

Study # 9

Cruciformity in Christ's Incarnation and Humility

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: . . . (NIV)
Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, . . . (KJV)

Like most translations of Philippians, these two do not convey the full sense of the imperative mood of the Greek verb *φρονεω* (*phroneo* #5426). This is not just an exhortation or ideal that we should allow to happen; it is a command to “Think this way—Jesus’ way!” or “Get your thinking changed to Jesus’ thinking!” One author paraphrases the verse this way: “See to it, every Christian, that the mind of Christ is in you.”¹

Note that the tense of this verb “refers to it as continuing or being repeated.”² Indeed, we will realize the need of the command to be obeyed continuously if we get a real revelation of what we are commanded to be changed into! We will all exclaim that we have a long way to go and we need to learn more and more every day of the rest of our lives what it means to obey this command!

This verb *φρονεω* means “to think, have a mindset . . . [this] involves the will, affections, and conscience.”³ Just as our basic mindset and attitudes govern all our actions, we can include in the meaning of this command all our motivations. Further, our mindset includes our whole concept of our identity—what we think of ourselves, who we are, and what are our goals and ideals for the person we hope to become.

Thus, we are commanded to have our whole thinking changed, including our motivations, sense of identity, and attitudes, to be like those

¹Stuart Briscoe, *Bound for Joy* (Ventura, CA, Regal Books, 1984) , 72.

²J. G. Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (New York: MacMillan, 1964), 180.

³Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1454.

of Jesus, whose “mind” is detailed briefly but poignantly in this glorious Christological hymn that Paul quotes:⁴

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped, but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and
became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)

Theologians debate the meaning of the phrase “made himself nothing”— His *kenosis* (“emptying”) — and necessarily go to great pains to argue that He did not give up His essential deity when He became man.⁵ I heartily agree that such theology is vitally important; however, it is equally important that we realize this “outstanding Christological passage . . . was actually written as an illustration of the attitude that ought to govern a person who professes to be a Christian.”⁶

In other chapters, I have proclaimed the Cross as the ultimate paradigm for our attitudes and humility; we can see, moreover, that the incarnation was also a manifestation of the same selflessness, humility and sacrifice Jesus showed through the Cross. Here is a quote from one commentary about how the paradigm of the Cross is thus exemplified in His incarnation:

He acted sacrificially by refusing to hold on to His rights, by exchanging His throne for a stable and His crown for a cross. And therein lies not only the basis of our redemption, but the principle of our behaviour. For it was sacrifice that brought atonement to our souls, and it is sacrifice in life-style that brings liberty to our lives.⁷

As we consider the incredible changes that Jesus went through to become man and to show us His love, we are moved to seek Him to help us to be willing to be similarly changed so that we can love others. When we consider the sacrifice He made

⁴Carson, Moo, Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 323-4.

⁵Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

⁶Briscoe, *Bound for Joy*, 59.

⁷Briscoe, *Bound for Joy*, 56.

to become like us, we respond by being willing to make any sacrifice necessary to love Him and others. When we consider His humility in becoming as a slave, we pray that we too can be more humble in our service.

In addition to what has been covered in preceding chapters regarding service, this passage prompts us to consider the following two prerequisites to becoming more cruciform in our service:

(1) A radical change in our motivations for service. Our service can be motivated by an attempt to establish our significance or to meet a need of love, acceptance, or value. Remember: “without love [as our motivation], we are nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Christ Himself and His love needs to become the only source and empowering of our motivations.

(2) A willingness to let go of everything, whether sinful attitudes, or selfish motivations, money, belongings, relationships, ministries, visions, etc. Consider the awesome willingness of Jesus to sacrifice everything in His incarnation.

Farther down in Chapter 2 of Philippians, we are told to “work out our own salvation” but are also reminded that we cannot obey the command in verse five by ourselves: “. . . for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”. This working out our own salvation involves, I believe, seeking the Lord to change us to His motivations and attitudes.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
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.

It is evident that a major reason that this glorification of Jesus is included here is to show that we, too, will have a reward for faithfully obeying the command in verse five.

If we endure [suffer], we shall also reign with him.” (2 Tim. 2:12a)

[We are] heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom. 8:17)

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Pet. 4:13)

In conclusion, there is another glorious effect and reward in this life for obeying the command in Philippians 2:5:

When this attitude is seen among a group of people, it is so unique, it is unbelievable It means a totally different attitude not only to the Lord but to each other.⁸

Lord Jesus, let Your humble mind be more and more in me;
Your glorious throne You left on high, a servant You chose to be.
Obedient even unto death—what shame You bore for me!
I worship as I gaze on Your humility.

Because You stooped so low and sought no earthly praise or fame,
On high has God exalted you; let every tongue proclaim
That Jesus You are Lord of all; be Lord of all in me,
And may my life be filled with Your humility.

-- Ron Wilson

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⁸Briscoe, *Bound for Joy*, 73.