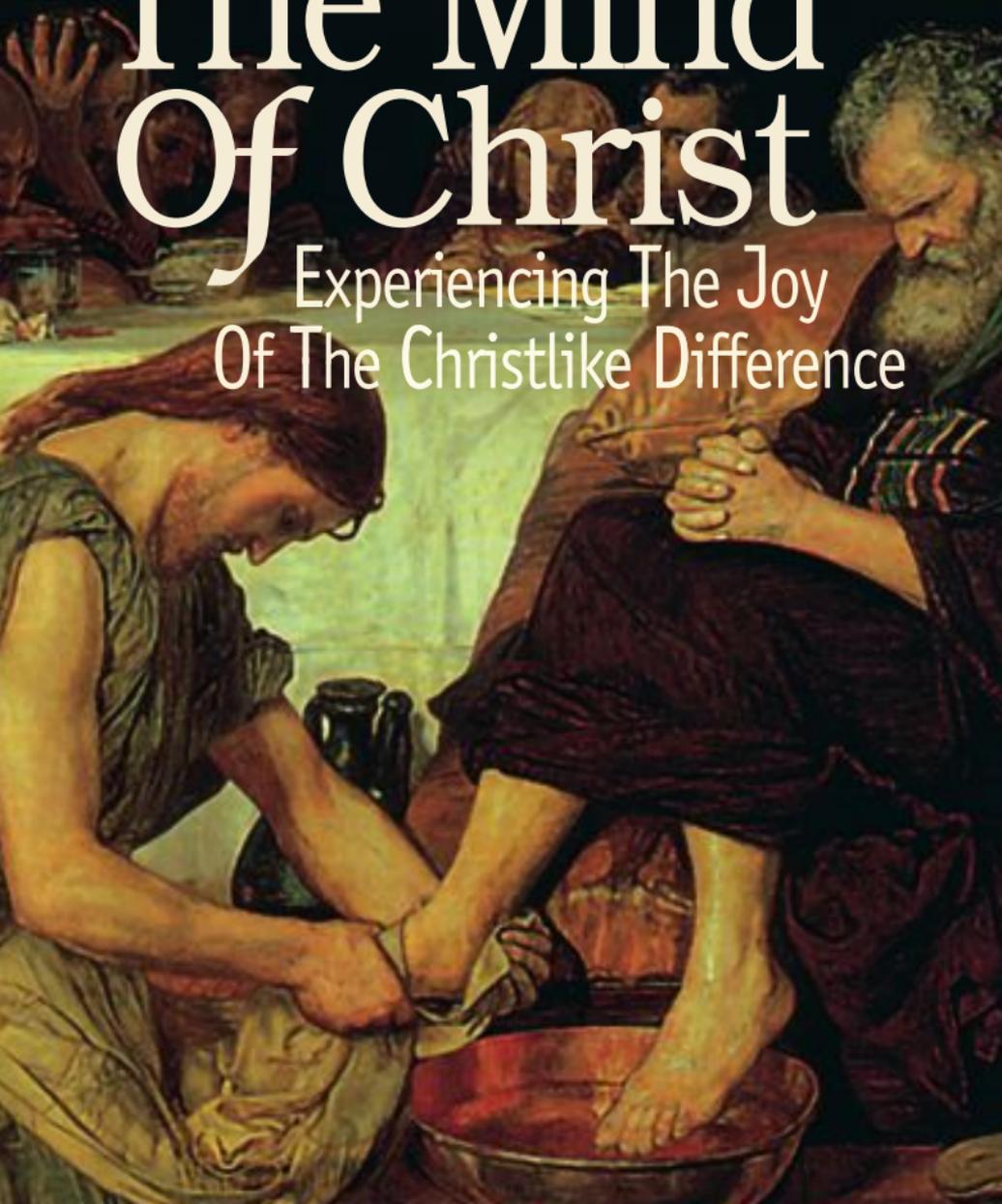




DISCOVERY SERIES

The Mind Of Christ

Experiencing The Joy
Of The Christlike Difference



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THE MIND OF CHRIST

Experiencing The Joy Of The Christlike Difference

How often have you wanted to tell someone what was really on your mind? Most of the time we don't because we want to avoid making matters worse.

Imagine, however, that instead of giving others "a piece of our mind" we were able to speak to them with the attitude of Christ. Would such a response mark us as unreal and overly pious? Or would it be a moment of wisdom and goodness that we would never regret?

In the following pages, RBC Director of Church Ministries Bill Crowder looks at Philippians 2:5-11 to show us the joyful difference that having "the mind of Christ" can make in our lives.

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A LIFE OF DISTINCTION

The idea of living with distinction has captured the imagination of our culture. A personal computer company challenges us to “Think Different.” A maker of pickup trucks tells us that their product is superior because it is “different.” A restaurant chain urges us to “experience the difference.” A construction firm says they are ahead of the pack because they use “a different perspective.” In fact, there is an entire volume on the Internet called “The Difference Dictionary” that extols the value of all things different. *Different*—it is a word with enormous implications.

A Challenge To Be Different. The importance of being recognizably different also

has a history in the Bible. When I was a young church attender, I remember being confronted with the New Testament words of Peter that we are to be “a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9 KJV). I was relieved to learn that

*God has chosen
you to be a people
for Himself, a
special treasure.*

the word *peculiar* in the King James Bible did not mean “strange” but rather to have the qualities that would mark us as God’s own special people.

Living a life that is different is one of the challenges of the children of God, and one that deserves to be taken seriously. As far back as the Old Testament law, the people of God were

told, “You are a holy [i.e. set apart for a purpose] people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Dt. 7:6). The quality of their national and personal lives was meant to show surrounding nations the difference their God could make in those who were willing to trust Him.

A Desire To Be Different. Those of us who grew up in the 1960s can remember how much our generation once wanted to be different in its own way. By our hair, our music, our clothing, and our vans we made it clear that we didn’t want to be identified with the values and policies of our parents, our government, our capitalistic way of life, or our churches.

Looking back, we probably weren’t “just being

ourselves” and shedding conformity as much as we thought. Instead of three-piece suits, ties, and a briefcase, we had our own uniform—bell-bottom jeans, tie-dyed T-shirts, beads, and long hair. On the outside we had traded one kind of conformity for another.

What made us different as a generation, however, was a new set of values, attitudes, and beliefs. Some of these were good, but some led to regret. We were right about the importance of love but wrong about how to express it. We were right in seeing the failures of social institutions but wrong in our disrespect for all authority. We were right in calling for peace but wrong in thinking we knew where to find it.

The attitudes of our heart told the real story of our generation. Our signs and slogans said “love,” “peace,” “back to nature,” and “flower

power.” But the music, drugs, sexual behavior, and rejection of authority that marked our revolution spelled the clear and present danger we didn’t see.

***Being like those
around us may
be giving us
more false
assurance than
we can afford.***

Today, those of us in the family of faith can also try to be different in ways that are not as safe as we thought they were. Sometimes we adopt what we think is a “biblical” way of life that separates us from our neighbors, but it doesn’t reflect the real spirit and values of Christ.

To help us avoid such dangers, the New Testament joins the Old Testament

Scriptures in showing us what it means to live as God’s special people. For example, in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5–7), He taught His people to distinguish themselves not just by moral convictions or religious separation but by changed attitudes that link them to His Spirit.

- Jesus showed us that the difference our heavenly Father is looking for is a clearly defined distinction of the heart (5:1-10). Repeatedly He taught His people not to focus on outward behavior but on attitudes, motives, and beliefs that are for the good of others.
- When these differences of heart are evident, Christ said, His people (5:13-16) are like “salt” (different from the world’s corruption) and “light” (different from the world’s darkness).

The difference Jesus set before us is not cosmetic in nature. It's not merely what we do but who we are.

By calling for actions that are rooted in a heart He has changed, Jesus brings us face to face with the unacceptable alternative of performance-based religion. He doesn't settle for good actions done for self-righteous or self-centered reasons. He knows how inclined we all are to speak and act in culturally acceptable ways on the outside while hiding hearts that remain largely unchanged on the inside.

The difference Christ calls for is what the apostle Paul later described as being "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom. 8:29). This is the difference Paul himself longed for in his own life and in the lives of those who read his letters.

PEOPLE LIKE US

The Bible gives us more than teaching and doctrine, it gives us case studies we all can identify with. One of these examples, which relates specifically to living with a Christlike difference, is found in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

A Church Struggling With Conflict. Philippians is best known for its emphasis on living with joy (1:4,25-26; 2:2; 4:1). But the reason Paul wrote about joy is that he knew many in the church were unhappy. There was trouble in Philippi.

Notice the way Paul repeatedly referred to strife and conflict.

- Paul appealed to them to live without strife and vanity (2:3).
- There were evil teachers

competing for their minds and hearts (3:2)

- Even some of Paul's faithful co-workers were not getting along with one another (4:2-3).

In response to the sources of conflict that were robbing the Philippians of their spiritual joy, Paul wrote a letter that got to the heart of the matter—the personal choices and attitudes of his readers. In chapter 2 he wrote the following words:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let

each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (vv.1-4).

In these verses, Paul identified two personal attitudes that were the opposite of Christlikeness and were getting in the way of their joy.

Selfish Ambition.

This is the first of two dangerous attitudes Paul warned against. Selfish ambition is the desire of some to promote themselves at the expense of others. In the first chapter of this letter (vv.15-16), Paul showed that he was aware of this competitive spirit that prompted some to try to get ahead without regard for the needs of others.

Conceit. In 2:3, the concerned apostle also referred to the problem of conceit. Conceit is the desire to be noticed, considered, and indulged at

the expense of others. At its root is a sense of personal absorption and entitlement that says, “My needs are more urgent and important than the needs of others.”

At the root of conceit is a sense of personal absorption that says, “My needs are more urgent and important than the needs of others.”

These characteristics of conflict—selfish ambition, and conceit—are both rooted in pride. And pride is the opposite of what is needed to live in harmony with one another. This is why Paul pointed his readers to a different

attitude—an attitude displayed in the life of Christ, who said to His disciples:

You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mk. 10:42-45).

A Church Needing To Be Different.

Speaking on behalf of his Lord, Paul pleaded with Christ's people in Philippi to change their attitudes toward one another. He urged them to replace their conceit and selfish ambition

with more Christlike characteristics:

Unity With Others.

Paul expressed this thought in four different ways in 2:2—“like-minded,” “having the same love,” “of one accord,” “of one mind”—but the essence was the same. He wanted them to put aside their divisiveness and to start being like-minded. There had been too much conflict among them, and it was time for them to start pulling together on the same end of the rope. But where were they to begin?

Respect For One

Another. Verse 3 reads:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

This respect for one another requires that we be humble enough to realize that “we” might be wrong, and that “they” might be

right. It demands that we admit that we might not have all the answers, and then be humble enough to listen to someone else.

Concern For One Another. Paul wrote:

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (v.4).

There will never be real peace in relationships until we overcome our own inclination to think only about ourselves.

There will never be real peace in relationships until we overcome our own inclination to think only about ourselves.

All of this provides

an introduction for Philippians 2:5, the key verse for this study:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Paul crafted his argument skillfully, building it layer upon layer:

- On the basis of the love of Christ (2:1),
- with a desire for unity of mind (2:2),
- by means of humility and genuine concern for one another (2:3-4),
- be different. Model yourselves after the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:5).

Author and Bible teacher John Walvoord explained it this way:

We should think within ourselves, or in our hearts, just as Christ did when He became incarnate. Our thinking, our attitude, our opinion, our evaluation of the situation which faces us

should be the same as Christ's when He faced His supreme act of humiliation and death. In brief, we should think Christ's thoughts (*Philippians: Triumph In Christ*, p.52).

The fact that this statement introduces a critical passage describing how God became man makes it all the more compelling. Yet, for all the marvelous theology in Philippians 2:5-11, Paul's intent was not to write a theological treatise. He was seeking a corrective to their problems—and that solution was in seeing how different the mind of Christ truly is.

What does this distinctive attitude toward life look like—and how did Christ model it for us? That is the Christlike difference that we will examine in the following pages.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

The decade of the 1960s included dangerous experimentation with “mind-altering” or “mind-expanding” drugs. While many were just following the crowd, some were looking for a new awareness and consciousness that would lift life to a new level of meaning.

The tragedy of the psychedelic solutions of the 60s was that too often the drugs damaged the very instrument that God gave to live a fulfilling life. Instead of opening up young vibrant minds, hallucinogenic drugs often shut them down. Rather than giving life a sense of purpose and meaning, the abused drugs were more likely to impair the mind’s capacity to process even the simplest aspects of everyday life.

In retrospect, it’s clear that there are more thoughtful and effective ways to open and expand our minds. And of all the ways to educate and stretch our minds, there is no more life-changing way than to give ourselves wholeheartedly to living with the mind of Christ.

How do we do this? Philippians 2:5-11, which contains some of the most profound thoughts ever written, gives us a clue.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the

point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul's intent was to help the Philippians restore the joy of an unselfish life.

This passage describes “the mind of Christ” and the ways it expresses itself—not in theory but in reality. The characteristics

of His attitude, which are so different from our human responses, include the following:

AN UNSELFISH ATTITUDE

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:5-6).

For centuries, debate has raged over what Paul meant by the second half of this statement. Before considering the theological issues, may I suggest that we keep in mind the practical, relational issues of the context.

Paul's intent was to help the Philippians restore the joy of an unselfish life. (vv.1-4). Too many of their actions were based on personal interests and agendas. That's why Paul moved his readers' attention to Christ, who

lived and died in such contrast to the self-centeredness that many of them were practicing.

By His own example, Christ showed us how to restore the comforts, the encouragement, and the joy of an unselfish life.

To feel the weight of Paul's illustration, it will help us to understand what some other passages in the New Testament say about Christ. For example, John 1:1-2,14 says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with

God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

When Christ came into the world, He set all that aside and came "in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). No one had more right than He did to remain above our pain. Yet by His own example, He showed us how to "look out not only for [our] own interests, but also for the interests of others" (2:4).

Christ, by virtue of His eternal deity, had every right to remain on the throne of heaven. But His love for us compelled Him to do otherwise. Instead of avoiding the hellish pain of our sin and punishment, He lovingly set aside:

- A heavenly throne for an earthly manger.
- Majestic splendor for suffering and shame.
- The rights of the Son for the place of a slave.

- The regalia of glory for the robes of humanity. This is the mind of Christ—the exact opposite of the self-will ascribed to Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. It is the essential attitude of selflessness, which says to the Father, “Not My will but Your will” (Mt. 26:39).

A SACRIFICIAL ATTITUDE

“ . . . but made Himself of no reputation . . . ” (Phil. 2:7a).

By a sacrifice of immeasurable proportions, the Lord of heaven acted in a manner that we can relate to in principle if not in degree. We commonly applaud and recognize the courage of those who give of themselves for others. Their valor causes many of us to reflect with admiration, and we wonder:

- What compels soldiers in combat to

throw themselves on live grenades, sacrificing their lives to save their buddies?

- What drove a man to dive into the icy Potomac River to try to rescue victims of a tragic plane crash at the risk of his own life?

Jesus’ act of self-sacrifice deserves an eternity of our praise.

- What did it cost Mother Teresa to spend her entire life working among the lepers of India? Wonderful and honorable as they are, such acts of sacrifice are

eclipsed by the questions we rightfully ask about Christ's sacrifice for us. What was He thinking? What did His sacrifice cost Him? Why did He do it? What can we learn from Him?

Notice again Paul's declaration that Christ Jesus, "being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (2:6-7).

The words "made Himself of no reputation" mean "made Himself nothing" or literally "emptied Himself."

This phrase has raised many questions among theologians. Some say Christ emptied Himself of His deity. But if that were true, He would have been unable to redeem us, for He would not have been an adequate

sacrifice. This would also contradict what Paul wrote elsewhere: "In [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

***"In [Christ]
dwells all the
fullness of the
Godhead bodily."
Colossians 2:9***

It's more accurate to say that the Son of God set aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes in order to accomplish the Father's plan. In his *Thru The Bible Commentary*, well-known Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee wrote: He lived on the earth with certain limitations, but they were self-limitations. There was never a moment when

He was not God. And He was no less God because He was a man, yet He emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives. He could have had the Shekinah glory with Him all the time, but He didn't. He didn't have a halo around His head as we see in so many pictures of Him. He was a human being, but He was God manifest in the flesh.

The Son of God did not consider His equality with the Father something to be grasped and clung to. Instead, for the eventual joy it would bring (Heb. 12:2), He willingly and temporarily gave up the independent expression of His deity so that He could come to our rescue.

In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Robert P. Lightner wrote:
Though possessing full

deity (Jn. 1:14; Col. 2:9), Christ did not consider His equality with God (Phil. 2:6) as something to be grasped or held onto. In other words, Christ did not hesitate to set aside His self-willed use of deity when He became a man. As God He had all the rights of deity, and yet during His incarnate state He surrendered His right to manifest Himself visibly as the God of all splendor and glory (p.654).

A SERVANT ATTITUDE

“. . . taking the form of a bondservant . . .”
(Phil. 2:7b).

One of the greatest descriptions of the incarnation is that Christ became a servant. In Philippians 2, His servanthood is pictured progressively. In the

incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

- came with an attitude of selflessness,
- paying a price that was sacrificial,
- in order to become a servant—even though He was Lord of all!

A provocative illustration of what Christ endured surfaced during the American Civil Rights movement. In the fall of 1959, a white man by the name of John Howard Griffin used medical treatments to darken the color of his skin. Leaving behind the comforts of “white America,” he set out on a journey to find out what it was like, as he wrote at the time, “to be a Negro in the Deep South.” His daily journals published in *Black Like Me* helped many to understand the daily injustice and humiliation experienced by African Americans.

Griffin’s chronicles,

compelling as they are, serve only as a faint illustration of what Christ endured to come to our rescue. When Christ clothed Himself in our skin, He didn’t just alter His appearance, He took on the very form of a servant.

***When Christ
came to earth,
He didn’t just alter
His appearance,
He took on the
very form of
a servant.***

In his commentary on Philippians *Be Joyful*, Warren Wiersbe writes: Jesus did not pretend to be a servant. He was not an actor playing a role, He actually was a servant. This was the true expression of His

innermost nature. He was the God-Man, deity and humanity united in one, and He came as a servant.

Consider Jesus' own words on this matter:

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28).

What a thought! The Sovereign of the universe would take the very form of a slave!

Many Bible scholars believe that the theme of Mark's gospel is "Jesus, the Divine Servant." Look, for example, what Jesus said in Mark 10:43-45:

Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

By His willingness to take the form of a slave, Jesus identified with the heart of the lowest person. This is especially intriguing when you consider that millions of people in the Roman empire at the time of Christ were slaves. What an encouragement it must have been to those caught in slavery to hear the gospel and then to discover that the King of heaven became a slave so that He would be able to set free those who were enslaved to sin.

Although first-century slaves could identify with the servanthood of Christ, we may find it more difficult. How often do we follow the example of Christ by genuinely yielding power or prestige to serve someone else? We often speak about "serving Christ." But how often do our acts of service really reflect the spirit of Christ's example?

Our Lord made it clear that we are to live in the same way He lived when He was among us. John 13 gives us an example of how He wants us to treat one another. As Jesus and His men came to the Upper Room for their last supper before His crucifixion, there was no servant there to wash their feet (a courtesy and custom of the day). Each of the disciples apparently thought they were above such a task. Washing dirty feet was reserved for the lowest servant in the house.

To His disciples' shock and amazement, Jesus took the act of hospitality upon Himself. He removed His robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, and proceeded to wash their feet.

No wonder Peter recoiled at the very idea when he said, "You shall never wash my feet!" (v.8). Yet that's exactly what the Lord of heaven did.

After washing their feet, the Teacher said:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him (vv.14-16).

In later years, this action and teaching of Christ so dramatically affected the life of the early church that they used the term *deacon* (*diakonos*—a household slave, table servant) to describe one of the spiritual offices of leadership. If "the mind of Christ" embodies the very concept of servanthood, then certainly those in leadership in the church need to mirror it.

Christ's words are clear—none of His

followers are qualified to lead until they are willing to do so with the heart of a servant.

None of us are qualified to lead until we are willing to do so with the heart of a true servant.

Human experience confirms in so many ways that a servant attitude is what sets apart people who have real leadership. One of many examples occurred at Valley Forge during America's war for independence. Three men were trying to lift a heavy log onto a structure to create a shelter from the powerful winter weather. As they were trying to lift

the log, a fourth soldier (a corporal) was screaming at them to lift harder. Another soldier came by and suggested to the corporal that the log was too heavy for them, but it could be lifted if the corporal helped. The corporal was indignant. "I am a corporal. I refuse to help them. If you think they need one more man, you help them." The stranger did help, and told them if they needed further assistance they could call him at headquarters. The helper was General George Washington himself!

George Washington, an American hero, was willing to be a servant. But his example, great as it was, pales in the presence of Christ's example.

If we are going to display "the mind of Christ" in our lives and begin to share His joy, then we must open our hearts to the One who took the form of a servant.

A HUMBLE ATTITUDE

“. . . He humbled Himself . . .” (Phil. 2:8b).

These simple, familiar words represent the inexpressible willingness of Christ to lower Himself for our sake. It’s interesting to notice that the word *humbled* is not the same word as *emptied* (“made Himself of no reputation”), but instead it explains how His emptying took place and how it showed itself.

Because of our Lord’s love for us, He voluntarily humbled Himself. This “coming down” was an important part of the rationale for Paul’s appeal for unity in verses 1-4. One man wrote, “No better example of humiliation and selfless attitude for believers to follow could possibly be given than that of Christ. With this example before them, the saints at Philippi should be like-minded (v.2)

and live humbly before God and each other.”

William Barclay, a well-known Bible commentator agreed. He wrote:

It is always to be remembered that when Paul thought and spoke about Jesus, his interest and his intention were never merely intellectual or speculative—they were practical. To him, theology and action were always bound together. Any system of thought must necessarily become a way of life. In many ways, this passage is one of the greatest reaches of theological thought in the New Testament, but its aim was to persuade the Philippians to live a life in which disunity, discord, and personal ambition had no place. Christ humbled Himself and became obedient. If humility, obedience, and self-renunciation

were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hallmarks of the Christian. Selfishness, self-seeking, and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with one another.

The record of Christ's life among us is conspicuously absent of pride. By all rights, He could have been ruling the whole world with divine authority and power. Instead, He chose to let Himself be misunderstood, misrepresented, and rejected. Hymnwriter Joseph Barlowe put it this way:

He comes a child
from realms on high,
He comes the heavens
adoring;
He comes to earth
to live and die,
A broken race restoring.
Although the King
of kings is He,

He comes in deep
humility,
His people to deliver,
And reign in us forever.

*If the Lord
of glory was
willing to
humble Himself
to advance us,
how can
we do less?*

Honest, healthy, genuine humility gives a loving character and attitude to everything Christ does.

It was this example that Paul used in his letter to the Philippians. His logic is compelling. If the Lord of creation was willing to humble Himself to benefit us, how can we do less for one another?

When my son Matt and I visited Moscow, we

attended a concert by the Russian National Symphony at the Moscow Conservatory of Music. The performance (at least to my untrained ear) seemed flawless. This was confirmed by the calls of “Bravo!” at its conclusion. The conductor, who in a symphony presentation is the star of the show, acknowledged the appreciation of the audience and made his way off stage. The cheering continued, which brought him back for a curtain call. At this point, the conductor did something unexpected. He pointed to a man in the audience and beckoned for him to come to the stage. As the man made his way forward, the audience slowly began to recognize him. He was the composer of the symphony. In his moment of glory, the conductor humbly stood in the background cheering the composer.

It was a powerful reminder to me of how different humility is from the normal human emotion of pride. Rather than accepting all of the applause (no matter how well-deserved), this man willingly gave the spotlight, attention, and acclaim to another.

“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”

I Peter 5:6

The One who humbled Himself for us gave the author of Philippians the ultimate example to point to. In the shadow of that Christlike attitude, we too are challenged to humble ourselves:

Before God—“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6).

To One Another—“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3).

To The Word Of God—“The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility” (Prov. 15:33).

The mind of Christ is a humble mind—and very different from the attitudes promoted by our world.

AN OBEDIENT ATTITUDE

“ . . . [He] became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8c).

In so many ways our world is characterized by rebellion. But the attitude of Christ toward the Father

was one of obedience:

- “He said to them, ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’” (Lk. 2:49).
 - “I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak” (Jn. 12:49).
 - “He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him” (Jn. 8:29).
- Christ undertook His

mission of obedience knowing that it would end in death. There seems to be a tone of astonishment in Paul’s words when he said that it was “even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

What would be the measure of Christ’s obedience? One man wrote, “The condescension of Christ included not only His birth—the incarnation

in which he became the God-man—but also His death. And it was the most despicable form of death—death on a cross.”

This was God’s plan from all eternity. The obedience of Christ would not merely lead to an ordinary death. He was destined to experience the most humiliating, disgraceful death devised by the hearts of evil, fallen human beings.

The cross shows us how much God hates sin—and loves sinners.

Crucifixion was a form of capital punishment practiced first by the Phoenicians, and later the Romans. It was a horrible death of unimaginable pain and shame. Rome’s view of

crucifixion was captured in Cicero’s words, “Far be the very name of the cross, not only from the body, but even from the thought, the eyes, the ears of Roman citizens.”

Death on a cross was:

Painful. Historians say that anyone who died by crucifixion died a thousand deaths.

Shameful. The condemned person was compelled to carry his own cross and was then executed naked before a mocking crowd.

A Condemnation. The Bible refers to the condemnation of sin as a curse. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13).

The horrors of the cross define the level of commitment attached to Jesus Christ’s obedience.

Ordinary men have died humiliating and violent deaths, but never did one die as Christ died. He had it in His power to come down from the cross and destroy His enemies, but He willingly endured “the death of the cross” out of love for those desperately in need of forgiveness.

Each step of obedience brought Him further down His path of humiliation—from Glory to Golgotha. But it was a path He faithfully accepted and willingly chose out of love so that He could become our Savior.

Pastor and Bible teacher Stuart Briscoe wrote:

God loves people, but He hates their sin. He must demonstrate His love for people and He must demonstrate His hatred for sin at one and the same time. The only way He could do it was in the cross. In the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ

we see the greatest demonstration of love that the world has ever known, and we see the greatest demonstration of hatred that the world has ever known. Any time I want to know how much God loves sinners, I look at the cross, and any time I want to see how much God hates sin, I look at the cross. I see them both there (*Bound For Joy*, pp.67-68).

The first time I taught at the Moscow Bible Institute, I learned (along with the rest of the school) of a new government policy that might outlaw the evangelical church. The students, ready to graduate and go into pastoral ministry, were told that since the underground church was still in place (which had existed for 70 years under communism), they could serve Him that way again.

Later that day when class resumed, I expressed to the students my deep concern. I had come to Russia thinking I was helping to train Russian pastors—not martyrs.

After class, one of the men said to me, “Thank you for your love and concern. You don’t know how much that means to us. But don’t fear for us. We have learned that it’s not enough that we preach the gospel. And it’s not enough that we live the gospel. It’s necessary that we suffer for the gospel.”

That level of obedience comprehends the Christlike difference—and it brought deep conviction to my own heart. All those who have experienced the love of Christ should want to obey Him and live out that love. Jesus Himself said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15).

A PATIENT ATTITUDE

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

Just the word *patience* makes me feel uncomfortable. The need for patience is an ongoing problem for me. I battle with it—reminding myself

***Yes, I want
patience—and I
want it now!***

over and over of the joy of delayed gratification and the satisfaction of

self-discipline—and keep coming away unconvinced. Yes, I want patience—and I want it *now!*

Life-lessons almost never come at convenient times, and neither do the tests from which our character is developed. Our need of patience is expressed in the Bible by two significant concepts:

Longsuffering. This involves the idea of perseverance in the difficulties of life. We are told in the Bible to “run with endurance [or patience] the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). And when trouble comes because we have identified with Jesus, we are to “take it patiently” (1 Pet. 2:20). The implication of these statements is that the struggles of life are not to deter us from who God has called us to be. We are to approach life with a commitment to

endure—even when it is extraordinarily hard.

Willingness To Wait.

This speaks of an attitude of trust and confidence in the purposes of God that enable us to await the outworking of His will in our lives. It is the challenge of Isaiah 40:31, which reads:

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

I believe that both of these elements of patience are inherent to the attitude of patience that is part of the Christlike difference. Not only did He endure with perseverance the pain of the cross, He was willing to entrust Himself to the hands of the Father.

Christ’s Model Of True Patience.

You say, “I don’t see the word *patience* in

Philippians 2:5-11.” You’re right. The word isn’t there, but the attitude is. In the transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is the word *therefore*. The *therefore* of verse 9 links the blessings and glory to follow with the events that have preceded it. The trials of verses 5-8 lead directly to the glory of verses 9-11.

Why did the Son of God allow Himself to be abused by fallen, sinful human beings to gain things that were already His by virtue of His deity? The writer of Hebrews answered the question this way:

Jesus, . . . who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).

This speaks of a mind that is truly patient, for it was willing to wait for the reward while enduring

the hardship of suffering.

This is a difficult example for those of us who are part of a generation that wants

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all the benefits of life, and wants them immediately. At some level, it’s not just an issue of patience, but of

confidence in the purposes of a loving Father who knows what is best, and knows when the timing for those things is right.

No wonder Solomon wrote that God makes all things “beautiful [or appropriate] in its time” (Eccl. 3:11). If we are to experience the joy and satisfaction of the Christlike difference, we must be prepared to trust the Father not only for His will but also for His timing.

Was Christ’s trust misplaced? Not according to Philippians 2:9-11. Notice the completeness of the joy experienced by the obedient Son who patiently trusted His Father’s love.

Jesus was exalted and honored. The Father “has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (v.9).

Jesus will be worshiped by all. Paul wrote “that at the name of Jesus every

knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth” (v.10).

Jesus will receive the recognition He deserves.

“Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (v.11).

Christ was willing to wait patiently for His Father’s will to be accomplished. And the Father was abundant in His response to His Son’s patient trust. Will we learn to live on the basis of that same hopeful confidence, even if it can only be learned through trials and testing?

Often, patience is nothing more than the inner expression of trust in a faithful God who promises:

Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Gal. 6:9).

LIVING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Yogi Berra is alleged to have said of baseball, “Half of this game is 90 percent mental.” It’s even more than that in life. Our minds and attitudes have a profound effect in shaping the way we live. If we are to know the joy of the Christlike difference, the results will be seen in a way that reflects His character. And not only will our personal lives begin to look like His, we will together (in the church) begin to look and act like Him (1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:11-16).

This brings us back to the church at Philippi—wracked by division, motivated by selfishness, and driven by personal agendas. If they were to put the Christlike difference into practice within the body of Christ (the church), they

had to do what Paul urged in verse 3:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Our minds and attitudes have a profound effect in shaping the way we live.

On a practical level, how can this be done? By putting into practice some simple instructions for believers—the “one another” statements of the New Testament that put others first and ourselves in a place of lesser priority. For example:

- Love one another (Jn. 13:35).

- Be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10).
- Build up one another (Rom. 14:19).
- Accept one another (Rom. 15:7).
- Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14).
- Serve one another (Gal. 5:13).
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
- Be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32).
- Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19).
- Be subject to one another (Eph. 5:21).
- Comfort one another (1 Th. 4:18).
- Encourage one another (1 Th. 5:11).
- Live in peace with one another (1 Th. 5:13).
- Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).
- Confess sin to one another (Jas. 5:16).

- Be hospitable to one another (1 Pet. 4:9).

This is how the mind of Christ can be demonstrated in the church. Jesus was obedient to die for us out of love. Now we are to be obedient to live for Him out of love. It demands that we truly allow His mind—with all its selflessness, sacrifice, servanthood, humility, and patience—to captivate us and shape our lives. May we move toward a life rooted in the difference Christ makes by allowing His mind to govern our hearts.

Hymnwriter Kate Wilkinson expressed it this way:

May the mind
of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me
from day to day,
By His love
and power controlling
All I do and say.

A DIFFERENT DESTINY

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, I would challenge you to look at life as it is lived according to the mindset of the world. See it in all its selfishness, pride, and destruction. Now, look at life lived with the mind of Christ. There is an undeniable difference in these two mindsets.

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 6:23

Carefully consider that all Jesus did—His selflessness, sacrifice, servanthood, humility, and patience—was

out of love for you and concern for your eternal destination. He was obedient to the point of dying on the cross so that you could experience eternal life. Someone expressed the heart of Christ this way: “When He was on the cross, you were on His mind.”

The Old Testament described this passion in the mind of the Lord:

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11).

Will you turn to this Savior who loves you and accept by faith this wonderful gift?

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

It’s true—Jesus Christ loves you! That love in your life can make all the difference in the world.



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