

Philippians 2:1-11

The Enabling Power of the Mind of Christ

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus – v. 5

Let this mind be in you. Paul is giving this exhortation for a very specific reason. He recognizes that if the Christians at Philippi are going to heed his previous exhortations to be likeminded, to have the same love, to do nothing through strife or vainglory but in lowliness of mind esteem others better than themselves – if these things are going to happen then the believers at Philippi would need to be empowered.

These things don't come naturally. Our sinful natures have an inherent propensity to be self serving. Our pride constantly tempts us to pursue vainglory and in the pursuit of our own interests we find ourselves vulnerable to strife. Wherever there is pride and competing self interests there will always be strife.

And so Paul is calling on the Christians in Philippi to overcome these things and let nothing be done through strife or vainglory. Verse 5, as I say, shows that Paul recognizes the difficulty of the task; so in order to give the Philippians what they would need to pursue the task of being unified and humble and esteeming others better than themselves, Paul gives them something to enable them to overcome strife and vainglory and obtain humility and service to others.

He gives them this exhortation in v. 5 – *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*. The word *mind* I think encompasses more than the mind as we commonly think of the mind – i.e. it encompasses more than the thinking process (though it certainly includes it). But the term *mind* also speaks with reference to our attitude or demeanor. Another English version translates it this way: *Having this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus* (NAS).

Have the right attitude – Paul is saying in effect. Have you ever, as a parent, had to deal with bad attitudes or wrong attitudes in your children? This is one of those areas in which parents set very high standards for what they think their children can instantly achieve. They demonstrate this when they say to their children *I don't like your attitude. You need to change your attitude right now.* What's overlooked in such admonitions is the fact that attitudes are not changed with a simple snap of our fingers. Attitudes have to be cultivated. Children need to be trained to develop right attitudes.

The same thing holds true in the spiritual realm. If we, as Christians, are going to have the right attitude in ourselves then that attitude has to be cultivated. If we, therefore, are going to have the mind of Christ then that mind or that attitude will only be obtained as we pursue Christ. As we behold the way he thought and the way he served and the way he identified with men and the way he obeyed his Father – as we see him in these various capacities it will enable us to have his mind.

Now what I want to focus on this morning is the enabling power that the mind of Christ imparts to the believer. We come in these verses in Philippians to one of the richest

portions in all the Bible. These verses minister the sublime truths to us about the Divinity of Christ and the incarnation of Christ, and the condescension of Christ, and the impressive obedience of Christ which was an obedience unto death even the death of Calvary's cross. These verses further convey to us the reward that Christ earned as a result of his atoning death. They point us to his exaltation and to that time to come when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

These verses along with the verses in Heb. 1 give us a condensed yet nearly comprehensive view of Christ. These are theological verses for they're teaching us about Christ. But the thing I want you to see and appreciate from these verses this morning is that these verses serve a very practical purpose. Paul is not simply interjecting this rich section on Christ in order to provide data for the systematic theology volumes that would be written – no, Paul has a very practical aim in view here.

He wants the Philippians to have the mind of Christ. Everything that's given to us, therefore, from vv. 6-11 ought to be approached from that perspective. And the verses should be thought upon with this question in view – what does this statement of Christ being in the form of God and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God contribute to my having the mind of Christ? What does the statement that he made himself of no reputation contribute to my having the mind of Christ? What do Paul's statements about Christ's humiliation and exaltation contribute to the believer having the mind of Christ?

We know why we need the mind of Christ – we need it in order to be likeminded; we need it in order to overcome strife and vainglory; we need it in order to esteem others better than ourselves. We need it, in other words, because of its enabling power. Let's consider, then, these glorious statements about Christ as they relate to the mind of Christ. And let's look at these statements with a definite aim in view – that aim being that you and I may draw the enabling power that we need from the mind of Christ. This is what I want to think on, then:

The Enabling Power of the Mind of Christ

And the question I want to ask an then answer is simply this – what does the mind of Christ enable us to do?

I. The Mind of Christ Enables Us to Think Right about Ourselves

Verse 6 gives us a statement about how Christ thought. Notice that he *being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*.

We certainly have in this statement a strong and clear affirmation of Christ's deity that comes from Christ himself. He is the one that thought it not robbery to be equal with God. It seems that every now and again a new notion, which usually amounts to nothing more than an old heresy with renewed popular acclaim springs up and a claim is made that Christ never made the claim to being God.

If that was the case then it would certainly follow that Paul sure harbored a wrong notion about Christ. According to v. 6 Christ's deity is not something that Paul interpreted and applied to Christ. He sees it, rather, as something that comes from Christ himself. Christ himself thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

The Jews in Christ's day certainly were aware of his claim to deity. When Christ made the statement in Jn. 10:30 that he and his Father were one we read how the Jews took up stones to stone him. And the reason that they took up stones is made clear. In Jn. 10:33 we read *The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.* That certainly indicates to us, doesn't it, that Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

Now there is something sadly ironic in the text that tells us that Christ, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God. The irony is that the same kind of thinking characterizes fallen man. You remember the devil's luring temptation to Eve in the garden of Eden – *ye shall be as gods* he said to her. And the proof of the Genesis account is readily seen by the way fallen man regards himself as a god. In a fallen and perverse way it can be said that fallen man thinks it not robbery to be equal with God.

He may not come out and declare that he's a god but such is his fallen nature that he thinks of himself as a god in that he thinks of himself as being the determiner of right and wrong and he thinks of himself as being at the center of the universe and has the attitude that everything should revolve around him. One of the things that makes this fallen world such a dangerous place to live in is the fact that there are so many god-wannabes that feel they ought to get their own way and everything should cater to them.

How then does this statement about Christ pertain to our having the mind of Christ? It certainly doesn't indicate that we, like Christ, should consider ourselves to be gods too. That was the very kind of mindset that Christ came to save us from. What it indicates to us, rather, is that like Christ, we too should think accurately about ourselves.

Christ saw himself as equal to God. Could it not follow that we ourselves as equal to other men? We share a common humanity with all other men. We're sometimes ashamed of that common humanity when we see how far men can plunge into sin and when we see how tyrannical men can be but it's an undeniable fact of our being that we are equal to other men. And this equality transcends every nation and race and culture and age.

This is not to deny that there are certain legitimate authority structures among men. There are. We recently reviewed Shorter Catechism #64 – What is required in the fifth commandment (Honor thy father and thy mother). *The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honor, and performing the duties belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.*

So we recognize these places and relations. It seems that some try to press the truth of the equality of men by denying these places and relations. We are not of that mind but having said that we do recognize an equality among men in that we were all created in the image of God; and we all have fallen into sin; and where the matter becomes very practical is

when we see the potential for any sinner to be saved by grace through faith in Christ. And to those that are saved by faith in Christ there is also an equality among them. Each one is saved the same way. Each one has claim to the same promises. Each one has a perfect standing with God based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. Each one is completely accepted in Christ.

Now you would think that it would be very easy and very natural for each one of us to think accurately about ourselves. But in actual practice it can prove to be a daunting challenge. In our men's Friday breakfast fellowships we've been reading and discussing a book entitled "Loving the Way Jesus Loves." In one of the chapters of that book the author tells the story of a missionary who in all likelihood didn't have accurate knowledge about himself. Listen to the account this missionary shares:

Upon returning home from a day of relief supply distribution, I joined my three-year-old daughter in the kitchen. She was drawing a picture of our family. I noticed what appeared to be me standing somewhat at a distance from the rest of the family wearing what was clearly a frown. "Is that Daddy?" I asked. "Yes," came the sheepish reply. "Why am I frowning?" She said, "Daddy, you never smile anymore."

That event proved to be a wakeup call to this missionary. Had you asked him before that event whether or not he was chronically frustrated and angry he probably wouldn't have admitted to it. It seems that we are often times reluctant to see ourselves as anything but happy and kind and caring individuals. And the fact that others don't see us that way only means in our minds that they just don't know us as well as we know ourselves – or not.

In such a case we have not gained the mind of Christ; we've gained instead the mind of pride. And the need in our lives is to invite the Spirit of Christ to search our hearts and show us what we are and give us the grace to formulate our view of ourselves at least in some measure by the perception of others. I say in some measure because if we are overly given to what others think we can in the end be ruled by the fear of man rather than the fear of God and we can also become puffed up in those instances when others heap vain flattery on us.

The Spirit of God knows you well and can search your heart and can reveal to you what you truly are. If you would utilize the mind of Christ, therefore, you will, in a spirit of submission and honesty invite the Spirit to assist you in recognizing accurately your strengths and your weaknesses, your sins and your virtues.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus – Such a mind will enable you to know yourself. But would you think with me next of the truth that:

II. The Mind of Christ Enables Us to Serve Others

Again note the words of v. 6 which pertain to Christ – *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. I like the AV translation of this verse. Most other English versions convey the idea that Christ did not consider his equality with God to be *a thing to be grasped*.

There's at least a potential danger to this translation misleading us as to the sense of value that Christ would place on his own divinity as if to suggest that his own divinity was *no big deal* so to speak. We know that his divinity is a very big deal. We know the triune God is the very essence of goodness and righteousness and love and holiness. These things are absolutes in the Godhead and we can't begin to fathom the meaning of any of these things apart from God being God.

There have been times in our Sunday School class when in our discussions we have referred to God as the only being in the universe that could be righteously selfish. It's wrong when you and I endeavor in our pride to promote ourselves and glorify ourselves. We become appalled (especially during political elections) when candidates try to put themselves forward as all loving and all knowing and infallible. We're appalled at their arrogance but on the other hand it's good and right and proper for God to promote his own glory. In promoting his glory he promotes all that is good and right and holy.

Listen to the way John Piper expresses the self-sufficiency of God:

From all eternity God had beheld the panorama of his own perfections in the face of his Son (and vice-versa). All that he is he sees reflected fully and perfectly in the countenance of his Son. And in this he rejoices with infinite joy. At first this sounds like vanity. It would be vanity if we humans found our deepest joy by looking in the mirror. We would be vain and conceited and smug and selfish if we were like God in this regard... Only God should be self-reliant. All the rest of us should be God-reliant.

I quote Piper here and say all what I've said only that we avoid the misimpression of thinking that Christ did not place the utmost value on his own Divinity. It becomes an attack on his self-sufficiency to think otherwise. His own glory, you could say, was and is a thing to be grasped and something to be promoted and is promoted in your salvation. This is why I like the AV translation better that *Christ being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*

It's only when we ourselves begin to grasp in some measure the infinite value of Christ's own glory that we can begin to appreciate his condescending service which was aimed at your salvation. When we have striven to view him as highly as we possibly can then we begin to appreciate the words of v. 7,8 *But he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Do you see, then, how the mind of Christ led him to condescending service and to sacrificial service? Late yesterday afternoon I had the privilege of proctoring a couple of seminary tests for our brother, Alan. I discussed my sermon for today with him and I'm glad I did because he referred me to a very powerful sermon on these verses of Philipians by B.B. Warfield.

Warfield sees and expresses so clearly the ethical ramifications of Christ's condescending and sacrificial love for sinners. Listen to what Warfield says. This is near the end of his sermon when he says:

And thus we are led to a third inference, which comes to us from the text: that it is difficult to set a limit to the self-sacrifice which the example of Christ calls upon us to be ready to undergo for the good of our brethren. It is comparatively easy to recognize that the ideal of the Christian life is self-sacrificing unselfishness, and to allow that it is required of those who seek to enter into it, to subordinate self and to seek first the kingdom of God. But is it so easy to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that this is to be read not generally merely but in detail, and is to be applied not only to some eminent saints but to all who would be Christ's servants?—that it is required of us, and that what is required of us is not some self-denial but all self-sacrifice? Yet is it not to this that the example of Christ would lead us?—not, of course, to self-degradation, not to self-effacement exactly, but to complete self-abnegation, entire and ungrudging self-sacrifice? Is it to be unto death itself? Christ died. Are we to endure wrongs? What wrongs did He not meekly bear? Are we to surrender our clear and recognized rights? Did Christ stand upon His unquestioned right of retaining His equality with God? Are we to endure unnatural evils, permit ourselves to be driven into inappropriate situations, unresistingly sustain injurious and unjust imputations and attacks? What more unnatural than that the God of the universe should become a servant in the world, ministering not to His Father only, but also to His creatures,—our Lord and Master washing our very feet? What more abhorrent than that God should die? There is no length to which Christ's self-sacrifice did not lead Him. These words are dull and inexpressive; we cannot enter into thoughts so high. He who was in the form of God took such thought for us, that He made no account of Himself. Into the immeasurable calm of the divine blessedness He permitted this thought to enter, "I will die for men!" ... He made no account of Himself. If this is to be our example, what limit can we set to our self-sacrifice?

I believe the key here is the recognition that Christ's love for us begets our love for him and our love for others. It would be tempting to think that the standard that Christ's example sets before us looms before us as a very high mountain that is impossible to scale or to think that our lives must somehow be reduced to some form of self-sacrificing slavery. Let me quote from Warfield again:

Let us not, however, do the apostle the injustice of fancying that this is a morbid life to which he summons us. The self-sacrifice to which he exhorts us, unlimited as it is, going all lengths and starting back blanched at nothing, is nevertheless not an unnatural life. After all, it issues not in the destruction of self, but only in the destruction of selfishness; it leads us not to a Buddha-like unselfing, but to a Christ-like self-development. It would not make us into deedless dreamers lazying out a life Of self-suppression, not of selfless love, but would light the flames of a love within us by which we would literally "ache for souls." The example of Christ and the exhortation of Paul found themselves upon a sense of the unspeakable value of souls. Our Lord took no account of Himself, only because the value of the souls of men pressed upon His heart. And following Him, we are not to consider our own things, but those

of others, just because everything earthly that concerns us is as nothing compared with their eternal welfare.

Do you begin to see, then, how gaining the mind of Christ empowers us? Do you begin to see how when this mind is gained the insurmountable challenge of *looking every man not on his own things but also the things of others* can be met? In this power we are able to overcome strife and vainglory. In this power we are able to gain the right kind of humble spirit. In this power we are able to place the value we should on the souls of men.

So the mind of Christ enables us to think accurately with regard to ourselves. And the mind of Christ enables us to enter into condescending and sacrificial service. I wonder this morning – is it the mind of Christ that rules your life? I think we could make a connection between our text and the words of Rom. 5:5 *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

I don't think you can have the mind of Christ without having the love of God shed abroad in your heart. It was obviously such love that was shed abroad in Christ's heart when he veiled his glory and condescended to come into this world. It was that same love that compelled him to take upon himself the form of a servant and be made in the likeness of men. It was this love that not merely enabled him but compelled him to be obedient to his Father – obedient even unto death – and obedient not just to any death but to a cruel and agonizing death upon Calvary's cross.

Oh how I want this mind to be in me! Oh how we must have such a mind and such a heart as the mind and heart of Christ! Do you not sense that apart from the mind of Christ you can do nothing but with the mind of Christ you can do all things. *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*

If Paul is calling Christians to have such a mind then it follows that such a mind is available to us. I can be yours and it should be yours. Another translation of the verse perhaps captures how available and near at hand this mind is to us when it reads this way: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus (ESV).*

Doesn't that bring the matter near to you? This mind is not something you have to scale the heights to attain or plumb the depths to attain – it's near at hand. Indeed, it belongs to you already in Christ. And if that's the case then you may conclude that when Paul says *let this mind be in you* he's simply calling on you to allow that which you already possess to be the mind that governs your life and your service to God.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. May we find the grace to heed the exhortation so that we may indeed have the same love, be of one accord and of one mind; overcome strife and vainglory and in lowliness of mind esteem others better than ourselves.