

**“The Mind of Christ”**

Today we land right in the middle of Paul’s instructions to the church on how to deal with a rift that has developed within her.

Two women, Euodia and Syntyche, have had a falling out of sorts, and Paul wants to see this rift mended. Even though he doesn’t specifically address this problem until the end of the letter everything he is telling them in the text is addressing the issue between these two women.

But not only is Paul addressing a rift that has already occurred in the life of this congregation he is also trying to do a little preventative maintenance as well.

Paul knows that this church is facing pressure from the outside, and that if they are not prepared beforehand to face such opposition this congregation will fracture because of attacks by her enemies.

I got a good picture of what Paul was trying to prevent in a movie that I saw last week. Much to my wife’s disappointment I missed *The Titanic* while I was in seminary. During that stage of my life I think I fell asleep during every movie I tried to watch with her. My brain was just too dead. But finally I saw it last week.

In that movie when the ship hit the iceberg mayhem broke out onboard. No one knew what to do. There were not enough boats and life jackets for all the people. The crew could not control the crowds. People were jumping into the water. It was massive chaos. The Titanic had been billed as the unsinkable ship. When you think your indestructible you’re not going to be prepared for a disaster.

This is exactly what Paul was trying to prevent from happening to the Philippians. He knows that there are ice bergs in the water and that one day they will hit one that is far more serious than anything they have faced thus far. Will they be prepared? They will be if they heed the apostle’s instructions given to them in the text.

Last week we looked at the first part of Paul’s instructions to the church on how to combat the problems they were up against.

Paul told them to be unified and the key to their unity was their being united in a common theology and goal as a church.

He exhorted them to stand firm in *one* Spirit and strive *together* as *one* for the faith of the gospel. They were to be *like-minded*, they were to the *same* love, and they were to be *one* in spirit and of *one* mind in Christ. A commitment to unity on these things would help them to be able to resolve their differences from within, and to be able to withstand the cultural onslaught from without. That was the first part of Paul’s instructions to this divided church-unity.

Today we come to the second part his instructions and they have to do with humility, in both attitude and action.

### **Humble Attitude and Humble Actions**

In v. 3 of the text Paul tells the Philippians to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves.”

This is the attitude part. Paul is telling the church that they are to think of others as being better than themselves.

We are called by God to cultivate attitudes that are not self-centered, but other centered. We are to have attitudes that view ourselves as the greatest of sinners; to not think that we are more holy than others.

And when we seek to develop this attitude of humility we are to do it humbly. We are not to brag about our humility, but rather we are to cultivate it in quietness and meekness.

Having this *attitude* of humility creates the right kind of conditions to produce the *action* of humility.

A transformed attitude will produce transformed actions. Thus Paul tells the Philippians in v. 4 that they are to look not to their own self-interests, but to the interests of others.

This means they are to put the needs of others above their own. .

If Euodia and Syntyche (*the two women who were feuding in the church*) would do this then their rift would be healed and unity would be restored in the church.

If the church would do this in the midst of persecution then she would survive the onslaught of her enemies. Chaos happens when selfishness rules the day. Peace and tranquility prevail in times of stress when people humble themselves enough to meet the needs of others, as opposed to their own.

### **Jesus Christ, The Supreme Example of Humility**

After Paul gives his twofold exhortation to humbly think of others better than one's self and to place the needs of others above your own, he then points the church to the supreme example in all of this.

Remember last week how I said that when Paul told the church to imitate him in his actions what he was really doing was pointing people not to himself, but to Jesus?

Paul does that in a big time way in our text today.

The one who most fully captures this humble attitude of viewing others better than one's self and this humble action of putting other people's needs above his own, is Jesus Christ.

*(read Philippians 2:5-11 again)*

That is a most remarkable piece of scripture. Many scholars believe it is an early hymn of the Christian church that Paul uses to bolster his command to live lives of humble, selfless service to one another.

In this Christ hymn we have the very essence of the gospel given for the world, and this gospel is totally grounded in humility.

In it we are told that Jesus, "who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage," or to "be exploited."

The Lord Jesus Christ just because he was God, did not consider that to be a sufficient reason to boast that he was better than his Father.

When we talk about the doctrine of the Trinity we say that Jesus Christ is fully God and co-equal with the Father and that is true. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," yet our Lord also said that "the Father is greater than I." Greater not because God the Father was more God than God the Son, but greater because the Son exists in that perfect relationship of the Trinity to do the will of the Father, not the other way around. "Father if it is thy will let this cup pass from me, yet not what I will, but what you will."

In short, unlike us, Jesus would not let the fact that he was God go to his head. He did not try to turn the heavens upside down by usurping the will of the Father, but rather he *humbled* himself to do his Father's will. He did not use his divine status as something to be exploited.

But not only did Jesus (*in his attitude*) consider the Father to be greater than himself, he also considered us to be greater. Not greater in the sense that we are better than God; for that would be absurd because we are all sinners. But greater in the sense that our needs were more important to Jesus than his own needs.

The Bible says that "the Son of Man came to serve, not be served."

Have you ever given serious consideration to that thought?

Jesus is the eternal Son of God yet he came to serve you! It supposed to be the other way around; it ought to be the other way around. Indeed, each one of us is called to serve Christ, but we must always remember that he first came to serve us.

This attitude of humility that our Lord Jesus Christ possessed for the will of the Father and for the needs of each one of us is what motivated him to take humble action on our behalf.

First, the text tells us that “he made himself nothing,” or more literally he “emptied himself” by “taking the very nature of a servant,” (*slave*) and “being made in human likeness.”

That is to say that he abandoned his eternal unbroken relationship with the Father and the Spirit, all for the sake of coming down to us to mend the broken relationship between us and God.

So what we can say here is that Jesus experienced the greatest tearing apart the world has ever known all because his humble desire to do the will of the Father in reconciling us back to God.

Think about the farthest, darkest, and most remote place that you could go to be away from your loved ones and you will not even begin to scratch the surface of what Jesus experienced when he tore himself away from his loved ones (*the Father and the Spirit*) so that he could come down to us in this sin infested world and save us. There are no words that can describe the great *chasm* that exists between the eternal bliss that Jesus shared in heaven with the Father and the Spirit, and the life of poverty and suffering that he experienced on this earth.

Yet Jesus abandoned it all in order to become one of us. That is his first action and because of it we can know God and God can know us face-to-face.

But Christ humbles himself lower than that. He must humble himself lower in order to save us. Jesus goes to the lowest of lows.

Paul tells us that Jesus became “obedient to death,” but not just any kind of death, but “death on a cross!”

God, in Jesus Christ, humbled himself so low for our sake that he was willing to die the most despicable and humiliating death that a man could die—crucifixion.

Death by crucifixion was the lowest of lows and it was reserved for the worst of criminals. This form of execution was so bad that if a Roman citizen had to be executed he was spared the crucifixion in favor of a more humane death.

The crucifixion was so gruesome, shocking, and disturbing that cultured people would not utter the word in conversation. It was a concept that choked people up, made them gasp, and stopped them dead in their tracks. Yet our Lord was willing to go this far and to reach this low, to make payment for our sin.

## **Conclusion**

So Paul, in this Christ hymn, is telling the church that if they will cultivate the same attitude of humility that Jesus had for us they too will be motivated to do humble acts of salvation for one another. They will too will view others as better than themselves, and they too will humbly “crucify” their own wants and desires for sake of the other.

What Paul is doing in this text is he is calling the church to have the mind of Christ. Doing this will mend the rift between Euodia and Syntyche in the very same way that Jesus, through his humble incarnation and crucifixion, mended the rift between us and God.

Does not the scriptures tell us in the last part of the Christ hymn (v.9-11) that because Jesus humbled himself enough to come down to us in human flesh and die on the cross that God “exalted him to highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, and that at the name of Jesus every name will bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?”

The fruit of Christ’s humility toward us is reconciliation. Likewise the fruit of Christ-like humility toward one another will also be reconciliation. What Jesus did on the cross cuts both ways. His death enables us to be reconciled to God and it enables us to be reconciled to one another if we will seek to apply the mind of Christ in our lives.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.