

# The Mind of Christ

By Dana Dexter

Paul commanded the Philippians to complete his joy (Philippians 2:1-2). While this at first may appear to be a selfish demand, quite the opposite is true. Completing Paul's joy here leads to the death of selfish demands. It leads to healthy relationships and peace-filled local churches. It leads to pastors with a high quality of life. Best of all, it leads to an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ and a fuller appreciation of what He has done for us. We have an opportunity before us to have our relationships transformed and our walk with our Lord made richer if we embrace what God is calling us to in Philippians 2:1-11. May He work through His Spirit towards that end as we walk through this text.

What would be Paul's joy? Quite simply that the Philippians would be of the same mind together. From what follows in verse 2, being of the same mind looks like having the same love, being in full accord (the word from the original Greek could also have been translated "united in spirit") and being of one mind. Thus, this kind of unity encompasses heart, mind, and spirit. This is a profound unity! And it should characterize our lives as the body of Christ.

Yet we can only live in this unity if God's graces from verse 1 are at work in us. Paul earlier makes the appeal that "*if there is any encouragement in Christ, comfort from love...participation in the Spirit...affection and sympathy,*" then the Philippians should "*complete my joy*" (2:1-2, ESV). A God-given love must precede and saturate this kind of unity. The kind of love described in verse 1 must empower the Philippians to live in the unity described in verse 2. While this gives a clearer picture of this kind of unity, it is still a bit abstract. What follows is a sharper image of this unity in more concrete terms.

Paul describes two contrasts in verses 3 and 4 to help us get a handle on this unified mind. First, it does not look like living day to day out of a heart of rivalry and conceit. Those two concepts go well together because our conceit gives us a high view of ourselves which we treasure. Further, when we engage in rivalry, we are trying to prove to others that we are truly as great as we think we are. Make no mistake, this kind of motivation undermines love and unity. Paul earlier describes people who preach the gospel out of rivalry, seeking to afflict Paul even worse as he is in prison (1:15,17). By contrast, others are said to preach Christ out of love (1:16). Paul points out the opposing nature of these motives. So instead of acting out of rivalry and conceit, the Philippians are to humbly count others as more significant and thus more important than themselves.

The second contrast is in verse 4. Rather than living a life of "every man for himself!" the Philippians are to pay attention to the needs and interests of those around them. They are to care at least as much about the needs of others as they care about their own. They are to be their brother's keepers in a sense. This same mind then looks like seeing others as more important than ourselves and valuing the needs of others rather than merely our own. Where does this kind of others-oriented thinking come from? This is the very mind of Jesus Christ. He is the source of it, and He is the one Who makes it possible for us to live in it.

Paul says, "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus*" (2:5). Jesus is our perfect example of this mind; thus, He Himself is the clearest picture of it. He better than anyone else shows us how to count others' needs as higher than our own, and how to count others as more significant than ourselves. Jesus, although He was in the form of God, did not hold tightly to His divine privileges but instead came down and entered our fallen world. He became a man. What kind of a man would God Himself become? Surely He would be the most powerful, most praised, smartest, most handsome, and, in summary, the best of the best at everything and everybody everywhere would acknowledge it. Instead, God Himself took the form of a servant. The Greek word here for servant means "slave." This is the kind of man God would become (vv. 6-7). What an amazing event! God became a man! One Whose life purpose was appointed for service! Jesus considered our needs and our plight, and He acted on our behalf by coming down to inhabit our world as a human. And yet there is

more.

Jesus not only considered our needs, but, perhaps more fundamentally, He came as a matter of obedience. Obedience to whom? He was obedient to His Father Who sent Him. The Father sent the Son on a very specific mission. It was a mission to bring God glory and redeem sinners. Paul states that Jesus, being found in human form, humbled Himself. What did that look like? That looked like being obedient to the Father even to the point of willingly embracing death. And this was no death by old age in a fallen world or even death by sudden accident or swift execution—but rather death by the most horrendous of means: a death by crucifixion. It was shameful, public torture that took an extended time. The depths of this agony are only exacerbated by the fact that Jesus also absorbed the wrath of the Father for sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 27:45-46; Romans 3:21-26). The humility of Jesus, which enabled Him to obey the Father, transcends any example that we have ever witnessed. And it was *“for the joy that was set before Him that He endure the cross”* (Hebrews 12:2). This was an amazingly humble and willful laying down of His rights and privilege to bring God glory and to care for others. This is the same mind that we are to have, but it does not come natural to us.

Can we even begin to understand what this would have been like? If we as American-born citizens were wrongly deported to an impoverished country with no hope of return, we would acutely feel the injustice. Yet Jesus willingly immersed Himself in our broken world and condescended to our finite mode of life. At another level, we would be appalled and rightly incensed if a teenager would spit in our burger at a restaurant, but can we really grasp what it would have been like for the very Maker of this world to have had His face spit upon by His rebellious creatures? We get glimpses of what it would be like, yet we will always have reason to stand amazed at what Jesus did on our behalf. And we should stand amazed! Further, what Jesus did both frees us and empowers us to live similarly. His redemption frees us from our slavery to self-service, and His Holy Spirit and example empower us to serve others in humility. And to God's praise, there is so much more that He planned for His Son.

Jesus humbled Himself further than anyone ever has, but God raised Him higher than any man could ever attain to. *“Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name”* (Philippians 2:9). God planned for Jesus to take the greatest humiliation ever endured as He bore the Father's wrath against sin, and then the Father planned for Jesus to be crowned with the greatest honor ever given. Jesus was given the name that surpasses every other name *“so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (2:10-11). What would it be like for a president to receive a 100 percent approval rating? That sounds like a fairy tale. But Jesus will receive total praise and affirmation from all of His creation. Even the rebel's knee will bow on that day. The end result of all of this will be *“to the glory of God the Father.”* The humility and exaltation of Jesus led to the Father being glorified. Consequently He received the highest honor and glory. And in the midst of this, sinners are granted pardon and redemption, as Jesus considered their needs above His own.

This is the mind that we are called to have. It is a mind based in love and leading to unity. Rather than trampling on our brothers and sisters in Christ through rivalry and conceit, we are freed to lift them up and encourage them to use the gifts that God has given them for our good and His glory. We are freed to entrust ourselves to God and serve others in radical ways, knowing that even if we are not honored adequately by them, our good Father will exalt us in due time.

This mind frees us to take our eyes off of ourselves and consider the lives of those around us rather than be endlessly self-absorbed in our own cares. This mind gives total praise and glory to whom it is due: to our amazing God! May our God grant us the grace to have this same mind within us as we interact with one another. Katie Barclay Wilkinson put it well:

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

May the love of Jesus fill me,  
As the waters fill the sea,  
Him exalting, self abasing, this is victory.  
May His beauty rest upon me,  
As I seek the lost to win,  
And may they forget the channel,  
Seeing only Him.