

Philippians 2:1-11

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[0 : 00] So in this letter from St. Paul to the Philippians, Paul makes several comments about the mind.! So we're going to do some thinking about the mindset of the Christian life.

So for example, chapter 1 verse 27, he encourages the church to be of one mind. Chapter 319, he warns against setting our minds on earthly things.

In chapter 4 verse 7, he prays that God would protect our minds. And in our passage, chapter 2 verse 2, he encourages the church to be of the same mind and of one mind.

Then in 2 verse 5 he says, have this mind among yourselves. So his theme here is the true mindset of the Christian life. Now mindset is very important in every area of life, isn't it?

When we consider the various sporting victories that were achieved throughout the last couple of weeks at the Olympics. They were achieved as much through an effort of the mind as they were through acts and effort of the body.

[1 : 14] And the same is true in business, in war, in our personal lives, in perseverance through trials. And so it is also with the Christian life.

Our mindset is absolutely determinative of the outcome. So what is it that Paul has to say about our mindset in these verses?

Well he wants us to share a mindset of imitating Christ. And in particular of imitating his self-sacrificial service.

So the main part of this talk will just be focusing on that one point. That Paul wants us to share a mindset of imitating Christ's self-sacrificial service.

And then at the end of this talk I'll give four practical implications of this mindset. Now in sort of summing up what Paul is saying here, I use those words share a mindset very deliberately.

[2 : 20] Because Paul is speaking to a group of people. He's speaking to a church. And he's telling them to be of one mind. In verse 2 he says, Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind.

That's an idea that sounds very nice theoretically. John Lennon famously sang of the world being as one. And it sounds wonderful.

But in reality it confronts our ordinary way of thinking and our usual mode of operation. Firstly, getting along with people, as we all know at times, is not easy.

And secondly, generally we're not as inspired by people who are simply able to get along with people as we are by individuals who think for themselves and stand up from the crowd and go against the flow and so on.

And in fact in our age and culture which celebrates really independence and individuality, we might feel that Paul's teaching is somewhat threatening. Is Paul suggesting an erasure of independent thoughts?

[3 : 42] In all this talk about being of one mind, does he want us to stop thinking for ourselves and to be passive? And to be directed by others instead?

I think if we read on, that's not quite what he's getting at. Have a look at verses 3 and 4. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.

But in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Now look firstly, Paul doesn't encourage them to simply be pushovers. He says, let each of you look not only to his own interests. So he doesn't say, don't look after yourself, forget about yourself and just be totally absorbed by others all the time.

He says, look not only to your own interests. So it's not about simply being a pushover. Secondly, Paul's letter is directed at everyone in the church.

[4 : 44] It's not simply as the lay people and this sort of idea that they all need to sort of stop thinking and let all the thinking be done for them by others.

No, he's speaking to everybody. He begins verse 4. Each of you, let each of you look not only to his own interests. But most importantly, Paul is not saying that Christians should have one mind just for the sake of being in harmony.

Or just because it's nice. Because life is easier that way. Or because it looks good to others.

There's nothing vague or sentimental about Paul's call to unity.

He says Christians are to unite together in one mind with a very precise goal and purpose. Which is that of imitating Christ's self-sacrificial service.

So he says in verse 5. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. It's really important that we understand this mindset is not something we have to muster up for ourselves.

[6 : 00] He's not telling us just to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. He says this mindset is yours in Christ Jesus. What does that mean?

Well it means for those who are Christians, who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. We have been united to Christ by his spirit.

Which means that we're being changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. To become more and more like Jesus Christ. Every day.

And that involves our minds. And if you're here and you're not a Christian. I hope that's very clear that this is not just a mindset that we can change for ourselves.

Just by sitting down and concentrating for a while. Rather we need to ask God to give us this mind. It's something that is given. And he says to these Christians it is yours in Christ Jesus.

[7 : 00] That's also interesting because it means the motivation for obeying this command is not simply just because it's a command. It's because we're actually involved in this work in which God is making us more like Jesus Christ.

The ultimate standard of all that is true, good and beautiful. And it's not simply for some practical reason. It's not simply if we do this then actually maybe more people will start coming to church. Because they'll think that Christians are really great. Even though that might be a side effect of it. But the main point is simply that it's good inherently to become more like Christ.

And that is happening to us. So then what actually is this mindset that is ours in Jesus Christ?

Well Paul says it's seen most clearly in Christ's self-sacrificial service. And he describes that service in three steps. Three steps in a descent.

[8 : 04] That begin with his place as the eternal son of God. A step down then to Christ's becoming man. And then a step even further down when Christ died on the cross.

So let's just think about those in three steps. Beginning with Christ as the eternal God. Paul says, have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Who though he was in the form of God. Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Normally when we think of Jesus we think of the man who walked around Galilee.

And who cured lepers. Who made the blind see. Who ate with sinners. Told parables. Who was crucified dead and buried. And on the third day rose again. And quite right that is who we're talking about when we talk about Jesus.

But the Bible makes it absolutely clear that there is another dimension to this man's identity. That he is not only man but also God. Fully God and has in his divine nature always existed.

[9 : 09] He didn't just come into being when he was born as a man. The beginning of John's Gospel. It says doesn't it in these famous words.

In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. In Paul's words here he was in the form of God. So he's fully equal with God.

With the Father. With the Spirit. There's nothing less divine about him. He's an infinite power.

Infinite goodness. Infinite wisdom. And for all eternity has existed. He's the creator.

And possesses fully all of the divine attributes. He's not composed of anything. He cannot be defined or comprehended. He is fully God. But Paul says he did not count equality with God.

A thing to be grasped. That is to say that though he is equal with God. And has equal glory, power and divinity with the Father and with the Spirit.

[10 : 10] He willfully humbled himself. So we see the first step down in this descent to him becoming man. Christ emptied himself. Taking the form of a servant.

Being born in the likeness of man. Now to understand this we have to do a bit of careful thinking about what's going on. Because some people have taken the language that Paul uses here of Christ emptying himself.

And said that what happened was Christ Jesus, the Son of God was God. And then when he was born as a man he sort of stopped being God for a while. He sort of emptied himself of being God. And hung up his deity on a coat hook for a little while. And that's a complete misunderstanding of what he's saying. Deity isn't something that he can just put to one side.

Like we might hang up our coats for the evening and put it back on the next day. Jesus never stopped being God. But what he did do was put to one side certain rights and certain privileges that come with being God.

[11:16] As an imperfect analogy use the idea of a chess player. Let's say the world number one chess player. Let's imagine they're sat across the table from their eight year old son.

And they're teaching son how to play chess. Now is it possible for them to lay aside, completely rid themselves of their expertise, their capabilities in chess.

So that their son can win. I would say short of bashing their head against a wall several times or taking some mind altering drug. They can't actually rid themselves of that ability.

They have it. But what they can do is choose to act in a way that doesn't maximise upon their abilities and limit the use of their power.

And Paul is saying that is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. That's what it means that he emptied himself. He took the form of a servant born in the likeness of men. Remaining fully divine and fully God.

[12:22] But taking a human nature and uniting himself to it. This isn't just some sort of abstract idea Paul is saying. This isn't theological hair splitting.

He's saying that this happened for a particular purpose. And the purpose is this. He did it to serve. He took the form of a servant.

But what does that mean? We see what it means in the next step down in this descent. Where we see how he has served us. He became obedient to the point of death on the cross.

To die for our sins. In our place. Taking the penalty that we deserve for our sins. Facing fully the consequence. And freeing us for eternity from them.

So Christ went from the highest place in all of existence to the lowest place. Being born as a man and being crucified for us. And he did it to serve us.

[13:26] And don't let this pass you by. This means that in Christ God has become our servant. If you're here and you are a Christian.

You're not primarily a Christian because you have decided to serve God. But you are a Christian because God has decided to serve you in Jesus Christ.

And if you're here and you are not a Christian. Becoming a Christian is not primarily about us. Deciding about. Deciding that we're going to do something great for God.

But it's about seeing something that God. A great thing that God has done for us. That he has served us. By in the person of Christ dying for our sins.

This is a very different vision of God from what we get elsewhere. Typically God's often portrayed as either absolutely transcendent rulers of the universe.

[14:27] Or as sort of beings that are just a little bit bigger than humans. And are very human like. Just with a lot more power. And that first type of God. The sort of transcendent one.

Is really not much of a servant. Really rather he or it exists to be served. But the latter type sometimes. Can be a servant. But is only a servant if you perform the right ritual.

If you do the right sacrifice. Or if you do the right prayer or petition. Take the gods of ancient Greece for example. But in reality God is not like either of those.

Yes he is transcendent and all powerful. But he's revealed himself to the world as a servant. And yes he is a servant. But this service was given freely. Not in response to any bribing.

Any coercion. Or any prayer or petition on our part. But rather he has done it for us. And for our salvation. And because of this Jesus has lived the only life that has been vindicated.

[15:28] By God. Have a look at verse 9 and 10. Therefore God has highly exalted him. And bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

So that at the name of Jesus. Every knee should bow. In heaven and on earth. And under the earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. To the glory of God the Father.

The movement of Christ's work has been from descent into ascent. From humiliation to exaltation. He went from eternal glory into human form.

To dying on the cross in our service. And now he's raised. Ascended. And is the Lord. Who will come back. To be the judge of the living and the dead. And all people will one day bow the knee. And confess that he is the Lord. And Paul's point when thinking about Christ. In this way. Is that this is the mind that we are to have.

[16:27] We are to share a mindset. If we are Christians. Of imitating Christ's self-sacrificial service. Well what does that mean? I want to suggest four things.

Firstly. Christ-like service. Is the whole of the Christian life. When I was thinking about how this passage actually applies. It struck me.

That Paul doesn't give many. Specific instructions. About how to perform these Christ-like actions. Other than what we find in verses three and four. I think that's because he's doing something much bigger.

He. Is commending an entire mindset. Not just. Two or three things. Two or three actions. To kick off. Saying the whole of the Christian life.

Is one of adopting. And living out a mindset. That is patterned after. The self-sacrificial service of Christ. Secondly. Christ-like service.

[17:23] Is rational. Paul is telling us. To do something with our minds. That means the whole. The Christian life. Requires some serious. Deliberate. And sustained thought. And reflection.

Upon what it means. To imitate Christ. Christ. So often we wrongly think. That the more spiritual something is. The less it will have to do with our minds. And the more it will have to do with our feelings.

That's not what Paul is saying. The Christian life is. One that is rational. He. Wants us to engage our minds. Take on a mindset. We're not told to get swept up in. Sentimentalism.

But to adopt. A mindset. Thirdly. Christ-like sacrificial service. Is not. Passivity. It's not. Weakness. Jesus did not become man. Because he was. In any way. Less than God. He didn't become man. Because he was already. Sort of predisposed. Towards. Making this descent.

[18:17] He had. Full. Complete. Infinite strength. And deity. At his disposal. And he willfully became a servant. Out of his decision. To use his strength. In our service.

So. For us. Taking this mindset. Of Christ-like service. Is not to take a passive mindset. Rather it's to intentionally. And deliberately. Take. Whatever.

Strength. God has given us. Whatever we have. Whatever our bodies. Our minds. Our time. And resources. Have to offer. And to channel them. In the service of God.

And fourthly. Christ-like service. Is not hopeless. It is self-sacrificial. But it isn't hopeless. See. Christ's work didn't end. In this descent. In this humiliation.

Our passage doesn't end. In verse 8. Christ's work was worth it. He was vindicated. And so. For the Christian. Nothing lost. In service. To Christ. Is truly lost.

[19:14] Anything given up. Will end. In ultimate. Eternal. Gain. Because Christ. Is raised. And ascended. So we too. Will be raised. So this is what it means.

To adopt. A mindset. To share. A mindset. Of imitating Christ. As sacrificial service. We must be shaped. As. Once you. Reflect the self-sacrificial love.

Of God in Christ. In our actions. Towards. One another. Counting others. As more significant. Looking to the needs. Of others. Reflecting the self-giving descent. That Christ made for us.

Christ. This is the whole of the Christian life. In a nutshell. Takes serious. And deliberate. Intentional thought. To adopt this mindset. It's going to require the submission. Of whatever we have.

In the service of Christ. And others. But we do it. Knowing that. Christ has already won our salvation. That he has done everything. To reconcile us to God.

[20:12] Through this act. Of self-sacrificial service. And not only that. Through the spirit. He has given us this mindset. If we're Christians. And if we're not Christians. Then this is a great opportunity.

To have a window into. What the Christian life. Is about. And how. We might enter it. And how we might be empowered. To live it. And isn't it wonderful.

To know. That to serve Christ. When we see his resurrection. And ascension. Is to play for the winning team. It is to fight. In a battle. That has already.

Been won. Let's pray.