

Opening the Word— The Model of Unity: The Mind of Christ

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11 (RSV) *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the **form** of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the **form** of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human **form** he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Hey, Kids, what time is it? ... No, it's "memory verse time".

Principle 4: The Model of Unity: The Mind of Christ

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-5 (RSV) *Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...*

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..."

Some English versions use the word, "*attitude*"—*have the attitude of Christ.*

In this passage we have an early litmus test for being a Christian: it is a characteristic of the mind. It's not a creed or sacrament or ritual; it's not a matter of morality. It's a quality of the mind—aligning our minds with the mind of Christ.

So, how does one come to "have the mind of Christ?" Is it a matter of positive thinking—having a Positive Mental Attitude? Can't hurt.

An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life...

"A fight is going on inside me. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.

"One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, self-doubt, and ego.

"The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

"This same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old chief simply replied, "The one you feed."

The ancient Hebrew proverb says, "As one thinks within his heart, so is he." The late Zig Ziglar said, "Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude." [BTW, my favorite Zig Ziglar quote is, "There's no traffic on the extra mile."

So, is having the mind of Christ a matter of filling our heads with nice things? Paul, winding down this beautiful, joyful letter to the Philippians (4:8), writes, “...*whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*”

Will that give us the mind of Christ? In I Corinthians (2:7-16), Paul again talks about having the mind of Christ:

No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. ¹²And we have received God's Spirit, so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

Then he quotes Isaiah 40:13:

*“Who can know the LORD's thoughts?
Who knows enough to teach him?”*

And he concludes: “*But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.*”

So, we don't develop the mind of Christ—we don't achieve it—we don't work for it. Like virtually everything else related to God, it is grace: we simply receive it as a part of God's Spirit.

But when we place this idea—“the mind of Christ”—in the context of today's Scripture, it's more than pretty thoughts. There's trouble in the church at Philippi; disunity, discord and personal ambition are frustrating the unity in their fellowship. So, Paul is writing to urge them to replace those attitudes with “the mind of Christ”; and I find five distinct qualities in the mind of Christ:

1. He did not exploit his divine state. The text says he was in the form of God. There three Greek words we translate form. One indicates an appearance, like when we say a cloud *looks like* a bear—it has the form of a bear. The other word signifies essence—the basic nature of a thing, like when we see a bear: “it doesn't just “look like” a bear; it *IS* a bear!” That's how Christ Jesus was in the form of God. But, he didn't exploit that status. Instead, he...
2. ...emptied himself (literally, he “poured out himself”); and he...
3. ...took the form—same word—of a slave—one whose life is lived at the will of a master. It's not like the Prince and the Pauper; the Prince could take back his status any time; but Jesus “emptied himself”. He didn't put on a disguise. In the same way he was in the form of God, he took on the form of a slave; and he...
4. And being found in human form—and here is the third meaning: “shape” something that can be touched and sensed with all the senses. ...he humbled himself. He didn't have to do that. He was equal with God... But he voluntarily “poured out himself”—emptied himself...: he “humbled himself” and...

5. ...became obedient. Now, there are two ways of looking at this obedience.
- a) Most commentaries say he was obedient to God; and, the Gospels affirm that. Obedience to God was the primary quality that defined Jesus as the Christ—the chosen one.
 - b) But there is another way of looking at this affirmation. When he took on the form of a servant—took on human form—he was obedient to that form. He maintained that form all the way to the end of the line—the text says he was obedient to the point of death". He became human, and what one experience will every other human in history experience? [Death].

Now why is that important? How is that humanly possible to have the mind of Christ, if Christ remains divine?

I guess every kid loves a circus. I always admired those daring young men on the flying trapeze. Wow! But, I couldn't identify. What are they thinking?

But there's the clown, down on the sawdust, tripping over his own feet, stumbling around... Yeah. I can identify. I know what that's like.

I can't take on the mind of the circus aerialist; but, I can take on the mind of the clown. I can't take on the mind of God; but, when another human faces death in a special way, that means it is humanly possible to do so; and I have hope. I can take on that way of thinking.

This whole passage is summarized in today's memory verses: "*...in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*"

HUMILITY: Greek philosophers discounted humility because it implied weakness, inadequacy and worthlessness. The word was always used in a bad or inferior sense. But Jesus redefined humility by living in the recognition that by ourselves we *are* inadequate and worthless (1 Corinthians 4:7). It is God alone who lifts us up and gives us everything we need to live as God intended us to live.

This is the counsel Paul offered to the church in Philippi—a church divided—much like the church in Corinth—over whose faith was superior—who should have the position of greatest honor in the church. And here is Paul's model for unity: "Have the mind of Christ. ...in humility, put others ahead of yourself."

Think of those you most admire. I suspect your admiration was, at least in part, because they were humble, putting others (including you) first. To live in Unity, model your life after theirs, but even more importantly, model your life after Christ: "*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...*"