

The Mind of Christ
Philippians 1:27; 2:1–11

Turn to Philippians 1 please. This is the first Sunday of October. On the first Sunday of November, we'll have our covenant of membership Sunday. As much as you can, please make plans to be here that Sunday. The sermons until then are to lay a foundation for us covenanting with each other.

In our text today, Paul wants us to imitate Christ dying for us in how we treat each other. The New Testament actually does this in quite a few places. I tend to think that the way I follow the Christ who died is to be ready to die for him. The Bible says that as well. But more often, we imitate the Christ who died in how we live with one another.

We saw this last week when we read about the disciples arguing about who was greatest. Jesus called them to be servants and slaves to each other, and he ended that with: *for even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*. In serving each other we follow the Christ who gave his life for others.

Live Worthy of the Gospel of Christ – Php 1:27

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, acting in a way that's worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the gospel faith. (NLT, adapted)

This verse twice mentions the gospel, and tells us how to live worthy of the gospel. There's a particular lifestyle that goes along with the gospel of Christ: *I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the gospel faith*. Standing together, one spirit, one purpose, fighting together for the gospel faith. Worthy of the gospel means unity in the church.

The Holy Spirit does not produce gospel preaching only to save individuals. When a person believes the gospel and receives eternal life, the gospel is only half done. The gospel creates citizens of heaven, and when we live this out in way worthy of our real citizenship, we live it in unity with each other. The gospel is not done until believers are together in unity.

The clearest example of this in the New Testament is the four-part story in Acts 2. In Acts 2, first the Spirit comes, then Peter preaches the gospel to a crowd from every nation under heaven, then 3000 believe and are baptized, and lastly those 3000 live the most remarkable life together that we ever see in the New Testament. That's when the gospel is complete, that's when we're living worthy of the gospel.

We may think that 3000 coming to the Lord in one day is the high point of Acts 2, but it's not, it's just another stage of the gospel. That amazing community life together is the climax of the story. "Worthy of the gospel of Christ" means "standing *together* with *one* spirit and *one* purpose." Now let's pick this up in chapter 2.

God Supports and Sustains Us – Php 2:1

This starts with questions: *Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Any tenderness and compassion from God?*

Is God taking care of you through other believers? Are you encouraged and comforted by what happens together? Paul asks them these things, and he knows this church, and he knows that the answer to all of these is "yes."

Our Response: Be One in Spirit – Php 2:2

Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Make my joy complete. What did Paul most want to hear about that church? What would delight him most of all? This was his priority for them. Back when we were reading 1:27, did you notice that it begins "above all"? *Above all ... stand together in one spirit and one purpose.*

Make my joy complete: *Be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.* More or less saying the same thing four different ways, it seems to me.

What Church Unity Requires from Individuals – Php 2:3–4

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with humble minds value others above yourselves. Don't just look to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In humility value others above yourselves. Let's talk about this. Paul does not mean that others are more valuable than we are. Here is what he's NOT saying: "Everyone, listen up, each of you convince yourselves that everyone around you is more valuable than you are." That is NOT what he's saying.

In Eph 5 Paul writes, "submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ." The person we submit to, or value highly, has no right to this. And we have no right to their submission. But Christ has every right to our submission. And Christ says, submit to one another. And so, because Christ is Lord, and we have reverence for him and submit to him, we shall submit to one another. In that sense, we value others above ourselves. Let's not just look to our own interests, each of us also to the interests of others.

I'm sure not very good at this. Perhaps some of you think you've got this in hand, but I don't. But it is also true that the Holy Spirit calls me out of myself and brings these good things out of me from time to time. And I see this happen among you, and it happens all the time when I don't see it. It is good for us to know what God values, because the Spirit uses that to lead us.

The Mind of Christ in Relationships – Php 2:5

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

The same Greek word “mind” happens four times in vv2-5: *Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, being of one mind. With humble minds value others above yourselves. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*

Now we'll read how Christ showed what God has just been calling us to do. We've been told: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with humble minds value others above yourselves. Don't just look to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Where God has been leading us so far in Philippians 2 is just how Jesus was thinking. And where does this “mind” come into play? In our relationships with each other. *In your relationships with each other, have the same mind as Christ Jesus had.*

The Mind of Christ in The Great Demonstration – Php 2:6–8

The next three verses describe an incredible story, unbelievable except that we believe it. What actually happens here is staggering. Let's read.

Christ Jesus, existing as God, did not consider his equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he emptied himself by becoming a slave, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Is there a story like this anywhere else on earth? True or otherwise? He was by nature God, he was equal with God, and he let it go, he walked away. He emptied himself and became a slave. He humbled himself and became obedient. To death, even to cross death.

That mindset that led Christ Jesus to volunteer for this, that's the mindset we're after. Here's how we imitate that: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with humble minds value others above yourselves. Don't just look to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

That's how the mind of Christ looks in us. God is showing us this great demonstration of humble service so that we will grab onto that mindset with both hands and hang on to it and live that out with each other. *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*

And when we humbly serve one another, which happens often among us, we are doing the same thing Christ did when he emptied himself and became a slave, when he humbled himself and became obedient. The Spirit that led Christ down his journey leads us on the same journey.

When is the Great Payoff? – Php 2:9–11

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus lived faithfully, and died like the scum of the earth. We imagine the physical pain of being flogged and crucified, and preach about it, but the Gospels tell a different story. They more or less ignore that, but they point out details of how Jesus was publicly shamed and humiliated.

But once he had died, heaven exploded! Then the victory was won, the battle was done, salvation was accomplished, and in heaven they had the most joyous victory march that ever happened. They carried him on their shoulders for hours. Jesus was the Hero of heroes, the Champion of champions. God himself gave Jesus the name above all names, which is Yahweh, and God seated Jesus at his right hand, where he is today. This happened after he died.

Jesus humbled himself and became obedient, right until he died. He died unpleasantly, as will many of us, though we will not die as unpleasantly as Jesus died. And then God lifted him up, God honoured him and gave him glory. And our lives follow the same path. That is the course that God has laid out for us.

God honours us by setting the same course for us as he set for his Son, he leads us on the same path that he led his Son. In the New Testament, this is a privilege God gives us, to follow Jesus in this way. We live in humble faithfulness, and die, and then we are immensely rewarded, as him.

But this Scripture is not about our death, it's God's call about how we live. When we take the mind of Christ to ourselves, and live that out, then we get to where we began today: *standing together with one purpose and one spirit, fighting together to be faithful to the gospel of Christ.* We will make the Lord's joy complete *by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*

Story about Our Church

This church began in 1990 with seven young households, all about the age of Friesens and Isaacs and Wiebes. Marilyn and I were the only ones without children, though we fixed that in the next four years. Several of those households had strong ideals about what a good church would be like. They looked on our new church as a chance to have a church that did things the right way, the way they believed in. All their ideals were good, they were things God likes.

But those with strong ideals did not have the same ideals. They had different principles about which they did not want to compromise. I did not know how to lead a group like that. They were good people, and we all got along well, but sometimes it was like herding cats. Church care meetings were difficult because different ideals would clash, respectfully and courteously, but still, sometimes they were not compatible.

Four couples left the church because life took them elsewhere, and those were sad partings. The last two of the original couples left the same year, 98 I think, because I and the church would not steer things their way. I could not see that the Scripture supported their principles as strongly as they wanted. The rest of the church did not want that either. I should make clear that these last two left for completely different reasons, neither had anything to do with the other. Hard days.

But nobody's ideal was that we'd complete Paul's joy by complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Nobody's ideal was to stand together with one purpose and one spirit, fighting together to be faithful to the gospel of Christ. That we would love one another as Christ loved us.

And at the time it was not my ideal either. I had not yet seen that in the Scripture. But by two years later this had become clearer, because 2000 was the first year we had our covenant of membership. Our church had not had any membership at all until then. None of us were that impressed with how we had seen church membership function.

But in the year 2000 the elders suggested this to the congregation at a church care meeting. We said, "let's try this covenant once and see how it goes, then we'll decide if we want to keep doing this." The group liked it from the start, and 2023 will be the 24th year we done our membership this way. My friend Ron Shiels was the one who aimed me at "love one another," and he's also the one who wrote up the covenant of membership, used it in his church, and then give it to us.

This kind of unity is not free. It will cost us. Do you think it was easy for Christ to empty himself and become a slave? Was it easy for Christ to humble himself and become obedient? Do we think he did not struggle with these things? We know he struggled with such. Unity will cost us.

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Any tenderness and compassion from God? Then let's make the Lord's joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, may the mind of Christ dwell richly among us. May the mind of Christ shape all our relationships with each other. May the Spirit produce his fruit in us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.