

The Apostle Paul is writing another letter to another church. This time it was the church at Philippi. There was a conflict within the church and Paul had a desire to see it resolved. To do this he employs the concept of possessing the mind of Christ. He deals with the problem of personal conflict with others in chapter one and then he offers a solution.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 NLT

Unresolved conflict and tension within a church brings shame and reproach on the causes of Christ. The apostle believes that this can be resolved with a change of heart and mind. Let's back up to the first four verses of chapter two for a moment.

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4 NLT

This sermon is about being delivered from our self-interest in the interests of others. It is about putting others first. Before we get into it let me make an interesting observation.

⁴ *Let each of you look out not **only** for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

In verse four there is a word inserted and there is no explanation for it except that it was not in the original manuscripts, yet you find it in most translations of the Bible. Not all but most.

According to Dr. Dennis Kinlaw after much research and conversations with leading Greek and New Testament scholars, we can only draw one conclusion as to why this word was inserted into the text. He writes, "Because we twentieth-century Christians don't believe the Lord can deliver us from self-interest, so we insert our assumptions into scripture.

To live with the mind of Christ we must we must avoid some things. In verse three and fourteen Paul lists four characteristics that should be foreign to Christfollowers.

A. The Heart of the Matter

1. **Self-interest:** This is the supreme characteristic of a sinful person. A large part of redemption is to undo our distorted orientation and to turn us outward so that we are not

interested in ourselves but in the well-being of others. This is where the breakdown often occurs between evangelism of others and social action. It is not either/or but both/and. Outward service to others is all there is to the gospel. The essence of Christian living is making oneself a servant as Christ is a servant.

Self-interest is demonstrated by the question, “What’s in it for me?” Jesus never strived to get anything for Himself. He never bargained with those asking for help but agreeing to do something for them as long as He profited in some way. In the Old Testament we are taught, “Love you neighbor as yourself.” (Lev. 19:18) Jesus however expressed it this way, “Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:12-13) Jesus changed everything when He became the Shepherd who sacrificed Himself for the sheep.

2. **Conceit:** This is being concerned about our status or doing things for the sake of appearance. Too often we fall way short of God’s will because we are overly concerned about appearances. The church often struggles with this and we come across with such a better than others attitude. We somehow think because we have become followers of Christ that we are somehow better than others.

Jesus never acted like that. He talked to a Samaritan woman. He touched lepers; He cared nothing about appearances before his disciples or the public. He hung out with the lowest of the low and it ticked off the religious elites of His day and ultimately costs Him His life.

3. **Grumbling:** This is the self-pitying attitude that says, “I deserve better.” When Helen Roseveare graduated from Cambridge University in the early 1960’s she answered to call to leave her homeland.

She was assigned to the north eastern part of Congo (later called Zaire), where she was the only doctor for two and a half million people. One day while driving to a meeting, her supervisor spoke to her of the Lord’s dealings, of the possibilities of success as a missionary.

If you think you have come to the mission field because you are a little better than others, or as the cream of your church, or because of your medical degree, or for the service you can render the African church, or even for the souls you may see saved, you will fail. Remember, the Lord has only one purpose ultimately for each one of us, to make us more like Jesus. He is interested in your relationships with Himself. Let Him take you and mould you as He will; all the rest will take its rightful place (R: Give..., p. 75).

Her work began in a temporary mud-and-thatch hospital. With the help of local workman, this graduate of Cambridge made and fired her own bricks and built the buildings they needed. It was her torn and bleeding hands (from working at the kiln) that impressed the Africans that here was

not only a white, professional woman, but one willing to pay the cost to stoop down to their level. While she murmured and complained to God about having to make bricks the workers at the kiln said to her one day, “When you are in surgery you are like a god. You terrify us. But when you’re at the brick kiln and your fingers drip with blood like ours, you’re our sister. We love you!” She started to realize that God hadn’t sent her to Africa to be a surgeon but to show the love of Christ.

They taught her to use an axe, to choose the right tree to resist termites and rotting; to select good clean grass and durable fibres for thatching. She learned how to plan the layout of the building with regard to the prevailing wind, and the slope of the roof to withstand the tropical rainfall. She struggled to learn Swahili, the local language.

Within eleven years, a 14 acre plot of land had been turned into a 100 bed hospital and maternity complex with all the necessary buildings and services. Many tens of thousands of sick were treated, scores of whom would have died without the help of the hospital. Each year 100 patients underwent surgery; 100 young men and women were trained as hospital orderlies and assistant midwives; and all the patients heard the Gospel through the ministry of the hospital chaplains. In addition, she established 48 rural health clinics in the immediate vicinity of the hospital.

But during these years, stresses and strains developed. The mission assigned Dr. John Harris to the hospital, and was put in charge. She had enjoyed her independence, had developed her own priorities, and chafed under this change. She became irritable and resentful. She was exhausted from overwork. She had conflicts with her African colleagues. Her time with the Lord had suffered greatly, and she had less and less interest in prayer and Bible study. The sensitive national pastor saw the symptoms and invited her to spend a week in prayer and fasting at his home. After several days, the Lord broke through. She later wrote:

I joined the Pastor and his wife round the fire....As they earnestly prayed, slowly the Spirit of God reached through into my heart and broke down the barriers of pride, the frigid restraint, and revealed so much of self. He helped me to unburden my heart, to reveal all the rottenness and sense of failure, the fears and criticisms, the pride and selfishness. Then, so gently and quietly, Pastor Ndugu...led me to look away from myself to the Christ of Calvary. He dealt with the need of restitution on certain points, the need of apologizing and asking forgiveness on certain others, and a great calm came

We need to lay down our entitlement mentalities and learn to serve as Christ in the world.

- 4. Arguing:** This is trying to bargain with God in order to do things your way. It is knowing the will of God for our lives but putting our own spin on it so that we don’t have to give up our won way and will. It is compromising the will of God by placing conditions on it.

It is the young man or woman who marries the guy that is not a Christian knowing full well that it is not God’s will but human passion takes the lead. It is the person that knows where God is sending them but they allow themselves to stay in the comfortable place instead of going to the uncomfortable.

B. The hope of maturity

Can you imagine a person who is not characterized by self-interest? A person who is not a slave to appearances? A person who is not always feeling he serves better? Or a person who does not answer God's will with conditions? That would be the sort of person God could use.

Both the Corinthian church and the church at Philippi made themselves part of the problem instead of the solution to changing the world. Paul exhorts them both to have the same mind and attitude which is found in Jesus Christ.

Some may question this as a real possibility but it is more than idealism. It is more than an unreachable goal that we strive for but never attain. This world longs to see the grace of Christ now lived out in the life of His followers. When all we have to offer them is some kind of entrance into another world or eternity but we live un-surrendered lives that parody the lives of non-believers it doesn't offer much hope.

Jesus said, "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me. (Luke 10:16) Christians are to be Christ in this and to this world. It is as simple as that. That's the standard we are to hold ourselves to.

Sometimes it may take us to the wall and the edge of our very sanity. Let me go back to Helen Roseveare for a moment. One tragic night she was raped by a gang of rebel soldiers. This single missionary lady that had given up a lucrative medical career to serve those that could not pay was brutally raped. In the dark nights of her soul that followed she cried out to God, How can you let this happen to me?

You know what she heard deep in her spirits and soul? She sensed the Lord saying to her, "Thank you Helen. Thank you for letting me use your body. They are not raping you; they are raping me." She was in recovery with a young nun that had also been raped and she shared the same thoughts with her although this time she used the Virgin Mary. Mary was scandalized yet she did nothing wrong. God used her body to bring bear His Son even though it brought shame and reproach. That is Christian maturity. There is such hope in that when we get to the place of full surrender and we can lay down our rights to ourselves. Go back to our text and read it again and again. Jesus laid aside His glory and position to become one of us.

C. The healthy and holy mind

Becoming like Christ is a work of God's grace. It is possible but it is something one must hunger for and yearn for. It is not one trip to the altar. It is a radical and thorough change from the inside out.

The Holy Spirit makes this sacrificial thinking possible. Jesus Himself began His ministry after the Holy Spirit descended on Him. The disciple's ministry began when the Holy Spirit

descended on them. The Holy Spirit must control us if we are to be effective and possess the mind of Christ.

Jesus Christ must have the right to spend us.

When we try to control and manipulate things to go our way we are not fully surrendered. There is something so freeing about knowing that you are living in a spiritually healthy way and with a surrendered and holy mind.

D. The helpless model

The answer is letting go. Take your hands off and let go of the control of your life. Let God into every relationship, every corner of your heart and mind.

When we let go God sweeps into our hearts with the presence of His Holy Spirit. Daily surrender is critical because the Holy Spirit will not stay where He is unwanted or when we live a double minded life. He will not abide in us if we want to hang on to the fleshly mind instead of the Spirit filled mind. There is not room for both.

Joseph Tson was a Romanian pastor in Communist Romania before the fall of the Iron Curtain. He often spoke out in opposition to the Communist dictatorship and they decided they had had enough. They destroyed his library leaving him only two books on his self. They interrogated him five days a week. They tried to destroy him often interrogating him with a loaded gun to his head.

One day after a session he went into his empty study and collapsed on the floor sobbing. He questioned why God was allowing this to happen. He sobbed out, "God, I can't take it anymore." He got up and took one of the two books he had left on the shelf and read the words of E. Stanley Jones in a chapter entitled, "How to live above your circumstances." It was about Jesus facing the cross. He did not resist it but embraced it. Joseph began to ask God. Are you saying you want me to embrace my interrogators?

He felt that that was exactly what God was saying so he asked for Him to do a special work in his heart. And God did.

He walked back into the interrogation room, ready to embrace his trial. The change in the atmosphere was almost comical. Before he had been a pastor in trauma but now the chief interrogator was in trauma because he had lost control of his subject.

He said to the pastor, "You are stupid. I guess we will just go ahead and kill you." Joseph found himself saying, "I understand sir. That's your ultimate weapon. When everything else has failed, you can always kill. But you know, I have an ultimate weapon too, And when you use yours I will use mine.

Your ultimate weapon is to kill but mine is to die. When I die, I will be much better off. But your troubles will just be beginning. You see every recording of every sermon that I have ever preached will be sprinkled with my blood. So you'll have much more trouble with me dead than you have with me alive."

The interrogator shouted, "Take him out."

A few weeks later he heard that the communist party was calling him crazy because he wanted to be a martyr.

"When I was pulling every string to try to save my life, I was at my wits end. But when I turned the strings loose and let Christ control my life completely I was free."