Do I Have the Mind of Christ?
Scripture Text: Philippians 2:1-11

Introduction

Last week, we learned about how God has empowered His Church to serve Him and each other. God has done this by giving each one of His children spiritual gifts to build up His Church. We do not get to decide what those gifts are, but we are responsible for to use what God has given us. We certainly should not refuse to use them. Like a birthday present or a Christmas gift, we need to receive it, unwrap it, and then use it. The Church ought to use their diverse gifts in an agreeable and cooperative spirit in order to bring glory to God. Paul’s letter to the Philippians takes that a step further. This is a wonderful letter of comfort. As other letters from the Apostle Paul, it conveys his affection for the Church. It rings with words of encouragement reminding us of the joy and peace we have in Christ. It even contains that wonderful promise that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). But, there is a serious tone to the letter. One of the issues Paul addressed within this letter was about the church in Philippi facing persecution, remaining true to their faith, and faithfully following Jesus Christ. Conflicts in a church can jeopardize the church’s witness to the world and their ability to withstand the world’s assaults, therefore we must stand firm.

Unity is a Defining Characteristic of the Church

Paul's thoughts in the letter turned from the need to withstand pressure from the outside world to the attitudes that should characterize all followers of Jesus Christ. If someone were to ask you what is a defining characteristic of the Church, what would you say? I suspect some, if not most people, would say it is love. Others may say it is faith, such as our faith in Christ. One defining characteristic of God’s Church is unity. In fact, that was a petition Jesus prayed to God the Father in His High Priestly Prayer (John 17:20–21). At the end of the first chapter, Paul exhorted the church to unity.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

Notice the words that Paul used to exhort the church to be unified. They were to stand firm in one spirit. There were to have one mind. They were to work together, side-by-side, for the gospel of Jesus Christ. This reminds me of the church being a team. It does little good for individuals on a team to contend individually rather than as part of the team. A team needs to work together. Similarly, the church should contend as one person. Harmony of purpose and coordination of various gifts and members is necessary to achieve God’s purposes. By working together and being unified, we show our faith in Jesus Christ. We show that we are citizens of God’s kingdom. In chapter two, Paul continued this thread on unity. Paul first described the basis of his appeal to unity (2:1) and then the essence of unity (2:2). Look at verses one and two below.

Scripture quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.
Philippians 2:1–2 1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Paul asked a rhetorical question. Do we have any encouragement in Jesus? Do we have any comfort from His love? Do we have fellowship in the Holy Spirit and with each other through the Holy Spirit? Do we have affection and sympathy? If we are in Christ, of course we do! Although Paul used the word “if”, which may in certain situations produce doubt, here Paul was merely building an argument and assuming these things were true. Paul was not doubting that encouragement, fellowship in the Spirit, affection, and sympathy were true for those in Christ and present in the congregation at Philippi. He was using a conditional sentence to provoke the Philippians so that they would reflect on whether these qualities were evident in their lives. The Philippian believers had to make sure they continued to progress in the critical area of loving one another.

The church should have a common experience of grace. If we have the things Paul mentioned here, if these qualities are present within our church community, then we should be in fellowship with one another. If these things are true, then we should be united. We should be like minded, believing the same things, and having the same love for one another. There is a strong current of unity within Paul's statement here. The Philippians were encouraged to live out their life in Christ and in the Spirit by living in unity with one another. However, this is not a call to unity at all costs. To be in one accord means to be “united in spirit” or to be “harmonious”. This does not occur at the cost of sacrificing truth, though. Unity occurs when followers of Jesus Christ have the same values and the same love. We should seek this kind of unity in our church family.

Humility is a Natural Expression of Unity

It is one thing to say why we should be unified and to even describe what that unity is, but how do we do it? What do we need to do in order to be one? It might be helpful to consider what disunity looks like. This might look like contention or unhealthy conflict. It would be like a court room with two opposing sides who cannot agree and a rogue judge who has it out for both of them. It would be like a family reunion where all of the in-laws are at each other’s throats. Disunity is a situation where every man is for himself. Now that Paul has given the basis and the essence for Christian unity, let us now consider how we demonstrate unity. Look at the next couple of verses.

Philippians 2:3–4 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

One way to not have unity is to only pursue your own selfish desires. Paul mentioned selfish ambition, which is putting your desires and your pursuits above others. It is considering yourself more important than other people. This kind of thinking promotes conflicts within the church, or any group of people. Have you ever known someone who was so focused on a position or a title or the recognition or rewards of something? Did
their selfish ambition create unhealthy conflict for those around them? Probably so! We all typically have a temptation to operate in a spirit of selfish ambition. We naturally look to advance our own agenda. Such conceit is countered by considering others more significant than yourself. Paul realized that everyone naturally looks out for his or her own interests. The key is to take that same level of concern and apply it also to the interests of others. Any concerns of others were to become the concerns of all!

Therefore, in contrast to selfish ambition, Paul encouraged the church to be humble. But, what exactly is humility? C. S. Lewis once wrote, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” Being humble is thinking of yourself less than you naturally want to do. Humility also involves a realistic appraisal of oneself and others as being in the image of God. We are to consider other people more significant than ourselves. We are to consider other people to be more important than we are. Notice that Paul did not write that we are to forsake taking care of ourselves. We just need to also take care of the needs of each other. When a community cares for one another just as they would care for themselves, disunity fades away. In fact, to consider someone else more significant than yourself is an example of sacrificial love, which is how Jesus said the world would know we are His disciples (John 13:34-25).

**Jesus is the Perfect Example of Humility**

Where do we get an example of this kind of attitude? Having given us the basis for unity, the essence of unity, and the expression of unity, Paul then introduced the perfect model of humility and servanthood: Jesus Himself. I am reminded of the example Jesus gave us when He washed His disciples’ feet. As Jesus humbly served, we ought to humbly serve others. With love and humility, we ought to consider others more important than ourselves. Jesus expects all of His disciples to follow His example. He is the supreme example of humility and how we ought to treat one another. To convey this idea, Paul used what many believe to be an early “hymn of Christ.” Let us look at the first of two stanzas of this hymn in verses five through eight.

*Philippians 2:5–8*  
5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Paul depicted Jesus’ example of service that traces His preexistence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension back to the Father. Jesus is the ultimate example of genuine spiritual progress. This is not a self-exalting struggle for supremacy, but a deep love for God and others shown in humble deeds of service. Paul included this hymn in the letter to encourage greater humility, and to encourage the church to consider other people’s interests first. Paul gave us an example of humility that we should follow. If Jesus had this mind-set, then we should also. In fact, this is a consistent theme of behavior modeling in the letter (Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus).
Having the “form of God” is roughly equivalent to having equality with God. However, this form of God is directly contrasted with having the “form of a servant”. Even though Jesus was equal to God the Father, He willingly submitted to the Father’s will and became a servant. Christ did not use His “equality with God” to hold onto His divine privileges. It was not something that Jesus kept and exploited for His own benefit or advantage. This does not mean that Jesus ceased being God. The “emptying” consisted of Jesus becoming human and becoming a servant, not of His giving up any part of His true deity. This is like having all of the power and authority to do something, but choosing to not use it. Jesus willingly deprived Himself of His rightfully exalted status. He exchanged His royal robes for the garments of sin worn by the human race.

Instead, Jesus had the mind-set of a servant. He did not come to please Himself but to serve others. In humility, He counted the interests of others as more significant than His own. Jesus humbled Himself and was obedient to the will of the Father. Though He was God and equal to the Father, He submitted to His Father’s will. Jesus also willingly died for those He loved. This is the model for us and the mind-set we each should have. We should be humble, considering others more significant than ourselves, and submitting to the will of the Father in all things. Because of Jesus’ humility and self-sacrifice, God the Father “highly exalted” Him. Look at the final verses in this Christ hymn.

*Philippians 2:9–11*

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every 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.*

Jesus left the glories of heaven and came to earth as a lowly servant, however, He left the earth victorious and exalted. Jesus’ humiliation became the grounds for His exaltation. By humbling Himself on the cross, Jesus demonstrated that He truly shared the divine nature of God, who is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus’ exaltation includes His lordship, in which every knee should bow and every tongue confess. The prophet Isaiah referred this act exclusively to God (Isaiah 45:24). The fact that these words are now applied to our Lord and Savior, shows that Jesus is fully divine. He is Lord!

**Conclusion**

In closing, Jesus came to serve, not to be served. He expects the same from His disciples. Being a disciple of Christ means that we love one another just as Jesus loves us. It means we serve one another just as Jesus served us. To serve one another means that we use the gifts God gives to us in order to accomplish His work and His will. Being a disciple means that we humble ourselves and consider others more important than we consider ourselves. To do this, we need only follow the example of Jesus, who humbled Himself as a servant and out of love, died for us. By following the example of Christ, the problems of disunity will be solved. Let us work together to be the disciples Jesus has called us to be. Let us work together as a team, considering each other more significant than ourselves, just as Jesus showed us. That is the mind of Christ and this is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!