

HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST

2 So then, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any comfort from his love, if there is any fellowship with his Spirit, if there is any compassion and tenderness, ²cause me to be filled with joy by living together in harmony, by sharing the same love, by being united in spirit, by having the same purpose. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself. ⁴Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶existing in the form of God, he did not regard his being on an equality with God as a thing to be exploited; ⁷on the contrary, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found as a man in appearance, ⁸he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. ⁹Therefore, God exalted him to the highest position and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name; ¹⁰so that before the name Jesus [now] possesses “every knee should bow”—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—¹¹“and every tongue confess” that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:1-11)*

*The phrase in verse 2 literally reads, “*by having the same mind*”

Introduction

He was a successful Southern farmer, cultivating acres and acres of peanuts; yet he was not above spending time with the common folk down at the local café. He lived in a luxurious white house, with every conceivable comfort and convenience; yet he often took up a hammer to help build houses for the poor. He gained international headlines and T.V. coverage when he served as mediator between the warring nations of the Middle East; yet he was more than happy to serve as Sunday School teacher at a little Baptist church in an obscure southern hamlet.

His name was Jimmy Carter. He held the office of President of the United States. Now in retirement he continues to hold the distinguished honor reserved for former presidents; but more than that, he truly exhibits the mind of Christ. Jimmy Carter is a Christian who takes seriously the exhortation of Scripture: “Have within yourself the mind of Christ.”

As Christians, let us also take seriously this command of Scripture. Rather than entertaining and exhibiting the mind of the world, we must possess the mind of Christ. Because we by faith have entered into the life of Christ, let us have the mind of Christ.

I. Have the Mind of Christ, ...Which is the Attitude of Humility (vs. 5-8)

In verse 5 we are exhorted to have in us the mind, (or, attitude,) which was found in Christ Jesus. In the next three verses we are presented with three great

statements that explain for us and define for us exactly what is the mind of Christ: Christ refused to exploit His rights for personal benefit (vs. 6); Christ willingly assumed the role of a servant (vs. 7); and Christ denied Himself for the sake of His brethren (vs. 8.)

In verse 6 we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ refused to exploit His rights for personal benefit at the expense of His brethren. We are informed that He was *"existing in the form of God."* The Greek word translated, *"form"* (μορφή), was a philosophical term, not referring to the external appearance of a thing—as we would be inclined to use the term, speaking of "the form of a thing,"—but to the essence, or better, the specific character, of the thing or person. The New Testament commentator, Jac. J. Muller, writes, "by *form of God* is meant ... His divine nature, which is inseparable from His person and in which the Divine Being realizes Himself [i.e.; knows and expresses Himself] in His ... inherent, divine glory and godly attributes" (Jac. J. Muller, "The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians," *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, pp. 78-79.) The New Testament scholar, John Murray, concurs, "the *form of God* would refer to the sum of those characterizing qualities that mark God off as specifically God" (John Murray, *Christology*, unpublished classroom notes, Westminster Theological Seminary Library, Philadelphia, p. 36.) By way of illustration: the "form" of an apple is not merely the shape of the apple, it includes all those qualities that make an apple an apple and distinguish it from every other fruit and every other thing in all of creation. Thus, *"the form of God"* includes all those attributes and qualities and characteristics that make God what He is, and that distinguish Him from everyone and everything else. When the apostle informs us that our Lord Jesus Christ was *"existing in the form of God"* he is telling us in the strongest possible terms that the Lord Jesus Christ possesses all the attributes and the very identity of God—all that defines God defines Christ Jesus, as the Lord Jesus Himself declared, *"whoever has seen me, has seen the Father"* (Jn. 14:9.)

The Lord Jesus is further defined as *"being on an equality with God."* Whereas the previous term (*"the form of God"*) refers to the reality and the fullness of His deity, this present term (*"being on an equality with God"*) refers to the divine dignity and honor Jesus Christ possesses because of His absolute deity. We are forbidden to worship false gods and angelic beings; the Apostle John was prevented from bowing before the angelic being who was communicating to him the revelation of the things to come: *"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. ⁹But he said to me, Do not do so! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God"* (Rev. 22:8-9.) But Jesus Christ, who is none other than God incarnate, is worthy of the same worship as God the Father: *"Thomas responded by saying to him, My Lord and my God. ²⁹Jesus replied, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, but [still] have believed"* (Jn. 20:28-29.) Note, too, Matthew 28:16-17, *"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee,*

to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷And when they saw him, they worshiped [him].”

Next we are told that the Lord Jesus did not consider His being on an equality with God *“a thing to be exploited;”* or, as something to be used for His own benefit. The particular Greek phrase (ἀρπαγμός ἡγέομαι) employed by Paul was used to describe a situation in which a person held a valuable privilege or possession, which he could exploit for his own personal gain or benefit. By way of illustration: In secular Greek literature the phrase is used to describe Alexander the Great’s refusal to exploit the territories of Asia, which he had conquered and held within his power. Our Lord Jesus, bearing the very identity of God and the equality with God, did not insist upon exploiting His position and privilege and rights for His own personal benefit.

Whenever we demand our rights or privileges for our benefit regardless of our brethren, we are **not** exhibiting the mind of Christ our Savior. Christ refused to exploit His rights for His own personal benefit at the expense of His brethren—He could have refused to endure the incarnation and the cross, but He willingly accepted them. We are called to possess the mind of Christ and to exhibit His mind in our relationship with our brethren and neighbors.

In verse 7 we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ willingly assumed the role of a servant. Our Lord Jesus Christ *“emptied himself.”* He did so **not** by laying aside His absolute deity, for throughout His earthly ministry our Lord continued to exhibit and exercise that divinity and authority. He taught with the authority of God. Jesus declared of His teaching, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”* (Matt. 24:35.) We may compare these words of Jesus with what the Psalmist says about the word of Jehovah: *“Forever, O Jehovah, your word stands firm in the heavens”* (Psl. 119:89.) Even during His earthly ministry, Jesus claimed the title of God. On one occasion He declared to the Jews, *“I tell you the truth, Before Abraham was born, I AM”* (Jn. 8:58.) We may compare these words of Jesus with the LORD’s personal revelation of Himself made to Moses at the burning bush: *“And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM; and he said, This is what you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you”* (Ex. 3:14.) Our Lord Jesus declared His unity and identity with God the Father: *“I and the Father are one”* (Jn. 10:30.) Later He declared to His disciples, *“he who has seen me, has seen the Father”* (Jn. 14:9.)

The way in which our Lord Jesus emptied Himself was *“by taking the form of a servant.”* Just as *“the form of God”* includes all the attributes and qualities that define God precisely as God, so *“the form of a servant”* includes all the attributes and qualities that define a servant. Specifically what it meant for our Lord to take the form of a servant (and so become the servant of the LORD) is explained by the following phrase of verse 7: *“being made in the likeness of men;”* (i.e., He really and totally identified Himself with men.) He became weary: *“Jesus, being wearied by his journey, sat down by the well”* (Jn. 4:6.) He mourned: when He came to the

tomb of His friend, Lazarus, we read, *“Jesus wept”* (Jn. 11:35.) He died under the judgment of God: upon the cross, *“Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? (which, being interpreted, means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)”* (Mk. 15:34.)

In verse 7b-8 we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ denied Himself for the sake of His brethren. He was found *“as a man in appearance.”* The Greek word (σχημα) translated, “appearance,” refers to the outward appearance of a person or object. On the basis of His outward appearance, men judged the Lord of glory to be merely a man. Note the comments of His neighbors as recorded in John 6:42, *“And they said, Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, I have come down out of heaven?”* (Jn. 6:42.) Note, too, the Apostle Paul’s evaluation of Christ before His divine glory was revealed to him: *“though we once regarded Christ [from a worldly point of view], we do so no longer”* (2 Cor. 5:16.)

Paul goes on to write, our Lord humbled Himself *“by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross.”* Humility is defined here as accepting His Father’s will over against His own will, as we hear our Lord pray to His heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the prospect of the cross of Calvary: *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”* (Matt. 26:39.) Our Lord so humbled Himself, accepting the Father’s will, for the sake of His brethren, despite the cost to Himself personally.

Let us have the mind of Christ, which is defined for us as the attitude of humility: the refusal to exploit our rights for our own personal benefit at the expense of our brethren; the willingness to assume the mind and the role of a servant; and the willingness to deny ourselves for the sake of our brethren.

II. Have the Mind of Christ, ...and You will be Honored by God (vs. 9-11)

The exaltation and honor of the Lord Jesus is described as the reward bestowed upon Him by God the Father for His willingness to humble Himself and take the form of a servant:

Being found as a man in appearance, ⁸he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. ⁹Therefore, God exalted him to the highest position and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name. (Phil. 2:7b-9)

We may contrast the final outcome of our Lord’s self-humiliation in obedience to His heavenly Father’s will with the final fate of the devil executed against him because of his effort to exalt himself in defiance of God.

God *“exalted [Christ] to the highest position.”* The Greek term (ὑπερυψώω) means, “to super exalt,” “to lift up to the ultimate height of exaltation;” note Psalm 110:1, where this very promise is made to the Messiah in His incarnate state and as the reward for carrying out His appointed role as “the Servant of the LORD”: *“Jehovah said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”* Again, according to Isaiah 52:13-15, supreme exaltation is the fulfillment of God’s promise to His servant:

See, my servant will be successful; he will become high and lifted up, he will be greatly exalted. ¹⁴Just as many were appalled at you—he was so disfigured that his appearance was unlike any other man, his form was unlike the sons of men—¹⁵so shall he cause many nations to be shocked. Kings shall cover their mouths at [the sight of] him; for what was not reported to them they themselves will see, and what was not explained to them they will understand. (Isa. 52:13-15)

In contrast to the exaltation bestowed upon Christ, the LORD God pronounces the most awful curse upon the devil, in consequence of the devil seeking to exalt himself to the position of supreme exaltation:

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! How you have been cut down to the ground, you who once laid low the nations! ¹³You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned upon the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain! ¹⁴I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High!” ¹⁵But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit. (Isa. 14:12-15)

Let us carefully consider the words of our Lord Jesus: *“what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God”* (Lk. 16:15b.)

Let us have the mind of Christ, and we shall be honored by God:

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another; because “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁶Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the appointed time. (1 Pet. 5:5-6)