

Have the Mind of Christ

Philippians 2:1-13

Introduction: (Read Philippians 2:1-13) - We have come to the end of “Advent Season” or Christmas celebration. It seems clear that two very strong themes run through our consideration of the truth of the birth of Jesus;

First – We looked at “who” the Bible declares that this baby Jesus really is and “why” He came or “what” He accomplished in coming.

The “who” is the basis for the “why/what.” We have seen that the birth of this baby is actually the Incarnation of God. This baby is the Divine Son of God become fully human, while remaining fully God. God came down in human “form”!! God broke into our fallen world and we saw, as Bonhoeffer wrote – “God is in the Manger”!!

The “why” He came or “what” He accomplished is ultimately our rescue, our atonement and redemption, our restoration to relationship with His Father as our Father and, in such incomprehensible ways, fellowship with Him in the family of God – John 14:1-3. In a word - He came for our salvation!! He came to save us from our sin!!

Second – We looked at the hope *that is* Jesus! We considered life in a fallen world in the light of who Jesus really is, why He came and what He actually accomplished. He becomes the defining and qualifying reality for understanding and living life rightly in this fallen world and in these broken bodies. Hope *is* this person! In Him the God who is Creator chose to be Redeemer and has taken all of the weight of the curse - the reign of sin and death - under which we experience life – all of it He took upon His shoulders. In His own dying He destroyed the reign sin and death and He has promised that for all who believe in Him He will make us to reign in life.

This morning I want to switch gears or emphases just a bit. I want us to consider the question, “In light of the ‘who’ and ‘why/what’ of Christmas, ‘where’ do we go from here?” Francis Schaeffer ask it like this, “How Should We Then Live?” Paul answers that question in this exhortation to the Philippians. It is fitting that within his answer he embedded what is perhaps the most popular scriptural statement of Incarnation (with the possible exception of John 1:14) in the New Testament.

The late Dallas Willard wrote a book on how it looks to live the Christian life intentionally. He gave his book the title, “The Spirit of the Disciplines.” He entitled the third chapter, “*Salvation is a Life.*” He opens that chapter with a question, “Why is it that we look upon our salvation as a moment that began our religious life instead of the daily life we receive from God?”

All that Paul writes to the Philippians in this very personal passage addresses *that salvation as a way of life*, an ongoing intentional life that faithfully reflects who Jesus is and what He came to do, as well as the way in which He did it.

Christ “in” the Christian is a Transforming Reality – cf. 2:1 – **Note:** The admonition in these verses starts as far back in the text as 1:27 and extends as far forward as 2:17. The passage has three clear sections – 2:1-4 in which Paul describes the transformed experience of the person who has been made alive in Jesus as the fundamental experience from which we intentionally pursuing the life of Christ individually and corporately; 2:5-11 in which Paul embeds the truth of the Incarnation as the objective work/act of God which serves as both basis and the measure of the transformation we have experienced and which we are exhorted to pursue “in Christ”; 2:12-13 in which Paul gives two brief statements which together serve as an exhortation in summary of 2:1-4 of how we ought to live out the life we have in Jesus.

- 2:1 – This verse is the first half of a conditional sentence (an “If...then...” sentence). It is the “If” clause in the sentence. The “then” clause is all of 2:2-4. The structure of the sentence is such that the apostle assumes that what he says here in 2:1 truly/accurately reflects the experience of the Philippian church. It might read “Therefore if you have experienced any encouragement in Christ...and indeed you have...then make my joy complete...”

- I firmly believe that the Apostle Paul is overviewing **the transforming reality of Christ in us** both at the individual and corporate/church level. In this language Paul is describing their experience of the reality of Christ in them in terms of intimacy with the Lord expressed and deeply affirmed in genuine and dynamic Christian fellowship.

Note: It is important not to miss the fact that the language the Apostle Paul uses in this verse is primarily the language of the affections. It seems that it isn’t 100% clear that the things by which Paul describes the fundamental and existential transformation of “Christ in us” able to be assigned exclusively to our relationship with Jesus or with one another. This means that the transformation the individual believer experiences in Christ, which is described by these transformed affections, by necessity characterizes their relationship with other believers and is actually deepened by those relationships. “If there is any...

“...if any encouragement **in Christ**”

“...if any consolation of/from love”

“...if any fellowship **of the Spirit**”

“...if any tenderness (affection/love) and compassion”

This initial clause is designed to move the believer from what they have experienced – profound and soul filling transformation – to the logical follow of commitment to submit to or cooperate with this transformation. Their experience is the basis of the exhortation to follow “...then **make my joy complete...**” (cf. 2:12 – “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” FOR “it is God who works in you...”).

The Christian's Call to Submit to and Strive after the Transforming Reality of Christ in Them
– cf. 2:2-5 – Note: This passage is the “then” clause of a conditional sentence. It is in understanding the language of the two clauses that we can see that the transformation in affections “in Christ,” which is the experience of every believer, is pursued and deepened in our relationship with one another.

- The admonition is to “make” the apostles “joy complete” – implying that it is as the believer moves intentionally forward in their growth in Christ in full submission to the real and transforming presence of Christ in them, that the believer is demonstrating/bearing and experiencing the true character/image of Jesus in their church.

This makes Paul’s joy in the Philippians full!!

- This is the conscious or intentional pursuit of the life of Christ individually in the context of the church. Paul begins and ends in 2:2 with a reference to the “mind” or “thinking” of the Philippians. He calls them to “be likeminded” and “intent on one purpose.” We will see that he then uses the same word in 2:5 “have this mind in you that is in Christ Jesus” to draw on the glory of Jesus for His admonition. ***This word pictures more than purely intellect or thought. It contains the idea of the devotion of the individual, one’s bent – it describes the perspectives and disposition of an individual to include the affections.*** Paul layers this call in 2:2 with 4 positive exhortations;

- “be likeminded”

- “having the same love”

- “united in spirit”

- “intent on one purpose”

Each of these are part of one another and speak to transformed affections being worked out/expressed and deepened in the context of the church. This is the Christlikeness of individuals being expressed in relationships with others who are similarly “minded.” In 2:3 Paul gives two admonitions negatively framed followed by one contrasting and positive admonition. This is followed by a summary contrasting set (cf. 2:4).

- “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit”

- “rather in humility consider others better than yourselves”

- “look not to your own interests but also to the interests of others”

- Paul finishes his exhortation in 2:5 by attaching it all to the “mind of Christ.” In Romans 8:1-12 the Apostle Paul uses the very same word group and the same language to describe the transforming reality of Jesus in the true believer by the Holy Spirit. The power and “proof” of

this transformation is experienced in the Christian as the work of the Spirit producing in us the “mind of Christ.” – cf. 2:5. The ultimate and designed product is Christlikeness. The Spirit seeks/works to conform us to the image and likeness of Jesus which is experienced in the “mind of Christ” and must be pursued as such.

The “Mind of Christ” Produced in the Christian is on Display in the Christ of the Gospel – cf. 2:5-11 – Note: This powerful theological statement is imbedded in this text in such a way as to present ***both the basis for the transforming reality of Christ in me/us and the goal of that transformation – that I/we be like Jesus!!***

- Paul introduces this powerful statement of incarnation with “your attitude should be” (NIV) or “Have this mind in you...” (ESV).

- Jesus is the quintessence of selflessness or self-sacrifice as pictured in His descent into humanity for the purpose of bearing away our sin, the curse and our death. This “descent” into humanity is given weight by depicting whence He came - its contrasted with His being God – and is pictured in terms like “He emptied Himself...” and “taking on the very nature of a servant” and “being made in human likeness” (cf. 2:6-7).

Incarnation is held up as the measure of the mind of Christ which must be the experience of the believer and pursued in the church.

- It is clear that the “mind of Christ” which is seen in Incarnation comes to its fullest expression in His willing submission to the cross – self-sacrifice (cf. 2:8).

- The outcome is the victory won at the cross which is the basis of the transforming reality of Christ in us (cf. 2:9-10; also Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:10; Colossians 1:15-20; John 12:31; 14:30-31; also Colossians 1:27).

- The “mind of Christ” which drove Him to the cross – the dominating affections of Jesus – were directed to His exaltation to glory “unto the glory of God the Father” (cf. 2:9-11). This expresses His passion or driving love both for our rescue (cf. 2:9b-10; also Hebrews 2:10-11) and for the Father’s glory.

Note: By the time Paul has worked his way through the beauty of the person and work of the Incarnate Son of God as both the source and the primary object of our transformed affections – the weight of the treasure and privilege entrusted to us is carried into his summary exhortation.

The Apostle Paul Calls on Us to “Work Out Our Salvation with Fear and Trembling” – cf. 2:12-13

- The idea of “working out our salvation” takes us back to 2:1-4. Our salvation is on display by the transforming power of Christ in us by His Spirit. This salvation is most powerfully displayed in the new affections – individual and corporate. In addition, the idea of “working it out” is

carried in the language of exhortation found in 2:2-4. It is the call to pursue the life of Christ in the shared life of the church – the fellowship of believers – by expressing those transformed affections in our relationships with one another. We do this not out of duty but by the compelling experience of the “surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus” (cf. Philippians 3:7ff).

- The language of 2:13 reminds us that we are really submitting to the work of God in our lives which we experience sweetly and powerfully by the Spirit created pleasure of loving God and loving one another.

- What does “fear and trembling” have to do with any of this? The fear and trembling are the response of those who understand what an incredible love they have been graciously given. It is response to the fact that we have done nothing to deserve or earn this trust of love. The greatest threat to our growing pleasure in Christ – to the “mind of Christ” which represents the profound transformation of my affections – is to allow them to stagnate or put myself in a place of “enslavement” once again to the degrading of my desires by “setting my mind on earthly things” (cf. Philippians 3:12-21; Colossians 2:20-3:4).

Note: Just for your consideration I will include an extended quote from the PhD Dissertation of Ron N. Frost.

“...The affections were both the avenue by which sin entered the world and the avenue by which God, through the Spirit, restores the fallen soul. Slavery of the will was seen to be an enslavement by one’s own desires, something broken only by a transforming vision of God as more desirable than anything human...(which emphasizes) Christ as much more than the source of justification, but primarily as one to be loved. The promise of the indwelling Spirit, whose ministry in Christ’s life now allocated to the Christian, gives promise of a greater hope...full and eternal intimacy of the Godhead through a true, although mystical, union with Christ. The feet of the soul are the affections and the affections are meant for communion with God.”¹

¹ Frost, “Richards Sibbes’ Theology of Grace and the Division of English Reformed Theology,” pages 96-97