit, all of which are necessary to constitute us his friends.

1. I begin by remarking that his spirit is eminently a spirit of humility.

Christ courted no splendor and made no vain and empty parade in the days of his flesh. He even concealed the glories he possessed--the glories of his divine nature--and appeared in the form of

a servant, when he might have appeared as the uncreated God, the Lord of Heaven and earth. He did not strive nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. When he performed miracles of the most stupendous character, which astonished alike the subjects and the beholders, he often gave a charge not to make them known. And when the multitudes, struck by the power of his preaching and the splendor of his works, gathered themselves together and sought to make him king, he instantly withdrew from them and retired into a secret place. Born in deep poverty, he was contented to live in it till the day of his death, though he was the original Proprietor and rightful Lord of all things. He traveled up and down the world on foot, often weary, often hungry and thirsty, and often the subject of the bitterest reproach. He never rode but once that we read of, and then it was upon an ass's colt, that he might fulfill the prediction of the prophet concerning him. Every action savored of humility. With what condescension did he treat his disciples, and those who approached him for the benefit of his instructions and for his healing power! Ah, with what condescension did he leave the throne of glory to take upon him the form of sinful, dying man, and to become obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross! Herein he "humbled himself," says the apostle, and it was an act of humility which will forever surpass the powers of angels fully to explore. God alone can adequately conceive or comprehend it.

Now this temper, in its essential qualities, is indispensable to the disciple of Christ. A man can no more be a Christian without humility than he can be an intelligent being without reason. To be a Christian is to put on Christ, and to put on Christ is to be like him in the grand features of his moral character. But can we be like him without lowliness of mind, and without manifesting this spirit in our daily intercourse with men and in our approaches to God? The fact is, that Christian humility requires us to esteem others better than our-selves and in honor to prefer one another, while it supposes us to have some just views of our own sinful characters and a disposition to lay ourselves low before God. A proud, self-righteous, self-satisfied Christian is a contradiction in terms, and as much a mockery of reason as a kind or benevolent fiend.

But how shall I know, it may be asked, whether I am truly humble, and especially whether I am humble before God? I answer: When you feel like the publican, who stood afar off and durst [dared] not so much as lift up his eyes unto Heaven, but smote upon his breast and cried, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." When you feel like Mary, who stood behind Jesus as he sat at meat, and began to wash his feet with her tears and to wipe them with the hair of her head. When you feel like the returning prodigal, who said to his father, "Father I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants," [that is], give me the lowest place if it be but under thy roof, and I am content. I deserve not even this, but might justly be excluded from thy family altogether. When you feel like those pardoned Israelites described by Ezekiel in the sixteenth chapter of his prophecy, who while they remembered their ways did not open their mouths (in a confident, noisy, showy humility) but were confounded before God because of their shame and because of the evil of their doings. Then may you be assured that you are the subject of genuine Christian humility.

If you are truly humbled before God you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for all your sins and abominations. You will stand amazed at God's mercy in not having cut you off. You will desire above all things to be delivered from the power of sin, and to be perfectly transformed into the divine image. And of course you will not live allowedly in any known transgression, but will fear God and show yourselves kind and placable [forgiving] towards men.

2. The spirit of Christ which every true Christian possesses is a spirit of meekness and

forbearance.

This is closely allied to humility, though not exactly the same thing. Humility stands opposed to pride and self-valuation, meekness to cruelty and revenge. The humble man forms a proper estimate of his own character, and is full of condescension to those who are beneath him. The meek man is kind and gentle towards all, soft and forbearing towards those who have injured him. This, you are well aware was eminently Christ's spirit. *"When he was reviled he reviled not again; when he was persecuted he threatened not but committed himself to him that judges righteously. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."* Nothing like hastiness, keenness or revenge appeared in his whole character.

This indeed cannot be said of his followers, not even of the best of them--I mean those who are most distinguished for a careful imitation of their heavenly Master. Yet it can be said and must be said of all those who truly belong to Christ, that they have a portion of this spirit. Great allowance we are willing to make for a man's natural temperament. Some are by nature more quick to feel an injury than others, and more ready to resent it. Some, though slower to wrath, yet when once kindled are hard to appease; like the lion in the forest, not soon excited, but when stirred up dreadful to the foe. But let a man's natural disposition be what it may, if he have the spirit of Christ he will not be destitute of that meek and lowly temper so conspicuous in the character of the Saviour, and which the Saviour himself singles out as an indispensable requisite to those who actually take his yoke upon them and learn of Him.

Show me a man who in his general deportment is hasty, rash, cruel, vindictive, who upon the slightest injury kindles into a flame and forms the malignant purpose of revenge, and I will show you a man who is ignorant of Christ--a man who, if he thinks himself a Christian, knows not his own heart. Such a man may have been baptized with water, but he never was baptized with the Holy Ghost. He may have made a loud profession of Christianity, but he is certainly a stranger to its spirit and its power. What, a Christian, a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus and yet bitter and spiteful and revengeful? A saint called to be holy and consecrated to God in a new and heavenly life and yet no gentleness, no forbearance, no long suffering? It is impossible. Of such men we may say, notwithstanding the mask which they wear, as Jacob on his deathbed said of Simeon and Levi--*"Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united. For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."*

3. The spirit of forgiveness is another characteristic of the Christian temper.

It is not strange that a meek and forbearing spirit should forgive. Having no resentments to cherish, no revengeful purpose to execute, why should it not forgive? A man has done me an injury, but if I feel a kind and benignant spirit towards him, if from the bottom of my heart I sincerely wish his welfare and do not fail to pray for it, if I am willing to wipe the remembrance of his injustice or unkindness from my bosom and henceforth to do him all the good in my power, what is this but forgiveness itself? This is surely the spirit of the gospel, the spirit which Jesus himself exhibited in the most wonderful manner on the cross. Surrounded by those who were filled with the most implacable malice, mocking and insulting his dying agonies and thirsting for the very last drop of his blood, no other emotion is felt by him but that of benevolence and compassion. *"Father,"* saith he, *"forgive them for they know not what they do."* Such also was the

spirit of the martyr Stephen, who, while his enemies were stoning him to death, breathed forth the prayer, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*" And, brethren, let us not be deceived. If we cannot from the heart forgive those who have trespassed against us, we shall lack an essential point in the Christian character, and may be sure that we ourselves shall not be forgiven.

This our Lord taught his disciples in the prayer commonly called the Lord's prayer, but more explicitly and with greater emphasis in the parable of the unforgiving servant, mentioned in the eighteenth of Matthew. Read that parable, my brethren, at your leisure, and reflect upon the solemn application which Jesus Christ makes of it. The servant was delivered to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due. "*So likewise,*" saith Christ, "*shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*" But what if my brother does not repent, am I bound then to forgive him? I am not bound to restore him to my fellowship or my confidence. This would be both unreasonable and impossible. But I am bound to exercise a forgiving spirit. I must show a readiness to receive him to favor the moment he relents and returns. And if he never return, I am still to wish and pray for his welfare, and am forbidden all desire of revenge. The example of Jesus upon the cross is a sufficient warrant and guide upon this subject.

4. I remark, in the fourth place, that the spirit of Christ is a spirit of patience under suffering, whether it be suffering immediately from the hand of God or from the hand of man.

We live in a world of suffering, and the best men are often the deepest sharers in it. To endure what God in his providence lays upon us, and to endure without murmuring, is a virtue of high importance to the Christian character. Jesus Christ has set us an example here. He was eminently a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But who ever heard him complain? When did he utter a murmuring word or vent an impatient sigh? He had his name cast out as evil, he was a reproach and a bye word among the people. For his love, they were his adversaries. The more he labored among them for their salvation, the more pointed was their malediction and the more hardened their cruelty. They mocked him, they blasphemed him, and inflicted on him the tortures of the cross. But still his patience failed not. In the garden, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and the dreadful weight of his Father's wrath was pressing upon him, he cheerfully suffered the will of God--"*The cup which my heavenly Father hath given me to drink,*" saith he, "*shall I not drink it?*" And although in the moment of his bitterest agony he prayed, "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,*" yet he immediately subjoins, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" The most eminent disciple of Jesus will no doubt fall far short of this bright example; still it is an essential part of the Christian temper to be patient in tribulation. Tribulation, indeed, is sent for the very purpose of working patience, and where this virtue is wanting [lacking], there also is the spirit of Christ wanting.

5. To this I add, that the spirit of Christ is eminently a praying spirit.

None of you can be ignorant how much the divine Redeemer inculcated prayer. By his example, no less than by his instructions, he often pressed this duty upon his disciples. Surprising as the circumstance may appear, he sometimes spent whole nights in prayer. When no eye but his own was awake, he poured out his soul into the bosom of his heavenly Father and committed himself to Him who had promised to sustain him. On some occasions when he had much to occupy him through the day, he rose up very early in the morning and engaged in this duty. His benevolent heart found full and delightful employment in praying for others, if not for himself.

If we are Christians indeed, we are partakers of the same spirit. We shall not merely pray, and pray with constancy and regularity as often as the proper season of devotion returns, but we shall delight in the duty. We shall love to come into the presence of our heavenly Father and unbosom to Him all our wants and all our sorrows. We shall feel it a privilege to extol and magnify his name, while we remember and supplicate his mercy, and send up to Him our songs of thanksgiving and praise. He does but deceive himself who imagines that he is a Christian, unless he possesses a spirit of prayer. I say a spirit of prayer in distinction from the gift of prayer. A man may have a great gift for the performance of this duty, and be much admired by his fellow worshippers for the fluency and pertinency with which he pours forth his supplications, and yet be utterly destitute of the spirit. Prayer is desire--sincere, unequivocal desire--offered unto God for things agreeable to his will in the name of Christ. And where there is no desire, or none which flows from a humble, believing and sanctified heart, then there is no prayer in the view of Him who tries the heart and the reins. It is only a solemn mockery which, unless repented of, God will expose sooner or later to the assembled universe, to the everlasting confusion of the presumptuous and self-inflated individual who is guilty of it.

6. I remark, further, that he is no less deceived who indulges the hope that he is a Christian if he be not dead to the world.

The spirit of Christ is a heavenly spirit, a spirit which draws not its hopes and its comforts chiefly from this transitory state. How was it with the blessed Redeemer himself? Did he teach that *"a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses?"* Yes, he taught this; and he actually felt as he taught. He sought not the honors and pageantry of the world. He desired neither its wealth nor its pleasures. His soul was borne aloft to the glories of the unseen state--the glories which he had with the Father before the world was, the glories which he expected to enjoy hereafter with all his redeemed, and to enjoy forever when the darkness and suffering of the present scene should have passed away. This was the joy set before him to which he constantly looked, and for which he endured the cross, despising the shame.

We may, if we please, dream that we are Christians while our hearts are buried in the world, and while it is manifest to everybody but ourselves that we are seeking to lay up treasures here. But one thing is certain: we have not Christ's spirit while we hold on with such a death-like grasp to the world. *"He that loves the world,"* says the Apostle, *"the love of the Father is not in him."* *"The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life,"*-- these are of the world. And if they govern us, though we may be too blind to see it or too perverse to acknowledge it, it is certain we have not the spirit of Christ, and shall never be owned by Him as his.

7. The spirit of Christ is also a resolute and persevering spirit in the discharge of duty.

Jesus Christ, though meek and gentle as a lamb, was nevertheless fearless and determined. He had a host of wicked men and devils to oppose; but no difficulties terrified him, no sufferings and dangers forced him back. Whatever became duty he resolutely performed it, though Sadducees reproached and Pharisees blasphemed. Such also was the spirit of the apostles, and such, to a certain degree, is the spirit of every true Christian. If a man merely truckle [submit tamely] and calculate; if he balance his interest with this party and that or with this friend and that; if he will risk nothing for conscience sake, or be driven from his own convictions by a little worldly loss or gain; what claim can he have to the bold and manly Spirit of Jesus Christ, who walked so fearlessly in the path of duty and who said, *"Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O God, yea thy law is within my heart."*

8. I mention a disinterested love to man [a love not motivated by our own interests] as another branch of the Christian temper.

And was not this emphatically the spirit of Jesus Christ? What brought him from Heaven to earth? What induced him to take our nature upon him with all its weakness and infirmities, sin only excepted? Why did he pass through that wonderful scene of humiliation and suffering which reached from the manger to the cross? Why did he bow his head, at last, in unknown agonies and sink to the weakness and dishonors of the grave? Was it to redeem a race of beings who had been kind and dutiful to him, or who--when redeemed--could make any adequate return for his love? No, it was for his enemies literally that this amazing sacrifice was made, for those who had not implored this mercy at his hands nor would be willing to accept of it but through the interposition of his sovereign and all-conquering grace! Here was love without a parallel, a love stronger than death, a love of the most tender and disinterested character.

If we have the spirit of Christ, a compassion like this will dwell in our own bosoms. We shall take a deep interest in the happiness of our fellow men, and especially in their eternal happiness. Whoever they are and wherever they are, we shall desire sincerely and intensely their highest welfare. It will not be enough that we love the immediate circle of our friends, that we are kind to those who are kind to us. Our generous bosoms will warm with affection towards the whole human family. We shall be able to love those that hate us, and pray for those that despitefully use and persecute us.

9. Finally, the same virtuous and heavenly disposition will show itself in supreme love to God and in a tender regard for his honor.

This was preeminently Christ's spirit. His Father's interest and his Father's honor lay near his heart. He had dwelt in the bosom of the Father from eternity. He surveyed His glories with more than an angel's eye, and burned in affection to Him with all the powers of Deity and humanity united. It was to unfold his Father's character, to set his glory high in the presence of the intelligent universe, that he made his appearance in our world. *"I came not,"* saith he, *"to do mine own will or to seek mine own glory, but to do the will, and to seek the glory of Him that sent me."* His zeal in the temple when he drove from thence those that bought and sold, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, sufficiently demonstrates his tender concern for his Father's honor and his readiness to vindicate the rights of his sacred cause. A similar zeal, though far less pure in its operation, glows in the heart of every sincere disciple of Jesus. Enlightened from above, he discerns enough of the divine glory to throw a shade over all terrestrial things. God appears to him to be the chief good, and his glory worthy to be the supreme end of all his actions. He feels himself tenderly united to his interest and honor. Such, my dear brethren, is the spirit of Jesus, and such, in a greater or less degree, is our spirit if we are in reality his friends.

What then can we say for ourselves in a review of this subject? What indeed has conscience said already? Does the Spirit of Christ dwell in us? Yea or nay? I do not ask if it dwell in our neighbors or in our Christian brethren generally, [but] does it dwell in our own souls? Let each waiting heart before God this evening answer the question for himself, personally. Say, my dear brother or my dear sister, have you the humility and condescension of Jesus? Have you his meekness and forbearance? Can you forgive like him, suffer like him, pray like him? Like him, are you dead to the world while you are fearless and resolute in the discharge of duty? Like him,

is your bosom warmed with disinterested love to your fellow men, and with a pure but supreme love to God, the Father of us all?

If such be the fact with us, we are Christians indeed. We are united to Jesus by bonds which are indissoluble and eternal. Christ is ours, and we are Christ's. And as certainly as he is heir of all things, so certainly are we heirs with him. We are children of the same Father-- He the elder, we the younger brethren. Has he gone to Heaven to take possession of an immortal inheritance? He has gone in our name, and it is his promise that where he is there shall we be also. Let it be our concern then, to grow in a conformity to him in all things, drinking more deeply into his spirit as we advance and bringing forth fruit more abundantly to his praise. But if the Spirit of Christ be not in us, be assured we are none of his, whatever shining qualities we may possess or whatever hopes we may entertain.

Oh, let us not be deceived with the Bible, that great fountain of light, in our hands. God and not man will judge us; and the judgment He will pronounce will be final and decisive. And let us bear in mind that He will judge us, not as we judge one another--by what passes without--but by what passes within. He has his eye directly fixed upon our hearts, and sees most perfectly every latent thought and spring of action there. Shall we not then cry with David, *"Search me, O Lord, and know me, try my reins, and my heart, and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way which is everlasting."*

Let all those who are convinced that they have not the Spirit of Christ awake to a conviction of their sinfulness and danger. Remember that there is no neutral ground here. If you are not for Christ, you are against him. If you gather not with him, you scatter abroad. If you are not numbered with his friends, he will certainly reckon you among his enemies. And can it be safe for you to remain in such circumstances? Can you dethrone Omnipotence or successfully oppose the mandate of the Eternal? Your only safety is in yielding at once to his authority, and becoming the humble and obedient disciples of the Lord Jesus. Only let the Spirit of Christ be in you, and He will own you as his when you meet him in the character of a judge.

Sermon XII, "The Spirit of Christ," by James Richards in William B. Sprague, *Sermons by the Late Rev. James Richards* (Albany: Erastus H. Pease & Co., 1849). Note: The text has not been modified, except that punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.