

Having the Mind of Christ Toward Others

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A famous comic strip character says what so many of us have thought, “I love mankind. It’s people I can’t stand” (Wiersbe 57). All of us have been disappointed and robbed of our joy because of people, but unless we become reclusive, we cannot avoid them (cf. Rom. 14:7); moreover, if we are going to be the people of God, we must be people-oriented (cf. Matt. 5:13). God expects Christians to share a common and united life in His church, and that is Paul’s primary concern in chapter two of Philippians, where he deals with, among other things, having the mind of Christ toward others.

When Epaphroditus came to Paul, he brought both good and bad news – good news because of the gift of the Philippians (4:18) and the joy they had for Paul (1:26), but bad news because of troubles at Philippi. Apparently, there were troubles from without because of threats to the church (3:2) and troubles from within because of disunity. That there were internal disturbances seems obvious from Paul’s statements in 1:27; 2:1-4, 14; and 4:2. Thus, in this letter, written from a Roman prison, Paul sets forth some facts that would have given them the encouragement needed to protect themselves against future threats and to create a mindset in which they can learn to get along with one another.

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST TOWARD OTHERS

The purpose of this essay is to consider the appeal that Paul gives to the Philippians in chapter two and specifically what he has to say in verses 1-8. I will show that Paul appeals for them to have the mind of Christ and that by having this mind they will be able to get along with each other and thus possess the like-mindedness expected of God's people. To accomplish this purpose I will consider three different matters: (1) the grounds of Paul's appeal (v. 1), (2) the aims of Paul's appeal (v. 2), and (3) the attitudes and example of Paul's appeal (vv. 3-8). [Thanks to John Pigg, evangelist in Ridgeland, Mississippi, for helpful suggestions concerning this essay].

THE GROUNDS OF PAUL'S APPEAL

When brethren are having difficulties in getting along, it is difficult, if not impossible, to think about some foundational principles. Thus, before trouble with one another begins, it is important to have already fixed in our minds the foundations of our unity in Christ. If these principles can be understood when differences occur, brethren can be motivated to meet their mutual obligations. Paul suggests four foundational points in the form of four first class conditionals in which the condition is understood to be true. These conditionals should not be understood as referring to realities which are uncertain or in doubt, but as definite realities in the Christian experience. Thus, "if" in each of the conditionals might be understood as "since" or "as is indeed the case" (Martin 93). Paul's appeal is grounded in the spiritual riches which they possess as God's people.

First, Paul speaks of the "*consolation* in Christ." "Consolation" is from *paraklesis*, meaning literally "to call along side of." [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] It seems

that Paul is referring to the encouragement we have from being united in Christ. Since Christians are united in Christ, “this ought to work toward unity and love, not division and rivalry” (Wiersbe 58).

Second, Paul speaks of the “*comfort* of love.” It is by focusing on the love of God, of Christ, and of Christians that brethren will be motivated to cease divisiveness in any form. If one has true love, then he is going to seek the welfare of his neighbor (2 Cor. 5:14). This ground of Paul’s appeal will surely motivate brethren to get along instead of retaliating when they are hurt by others.

Third, Paul speaks of the “fellowship (*communion*) of the Spirit.” God sent forth His Spirit into our hearts when we became Christians (Gal. 6:4; Acts 5:32). This is a blessing of the highest order for the Christian. Since we have in common the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we should be motivated to be of the same mind and thus be enabled to get along with one another.

Fourth, Paul speaks of “affection and mercy” (*compassion*). Paul is grounding his appeal on the power of compassion. As is indeed the case that compassion has been given to us abundantly by God through Christ, then we need to be moved by hearts filled with compassion to resist any temptation to tear down one another. A recognition that Christ is compassionate toward us should fill us with that same kind of compassion and tenderness toward others (cf. Col 3:12).

In short, Paul appeals to the Philippians (and us) to contemplate the excellence of the spiritual realities we have. If we can realize that we have been blessed in a way beyond what we deserve, we should grant grace to others and do our very best to take steps which make for peace and unity.

THE AIMS OF PAUL'S APPEAL

Having laid the foundation of his appeal, Paul exhorts the Philippians to fulfill four expectations of what must be done in order that an atmosphere of peace can prevail among God's people. He tells the Philippians to "fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (v. 2). (1) To be "like-minded" means to think the same thing (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10). (2) If we are like-minded, we will have the "same love." This means we are going to love the same things pertaining to the Lord and His church. Further, it means we will love each other with the same kind of love—love which is sincere, fervent and from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:23). (3) To be of "one accord" is *sumpsuchoi*, occurring only here in the New Testament, meaning literally to be of one soul. The idea is to be "harmonious in soul, souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other" (Robertson 4:44). It is as if one soul is driving the Philippians. They are in complete harmony—not separate entities going in different directions. It is not enough to be like-minded and to have the same love, Christians must have their souls joined together in one purpose for the glory of God. (4) Finally, the Philippians are to be "of one mind." He wants them to have unity of heart and purpose. He desires that they avoid any kind of division and discord and to show the power of the spiritual riches they enjoy by being united in a common purpose.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL'S APPEAL

In verse 5, Paul calls attention to the example of his appeal for unity—the Lord Jesus Christ—the greatest possible incentive to get along with one another. He says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"

(2:5). "This mind" (the attitudes expressed in the preceding verses) is the only attitude proper for one who is in Christ, because it is also the mind of Christ Himself. The purpose of this part of the essay is to consider particularly the attitudes in verses 3-4, while calling attention to the example of Christ in verses 6-8. The example of Jesus in doing nothing through selfishness, in having lowliness of mind and in looking out for the interests of others provides a model for us today. If we can walk in His steps in these areas, we can share the joy He had and experience the blessing of being "transformed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18).

First, we should have the attitude of doing nothing "through self-ambition or conceit" (v. 3). This was clearly the mind of Christ. Prior to becoming flesh, Jesus was "in the form of God" and "equal with God" but did not consider such equality as "robbery" (v. 6). "Form" carries the idea of an outward expression of an inner reality or substance. In short, Jesus was deity. He was equal with God. Whatever deity is, Jesus is. This is in accord with what John tells us in John 1:1-3—the Word has existed eternally, the Word was in a relationship with God and the Word was deity (cf. Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-3). In spite of the glorious position of the preincarnate Son of God, Jesus "did not consider it robbery (literally, "a thing to be grasped") to be equal with God" (v. 6). In other words, Jesus did not consider the glory of His position with God something to which He had to cling. This is the supreme example of a lack of selfish ambition and conceit.

If we are going to get along with others, we must have this mind. We should not be characterized by selfish ambition (an ambition which has no conception of service but only aimed at self promotion) and conceit (an improper estimation of one's self). This was not the mind

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST TOWARD OTHERS

of Christ and it should not be our mind. It is inconceivable that such attitudes would have ever been exhibited by our Lord. We must resist selfishness and self promotion. Conflict will always exist among brethren where there is pride which aims at promoting one's self while seeking to tear others down. We do not possess the mind of Christ if we believe ourselves to be more important than others and believe that distinction is something to be held on to no matter the cost. Such behavior is childish and should not be named among spiritually mature saints.

Second, we should have the attitude of "lowliness of mind" in which we esteem others better than ourselves (v. 3). This also is the mind of Christ. According to verses 7-8, when Jesus became flesh: (1) He "made Himself of no reputation," (2) He took on "the form of a bondservant," (3) He came "in the likeness of men," and (4) He "humbled Himself" to the extent of death. Clearly, Jesus is the supreme example of lowliness of mind. Concerning (1), some versions say that Jesus "emptied Himself." "Empty" is a derivative of *kenoo*. "The word does not mean He emptied Himself of His deity, but rather He emptied Himself of the display of His deity for personal gain" (Rogers and Rogers 451-452). Concerning (2), Jesus' taking on the form of a servant vividly demonstrates His humanity. Jesus entered the world with all the frailty of human existence. This closely relates to (3) when Jesus is further described as coming "in the likeness of men." Jesus was truly man, experiencing all that man is subject to including His temptations and sufferings (cf. Heb. 2:14, 17-18; 4:14-16; 5:7). Finally, (4) Jesus "humbled Himself." His entire life on earth was one of lowly acceptance of the human condition, even to the extent of death. Why did He do all of this? He did it because it was in the interest of others.

If we are going to get along with others, this is a mind we must possess. Having an attitude of lowliness of mind will effectively deal with the problem of selfish ambition and conceit. Lowliness of mind is simply lowly thinking or humility. The humble person is not one who thinks some of himself or little of himself; he simply does not think of himself, period. "Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it" (Wiersbe 58). Paul says that we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought and that we are to have brotherly love toward one another, "in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:3, 10). We will never get along with one another until we clothe ourselves with the virtue of humility. As we think less of ourselves and take note of our own imperfections, we will start making progress in esteeming others better than ourselves.

Third, we should have the attitude of looking out for the interests of others (v. 4). Again, this is the mind of Christ. Earlier we noted what Jesus did when He became flesh and briefly why He did what He did, namely for others. Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give His life for others (Matt. 20:28). Paul says, "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me'" (Rom. 15:3). Jesus tasted death for every one of us (Heb. 2:9). While we were without strength, ungodly, sinners and even enemies of God, Christ died for us (cf. Rom. 5:6-10). Everything Jesus did was for others.

If we are going to get along with others, this mind, along with the others discussed, must be exhibited. We must take our eyes off ourselves and look to the interests of others. Focusing on others should be on the mind of every Christian. It is what we are taught throughout the New Testament. We are to prefer one another (Rom.

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST TOWARD OTHERS

12:10), edify one another (1 Thess. 5:11), be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32), bear with one another and forgive one another (Col. 3:13). Many other verses emphasize the relationship we should have toward others. Jesus said it best when He said, "Whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:44). If we would only become servants, as our Lord became a servant, we would learn to get along with one another.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have shown that Paul appeals for Christians to have the mind of Christ and that by having this mind they will be able to get along with each other. We have discussed the grounds of Paul's appeal, the aims of Paul's appeal and the attitudes and example of Paul's appeal (vv. 3-8). It is only by having the mind of Christ that we will ever learn to get along with others. It is inevitable that differences will arise in interpersonal relationships, whether they are in the church, home or business. These differences can be greatly minimized when we possess the mind of Christ. May God help us to take seriously the appeal He made to the Philippians to have the mind of Christ. The appeal He made to them is the appeal He makes to us.

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