

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Having the Mind of Christ

Several years ago, French scientists succeeded in causing chickens to sound like quail. Researchers took tissue from parts of the Japanese quail brain thought to control the bird's call and implanted it in the brains of five chicken embryos. The experiment worked. Researchers say the hatched chicks sounded like quail rather than chickens.

But now the real miracle. God has "implanted" the mind of Christ in those who have accepted His Son as their Savior. The Spirit of God has taken up residence in us. *1 Corinthians 2:12 (ESV)*¹² *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.* In some mysterious way we now have a capacity for divine wisdom that no Ph.D. or natural experience could ever provide. Having the mind of Christ enables us to see life increasingly from God's perspective.

Today's lesson takes us to the pattern for Christian living, which is summed up with the phrase - *the mind of Christ*. *The mind of Christ* does not come by our imitating Him. His *mind* comes to us by the power of the Spirit of God. The mind of Christ comes into effect when we say, 'Lord, You take over.'

Paul's Four-Fold Appeal

Read Philippians 2:1-4 (ESV)¹ *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,*² *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*⁴ *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Paul's use of the word 'if' does not imply that there might not be any encouragement, comfort, etc. In the Greek the sentence construction assumes the statement is true. It is as though Paul is saying to the Philippians, "Since you know there is encouragement and these other benefits, be of the same mind sharing the same love. It is wrong for believers to act like these blessings do not exist when they do!

Like the Philippians, we need to be watchful of our attitudes. Each of us must take on an attitude of submission and servanthood in order to be unifiers for the cause of Christ. Disunity is a tool that Satan loves to use in the body of believers. True spiritual unity comes from within; it is a matter of the heart. The Apostle Peter wrote in *1 Peter 3:8 (ESV)*⁸ *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

God didn't make robots in the beginning and Paul is not asking the Philippians to be photocopies of one another. He just wants them to have the same mind. Yes, there will be differences among the 'family'.

Yet, we do not tear each other apart because we disagree on some things. When we possess the mind of Christ, we will agree on the major points of our faith. If the Philippians put their divisions aside, it would complete Paul's joy and I am sure it would complete any pastor's joy today and most importantly our Lord's joy in us.

Are we really humble enough to count others more significant than ourselves? The humble person looks after the best interest of others. Please note that Paul also said we are to look out after our own responsibilities. Don't be so consumed with the best interest of others to the point of overlooking your ministry to your own family. Also as church members, we should never be so demanding of the time of our church staff and leaders that our demands become a detriment to their families.

The mind of Christ avoids selfish-ambition and personal vanity because if these sins get a foothold in any church family, they become destroyers of our unity in Christ. **James 3:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

This next passage is very likely a hymn that Paul either wrote or borrowed as an illustration of Jesus being the perfect example for Christian unity.

The Mind of Christ

Read Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV) ⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ⁸ *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

We tend to feel that the mind of Christ is something too unattainable for the believer to possess. And yet Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.* The question is will we use it?

To help us use the mind of Christ that we possess, let's look at a few examples from the life of Jesus.

1. His Reputation Was Not a Priority

Jesus is the King of kings, yet, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. In spite of His love, godliness, and miracles, His reputation was trashed by those who hated Him but that did not stop Him. Let's do our best to live for Christ and leave the rest up to the Lord not making our own reputation the priority.

2. He Was Humble

To have the mind of Christ is to have a humble mind and an attitude of serving. Jesus said in **Matthew 11:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* Some translations use the word meek in place of gentle. The word 'meek' was used to describe the breaking of a wild horse. Applied to us, this word involves discipline and self-

control. A truly humble person is disciplined to the will of God and does not ‘fly off the handle’ in difficult situations.

3. The mind of Christ is an obedient mind.

Jesus said in **John 8:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ ... *I always do the things that are pleasing to him* [meaning the Father]. ” Everything Jesus did was pleasing to His Father. As we make our decisions, let’s be quick to consider how what we do will please our Father in heaven.

The mind of Christ in us causes the Holy Spirit to transform and renew our minds.

Read Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* ² *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

The renewing of our minds is not a one-time event. It will be a lifetime ongoing journey. Wondering what choice to make at any given moment, use the mind of Christ that lives in you to discern what the will of God is. If you can’t discern the will of God, wait for the Lord to reveal it to you.

Let’s consider the meaning of *though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself*. The King James Version expresses what happened as Jesus making Himself of no reputation. The Bible teaches that our Savior was both fully divine and completely human during His earthly life. But nowhere does Scripture explain exactly how Jesus' two natures coexisted. To be honest, if the Bible did explain it, our finite minds probably wouldn’t completely comprehend it.

Theologians have struggled for years to explain this mystery. In the 1800s certain scholars formulated the Kenosis theory, which asserts on the basis of **Philippians 2:7** that God’s divine Son laid aside, or emptied Himself, of certain divine attributes when He became human. However, these theories of Jesus’ incarnation have been rejected by many conventional Bible scholars.

Paul does not say that Jesus stopped being God or that He gave up any divine attributes. However, Jesus said in **John 17:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

It is not only about what Christ gave up but what He took on. Jesus added to Himself a human nature and humbled Himself. Jesus went from being the Glory of glories in heaven to being a human being who was put to death on the cross. In the ultimate act of humility, the God of the universe became a human being and died for His creation.

Let’s be careful to not be too casual in our thinking of what Jesus actually gave up for us when He left heaven and what He did when He came to earth. In his book, *What If It Were True?*, Charles Martin writes of Jesus residing in heaven among all His glory and yet choosing to become human. In human terms Martin uses his imagination to visualize these events. Martin writes:

“The Father hugs the Son, buries His face on His Son’s cheek and kisses Him. The time has come. On earth, the sons of Adam have lost their way. Each gone their own way. Astray. The entire human race has been taken captive, and the enemy is torturing them. Not one of them will survive the night. The Son has volunteered for a rescue mission, but it’s a prisoner exchange. The whispers are true, their freedom will cost the Son everything.

His life for theirs.

The Father holds His Son’s hands in His and tenderly touches the center of His palm. He knows what’s coming. A tear rolls down the face of the Ancient of Days. The Son thumbs it away. “I’ll miss you.” He glances at the earth below and hell in between. Billions of faces shine across the timeline of history. He knows each by name. They are the “joy set before Him”...

Voices rise from every corner singing at the tops of their lungs...The Son whose “countenance was like the sun shining in its strength” – exits heaven blanketed in the singing of more than a hundred million angels and bathed in the tears of the Father. The Word becomes flesh, and He is gone.”

Martin goes on to say:

“I am trying here to give you a picture that grows your faith and your hope. He is God of battle-axe and spear. God of angel armies. He holds the keys of death and Hades. And when you were created, by Him, He meticulously fashioned you out of the dust, sculpted your body as it is, then knelt down, took a giant breath, placed His lips to yours, and breathed out... The life-giving breath made you a living breathing soul...

That’s my King.”

Paul traces the steps in the humiliation of Christ:

- First He emptied Himself – laying aside the independent use of His own attributes as God.
- Next, He permanently became a human, in a sinless physical body.
- Then, He used that body to be a servant.
- And finally, He took that body to the cross and willingly died.

Read Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV) ⁹ *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,* ¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

It has not happened yet but it will! In this passage Paul looks beyond the day of Christ’s ascension into heaven to a future day when every knee will bow and every tongue in heaven and on earth will exalt Christ as Lord. There is a time coming when the One who was brought low will be raised high. Let’s live out the gospel and exalt His name now.