

The Mind of Christ . . .

“LET THIS MIND . . .”

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I. Introduction

In this lesson we will study the mind or attitude of Christ based on the description given by the Apostle Paul in his Philippian letter (chapter 2, verses 1-18). Philippians is a letter to the church in Philippi written while Paul was in prison. Paul was concerned with a potential problem of conflict and disharmony within the church. His purpose in writing seems to be to address the problem and encourage them toward unity and care of one another. Paul approaches these concerns in the following ways:

- He reminds them of the unifying qualities that are inherent within their identity and calling as Christians (Philippians 2:1).
- Paul specifies how they must treat one another in order to be true to that identity and calling (Philippians 2:2-4).
- He sets before them the perfect picture of this attitude in the example of Jesus and calls the church to adopt Jesus' attitude as their own (Philippians 2:5-11).
- He applies the lesson to his readers with concrete instructions concerning their behavior (Philippians 2:12-18).

II. The Mind of Christ

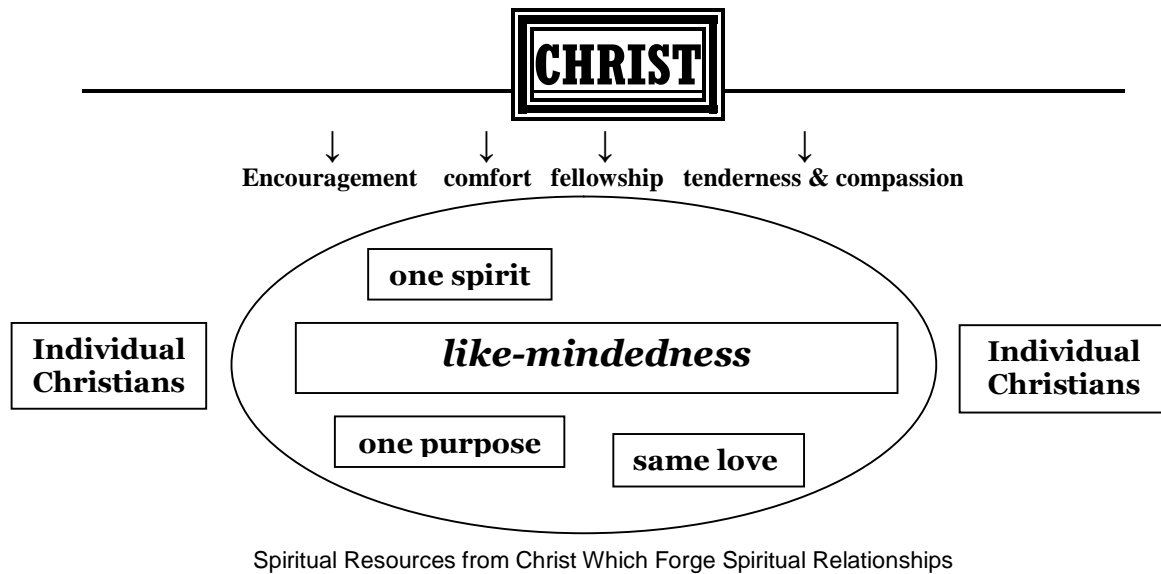
A. Four Compelling Reasons to Have the Mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1)

In the first verse of chapter 2, Paul reminds his readers that they have *four very powerful resources* at their disposal to motivate them to live at peace with one another: “If you have any . . .

- 1) encouragement** from being united with Christ, if any . . .
- 2) comfort** from his love, if any . . .
- 3) fellowship** with the Spirit, if any . . .
- 4) tenderness and compassion . . . ”**

Paul's use of the word **IF** . . . is not to convey any sense of doubt. He uses it like the word **since** . . . to acknowledge that they have already received these four qualities. Since there is *encouragement and comfort* in Christ, *fellowship, tenderness and compassion* with the Spirit. He urges them to live in a manner that is consistent with these spiritual blessings.

Paul's challenge is to let these blessings motivate them to live in peace and unity with one another.



B. Christ-Minded Behavior (Philippians 2:2-4)

The goal of Paul's instruction is to help the members of the Philippian church live together in *unity* (Philippians 2:2). In this verse Paul uses the word *like-minded*. To Paul, *likemindedness* was *not* uniformity of thought or conformity or behavior. He describes like-mindedness as *a common love and a spirit and purpose*. He challenges them to a commitment of loyalty to one another that transcends differences of understanding, temperament, culture, tastes and preferences. In Philippians 2:5, he further states that the mind of Christ is the standard toward which all must strive in becoming like-minded.

C. Christ: The Supreme Example (Philippians 2:5-11)

The perfect personification of the attitude Paul describes is Jesus. In verse 5, Paul says that this is the mindset for which we must strive. Notice the characteristics of the model Jesus lived for us:

1. The Mind of Self-Sacrifice

The Bible makes clear that Christ, as a member of the Godhead, was by nature God (Philippians 2:6) and the exact representation of God's being (Hebrews 1:1). He was with God and was God (John 1:1). But Jesus did not consider this position of equality with God something to hold onto at all cost. He willingly gave up the glory and power of heaven to come to earth, putting mankind's needs ahead of His own position, status and privileges. Imagine that you are a powerful national ruler. A crisis in the ranks of your people threatens to destroy them. What would you do? You could pass laws, allocate funds or appoint a commission to study the problem. You might even visit the area to demonstrate your support. But would you strip yourself of your rank and privilege to go live and suffer among them? This is what Jesus did. We see related examples of this kind of sacrifice in our world today:

- ...when a father works two jobs to put food in the mouths of his children...
- ...when caring hands reach out to those with AIDS...
- ...when a tired single parent stumbles home exhausted from work and worrying about paying the bills, but attends lovingly to the needs of little

**children instead of collapsing in front of the TV...
...when a grown child, aging in years himself or herself, looks after an
aging parent with Alzheimer's disease...**

2. ***The Mind of the "Extra Mile"***

Jesus identified Himself in the role of a servant as He walked among men (Matthew 20:24-28). He sought no special rights, privileges or advantages. When the apostles resisted and bristled at the thought of serving one another, Jesus demonstrated a servant's heart by washing their feet (John 13). He calls us to be servants of one another in the same way. The "extra mile" phrase and concept come from Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus said if an official asks you to carry his pack for a mile (what the Roman law required), you should go beyond what you are *forced* to do and carry his pack two miles (Matthew 5:41). A beautiful example of going the extra mile in our modern world was brought to my (Shelley's) attention this year . . .

Here In Fort Worth we have a wonderful museum school. Enrollment is limited, and competition for space is keen. Every year the local TV stations and newspapers carry stories of parents camping outside the museum school entrance all night in order to be in line for enrollment when the doors open the next morning.

Janet, a young mother with a four-year-old daughter named Leah, was dying of cancer. She received a call from Sharon who didn't know Janet very well. Sharon told Janet, "I know how important it is to you that Leah go to the museum school next fall. My gift to you will be that I will personally see that Leah has a place, and I will transport her every week so that she can attend.

When I first heard about this, I was touched at Sharon's thoughtfulness and commitment. But it wouldn't be *all that much* trouble for her, I reasoned, because she teaches at the school two days a week and I assumed she would take Leah when she was going anyway. But I underestimated her.

Sharon did not pick a day when she was going to the school to teach because she wanted Leah to have a "mommy" waiting at the door for her just like all the other children. If she were teaching, Leah would have to be the last one picked up. I imagine Leah could have adjusted to this, but since she was so very small and motherless, Sharon did not want her to have to. So, Sharon, who has four kids of her own, has taken a whole day out of her week *every week* to go across town, pick up Leah, take her to school, wait three hours, go back as her "mommy" and then drive her home.

That is figuratively and *literally* going "the extra mile." It is done out of the mind of Christ formed in Sharon's mind and heart.

3. ***The Mind of Empathy***

"Being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man" makes it clear to all that Jesus identifies with us in our humanity and is able to understand and empathize with our plight. In the book of Hebrews we learn that He shared our humanity and was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 2:14-18). This qualifies Him to be a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). The act of identification with us was not for Jesus' benefit. In his omniscience He did not need to become a human to understand the human condition. It was for *our* benefit to assure *us* that He can empathize with us in our weaknesses, pains and struggles.

4. ***The Mind of Humility***

Jesus, the glorious Son of God and heir to the throne of heaven, humbled Himself by being born in a stable as the son of a poor Palestinian couple and heir to a carpentry

shop. He humbled Himself by being a submissive and obedient child, being baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness, and by giving up any claim to human comfort, status or power by identifying with the poor, suffering, homeless and oppressed. Further, He humbled Himself by willingly experiencing the injustice of an illegal trial and refusing to defend Himself against false charges and the violation of His civil rights. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death on the cross like a common criminal although He had the power to call down all the forces of heaven to His rescue.

5. ***The Mind of Obedience***

In Hebrews 5:7-10, we are told that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. As a member of the Godhead He was in a position to *be* obeyed. Yet, He humbled Himself by giving up His place of authority. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the most debasing and ignoble experience of man . . . a dishonorable death by execution on the cross. We will consider the Mind of Obedience in more in-depth in the next lesson.

6. ***The Mind of Trust***

In our day of instant gratification many have trouble denying themselves pleasure regardless of the cost. Yet, the attitude of Jesus is to be obedient regardless of the consequences in the firm hope that God will exalt and honor those who put their trust in Him. The attitude of Christ is . . . “I did it God’s way.”

Doing it God’s way may mean the sacrifice of “earthly” rewards in order to lay up treasure in heaven.

D. **Our Response**

What follows this passage is an admonition by Paul containing some concrete ways through which his readers can apply these teachings:

1. ***Our Response: Obedience*** (Philippians 2:12-13)

The mind of Christ is . . . “*For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me*” (John 6:38). Jesus took this attitude with Him all the way to the cross. In the garden before He was arrested, He fought this battle of wills as He prayed: “*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done*” (Luke 2:13). This attitude means that we trust God will give us the *willingness* and *ability* to act only in valid ways as we strive to accomplish God’s purpose or will in our lives. When we make *His* purpose *our* purpose – we are demonstrating the mind of Christ.

2. ***Our Response: Focusing on God’s Purpose - Not Our Own***

In Philippians 2:13, we are promised that God will work in us both to “will and to do” only when we are working for *His* purpose, not ours. Romans 8:28 gives us this same concept: “All things work together for good for those that love the Lord, for those who are called according to *His* good purpose.” We can make *His* purpose *our* purpose by forming within our minds and hearts the mind of Christ.

3. ***Our Response: Refraining from Grumbling and Complaining***

Grumbling and complaining are signs that we are second-guessing God and do not trust Him to provide for us. Seemingly harmless, they are actually very serious offenses because they open up the door to discontent and disbelief and spread fear, anger and discord among the people of God. While we may not understand all of God’s ways and are at liberty to ask Him for greater understanding and power to endure, we must learn

to trust and obey without openly or privately impugning His wisdom and authority. Doing the will of God brings us into conflict with a “crooked and depraved generation” (Philippians 2:15). This collision of values creates pain, suffering and maybe even *persecution*. When the going gets tough, the people of God do not grumble or complain. They rejoice that the darker the night of oppression – the brighter the stars of purity.

4. ***Our Response: Rejoicing*** (Philippians 2:17-18)

Joy and *rejoicing* are key themes in the book of Philippians. Even in the face of suffering, Paul found cause to rejoice and urged his readers to rejoice with him. This sounds strange to modern readers. We usually associate rejoicing with pleasure and fun, not pain. When Paul says that he will rejoice even if it requires his being “poured out like a drink offering” on his sacrificial service to the Philippians (probably an allusion to his imprisonment and impending death) we modern readers may be confused. But in Paul’s mind, suffering the loss of everything in order to know Christ was a trade he was glad to make. Gaining Christ and having a righteousness that comes through faith in God was Paul’s priority. The thought of sharing in Christ’s suffering and becoming like Him in His death only meant that Paul would also attain his resurrection (Philippians 3:7-11). Paul’s goal was to develop his relationship with Christ to such an extent that he would be glad to suffer what Christ suffered.

Paul’s rejoicing had very little to do with physical circumstances and everything to do with spiritual reality.

When Paul saw God’s will being realized - even if it involved suffering - he rejoiced. When we become more concerned with God’s will than we are with our own comfort, we reflect the attitude of Christ.

III. Conclusion

Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to have the power to live the Christian life and maintain the unity of the believers. He knew this would require the mind of Christ being formed in their minds and hearts.

We need the mind of Christ today no less that they did as we strive to access the power to will and to do all things through Him and according to His purpose.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

- Paul's purpose in writing Philippians was to encourage Christians toward caring for each other and
 - unity
 - unanimity
 - unilateral authority
 - isolationism
- One of the four powerful resources motivating peace with each other is
 - money
 - physical force
 - comfort
 - none of these
- Paul describes like-mindedness as a common love and a oneness of purpose and
 - financial resources
 - spirit
 - flesh
 - all of these
- Jesus willingly gave up the glory and power of heaven, putting our needs ahead of
 - David's throne
 - Solomon's temple
 - Moses
 - His own position
- Jesus demonstrated a servant's heart by
 - turning water to wine
 - healing a leper
 - washing feet
 - raising Lazarus
- Jesus did not sin but was tempted
 - once
 - unlike us
 - twice
 - in all ways
- Jesus learned obedience through the things He
 - suffered
 - ignored
 - avoided
 - could not understand
- The will of God was the will of
 - the Roman government
 - Jesus
 - the Pharaoh
 - all the people
- The Christian does not focus on human ambitions but focuses on the purpose of
 - his wife
 - the family
 - God
 - society-at-large
- Paul's joy had little to do with physical circumstances but had everything to do with
 - spiritual reality
 - subliminal messages
 - luck
 - coincidences.