

PUT INTO PRACTICE 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

One Sunday morning Sharon Beth heard a sermon that challenged her down in the very deepest part of her inner being. That Sunday morning the pastor preached on the incident of Jesus washing His disciples’ feet.

On that occasion in the life of our Lord, the mind of Christ was vividly displayed in action before the wide-eyed astonishment of His disciples as they witnessed their Lord assuming the lowly role of the most menial servant, stooping down and washing their dirty, dusty feet. The passage concludes with Jesus’ challenging words: “*I have given you an example, you also should do as I have done to you*” (Jn. 13:15.)

That message on the subject of Jesus’ foot washing caused Sharon Beth to ask herself the question, “When have I washed someone’s feet?”

As she pondered that question and examined her own life, she confessed, “In all honesty I was not pleased with what I saw. I had been programmed constantly to ‘Watch out for Number One,’ and to ‘Take care of yourself;’ programmed to ‘Be successful.’ and ‘Don’t be a doormat.’ My mind so easily fell into the pattern of thinking, ‘How does this affect me? Does this improve my image? Watch out for yourself, no one else will.’”

Sharon Beth relates, “This period of introspection was the beginning of a change in my life.”

Here are some of the lessons about life that Sharon Beth has learned since she has become an active “foot washer:”

- living for herself and her self-image left her with a deep emptiness; “the sheer emptiness of that way of life demands that I change” she says
- “washing feet” (as in scrubbing a bathroom floor, for instance) “was not fun, but all the time my heart was singing with joy because God had shown me a special way to serve.”
- “washing feet sometimes hurts” (as when her friend faithfully cares for her aged mother who no longer recognizes her)
- “washing feet” has given her a way to express her commitment to Christ “in understandable language through my relationships with people,” Sharon says
- “washing feet” has brought a fresh perspective and a new purpose to her life: “I find myself seeing people and their circumstances in a different light. Their needs become in a sense my needs.”

Sharon states, “The wonder of it all is that in my obedience to wash feet, my joy breaks forth, and I hunger more to be used by the Lord.” (*POWER*, 10/15/89, pp.4-6)

It is interesting, though maybe not surprising, that much of what Sharon Beth did and learned are the very things that are brought to our attention in Philippians 2:1-4.

The mind of Christ is not something to be merely admired as it was displayed by our Lord Himself in His ministry; on the contrary, we, as His disciples, are called to put into practice the mind of Christ in our relationship with fellow Christians.

I. Put into Practice the Mind of Christ, ...by Seeking to Preserve and Promote Christian Unity

In verses 1-2 the Apostle Paul is saying to the Philippians, “If you are acquainted with the reality of the graces Christ ministers to His church, use them to preserve and promote Christian unity:”

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.
(Phil. 2:1-2)

The grace of *“encouragement”* is found in Christ. The Greek term (παρακλησις) literally means, “to stand beside someone, calling out words of encouragement or exhortation,” as the need may be. By way of illustration: a basketball coach stands on the sidelines calling out words of encouragement or exhortation to his players on the court. We are to encourage a brother who has become weary: *“Let us not become discouraged in doing good, for at the appointed time we will reap, if we do not give up”* (Gal. 6:9.) We are to encourage a brother who has become burdened down with a special trial: *“Bear one another’s burdens, and by doing so you will fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2.) We are to lovingly, and with much discernment, exhort a brother who has become careless and comfortable with a particular sin: *“exhort one another daily, so that none of you may become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”* (Heb. 3:13.) Note: We are also commanded to graciously receive exhortation when we stand in need of it: *“But I exhort you, brothers, bear with the word of exhortation”* (Heb. 13:22.)

Paul also refers to the *“comfort”* that comes from Christ’s love. What is being spoken of here are expressions of comfort and sympathy and understanding motivated by Christ’s own love for us and communicated to one another in a loving manner. Consider the example of Job’s friends when they first learned of the severe trial he was facing: *“So they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. No one spoke a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great”* (Job 2:13.) Note Job’s own testimony with regard to the need for consolation and comfort in times of severe testing and trial: *“To him who is ready to faint, kindness should be shown by his friend; or else he might forsake the fear of the Almighty”* (Job 6:14.)

Then there is the *“the fellowship”* with Christ’s Spirit. What is being referred to here is the communion with God and with fellow Christians created by the Holy Spirit. We must acknowledge, cherish, cultivate, and avoid disrupting, this Spiritual unity: *“[walk] with all humility and meekness, and with patience, bearing with each other in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:2-3.) We greatly contribute to the preservation of the spiritual of the church when we heed the admonition and instruction provided in Colossians 3:12-14,

... as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:12-14)

Finally, Paul mentions the grace of *“compassion and tenderness.”* We as Christians are to be tenderhearted towards one another, entertaining feelings of brotherly affection as opposed to ill will. Writing to the Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle Paul declares, *“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰And in fact, you do love all*

the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more” (1 Thess. 4:9-10.)

Let us put into practice the mind of Christ by applying the graces that Christ has bestowed upon His church to preserve and promote Christian unity: the grace of encouragement and exhortation; the comfort that comes from Christ’s love; the fellowship created by Christ’s Holy Spirit; and the grace of compassion and tenderness.

II. Put into Practice the Mind of Christ, ..by Assuming the Role of a Servant

The Apostle Paul exhorts the church, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.”* The Greek term (ἐπιθεια) translated, *“selfish ambition,”* originally referred to the self-seeking pursuit of public office by unscrupulous means. What is in view here is the lust to have the pre-eminence at any cost; an attitude of total self-centeredness. *“Selfish ambition”* (in the sense of a pre-occupation with one’s own status and advancement, especially at the expense of other people) is one of *“the works of the sinful nature”* (i.e., the old sinful nature that dominated our lives before our conversion) listed in Galatians 5:19-21,

*Now the works of the sinful nature are well known, [such as]: sexual immorality, moral impurity, debauchery, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hatreds, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, **selfish ambition**, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other such things. I warn you [again], just as I [previously] warned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)*

“Vain conceit” is referring to the effort to gain or maintain self-image, social status, and respectability in the sight of the world. Note some examples of vain conceit presented by our Lord Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount:

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full ... ⁵And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (Matt. 6:2,5)

On the contrary, *“with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself.”* The Greek usage of the term *“humility”* originally had a negative connotation for it speaks of putting others first. Jesus refers to the attitude entertained by the world and admired by the world when He taught His disciples that such an attitude was something they must not emulate: *“Then Jesus called them to himself and said to them, You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the Gentiles lord it over their subjects; and their high officials rule*

*over them [with tyranny]" (Mk. 10:42.) Such was and still is the world's ideal of the leader and the successful man; he is one who exercises dominion over others, they being in subservience to him to do his will. But in contrast to the mind and attitude of the world, Jesus exhorts His disciples to practice humility, even as He exemplified in His own life and ministry: "*whoever desires to be great among you, shall be your minister* [i.e., the one who ministers to his brethren]; ⁴⁴*and whoever desires to be first among you, shall be servant of all; ⁴⁵for, indeed, the Son of man came not to receive ministry, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10:43-45.)*

We are to regard the other person as "*occupying a higher position*" than ourselves. The Greek term (υπερεχω) usually translated, "better," actually has the meaning, "higher." We are to view our brethren as being in the place of Christ, as our Lord taught His disciples:

Then the king will say to those on his right hand, Come, you who are blessed by my Father; receive your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you took me in, ³⁶I was naked, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you cared for me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? ⁴⁰Then the king will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. (Matt. 25:34-40)

Viewed in another way, we are to assume the role of Christ in His role as the One who came to minister rather than to receive ministry: "*indeed, the Son of man came not to receive ministry, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10:45.) As we resist the attitude of self-ambition and vain conceit, and as we assume the attitude of humility and servant hood, it becomes so much easier to carry out such a ministry to each other and thereby fulfill the admonition of Scripture: "*You were called for freedom, brothers, only do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature to express itself; rather, serve one another with love"* (Gal. 5:13.)

The apostle goes on to exhort, "Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others." We are not to be self-absorbed with our own life, our own problems, our own ambitions; but rather, we are to be sensitive to the needs and concerns of others. By way of example, consider Sharon Beth's ministry:

A librarian at the school where Sharon Beth taught was taken ill quite suddenly. For days she lay in bed, racked with searing pain. Sharon Beth

called her one afternoon to comfort, encourage, and inquire, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Although the woman politely responded, "No, there's nothing I can think of," an idea came to Sharon.

"June," she said, "I would be glad to come over and clean your bathroom."

"That would be wonderful!" Sharon heard her say with a choked voice.

A few hours later Sharon Beth arrived with buckets, scrub brushes and disinfectants; she got down on her knees, scrubbing and cleaning.

Since the time she asked the Lord to show her some "feet" to "wash," He has opened Sharon's eyes to see other opportunities where she can put the mind of Christ into practice: putting an arm around someone who is ready to call it quits; writing a note to someone who has undergone a severe loss; suggesting another pianist be given the opportunity to play for a special occasion (Sharon was often asked to play, this other woman was rarely asked, even though she, too, was an accomplished pianist.)

Bear in mind Sharon Beth's observation noted earlier: "'washing feet' has brought a fresh perspective and a new purpose to my life. I find myself seeing people and their circumstances in a different light. Their needs become in a sense my needs." We must remember that the second great commandment is, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matt 22:39.)

Let us put into practice the mind of Christ by assuming the role of a servant.

Conclusion

The mind of Christ must not merely be something we admire; it must be something we emulate. It must not be something that is merely theoretical, it must become very practical, it must be applied to our relationship with fellow Christians at home and at church.

The mind of Christ, especially as it is put into action, is most pleasing to God, being the direct opposite of all that is detestable to the Almighty:

There are six things Jehovah hates, seven that are detestable to him: ¹⁷haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ^{18a}a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, ^{19a}a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19)

By the grace of God ministered to us by His Holy Spirit, let us put into practice the mind of Christ, bearing in mind that by so doing we shall bring glory to God and receive blessing from Him.