

"JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS"

A Demonstration Of The Mind That Preserves Unity

(Philippians 2:5-8)

by Mark Copeland

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross signifies many things. For example, it proves the love God has for sinners, and the terrible cost of sin. From Paul's letter to the Philippians, we also learn that the death of Jesus serves to demonstrate the "mindset" so necessary to preserve the unity we have in Christ.

In the second chapter of Philippians, Paul calls upon his brethren to make his joy complete by being "like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." (Phil. 2:2) In describing the attitudes necessary to be "of one mind", Paul exhorts them to:

- * Do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit (3a)
- * Have lowliness of mind in which they

esteem others better than themselves (3b)

- * Look out for the interests of others, and

not only those of their own (4)

In verse 5, Paul continues to exhort them to have this "mind" (the attitudes of verses 3-4), by pointing out that this was also "the mind

of Christ." In the following verses (6-11), he elaborates on the "mind of Christ" (or the attitude of Christ) so crucial to preserving the unity that produces joy among brethren.

In a time when divisions within congregations occur much too often, we would do well to carefully consider what sort of "mind" is necessary to preserve that precious unity for which Jesus died. Notice, then, that the "mind of Christ"...

LACKED SELFISH AMBITION OR CONCEIT (6)

As evidence that Jesus lacked selfish ambition or conceit, Paul reveals that prior to His incarnation, Jesus was "in the form of God." According to Vincent's Word Studies, this means that Jesus "existed as essentially one with God." This corresponds to what we read in John 1:1, where it is stated, "...the Word (Jesus) was God." Paul also states that Jesus was "equal with God." This "equality" included sharing "glory" with the Father (cf. Jn 17:5), something the Father refused to share with any created being (cf. Is 42:8).

Yet Jesus did not consider such equality "robbery" (Lit., "a thing to be grasped"; that is, something to be laid hold of, and retained jealously). The "glory" of equality with God which Christ enjoyed from eternity was not something to which He felt like He HAD to cling. This "glory" He was willing to give up temporarily in coming to this earth to die for our sins.

DO WE HAVE "THE MIND OF CHRIST"? Do we reckon our "standing" before others (whatever that may be) something to be jealously held on to? Do we regard ourselves more important than others, and consider that distinction something to be preserved at all costs? Are we willing to push our opinions on others to the point of division, just because we are afraid to look weak? If so, then we lack the "mind of Christ" necessary to be "of one accord" with our brethren!

Not only was His coming to this earth a demonstration of His lack of selfish ambition and conceit, but the manner in which He came shows that the "mind of Christ" also...

POSSESSED LOWLINESS OF MIND (7)

Coming to this earth in any form would have been humbling enough for One possessing deity, but Jesus also "made Himself of no reputation" and took "the form of a servant". He had every right to come in pomp and royalty as a king or nobleman, but no, He came into this world, known as the son of a simple carpenter, raised in a town despised by

many of His own countrymen (cf. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" - Jn 1:46).

The lowliness of mind demonstrated by our Lord is seen further when Paul says that He came "in the likeness of men". Truly man as well as God, Jesus did not come as a humble servant in some superficial way. He experienced the same temptations and sufferings we all experience. This He was willing to do so He could serve as our "merciful and faithful High Priest" (He 2:17-18; 4:14-16).

DO WE POSSESS THE "MIND OF CHRIST"?

Are we humble enough to accept positions considered by many to be of less importance if we can still be of better service to Christ and His brethren? Are we willing to "take a back seat" or "play second string" if it means preserving the unity of a local congregation? The "mind that preserves unity" is one willing to imitate the example of Christ and not be concerned about developing a "big reputation".

The "lowliness of mind" possessed by our Lord is also made vivid as we read on in Philippians 2, and notice that the "mind of Christ" is one that...

LOOKS OUT FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS (8)

Paul also declares that Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Though in every way a man (while still fully deity, the Son of God), He obediently submitted to the will of His Father and endured that painful death of crucifixion.

Why did Jesus do this? He did it all for the sake of others! He became man, humbled himself as a man, was obedient, and then died on the cross . . . because it was in OUR own best interest! As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus suffered in order to bear OUR griefs, OUR sorrows; He died for OUR transgressions, and for OUR iniquities. It was for OUR peace He was chastized by God (Isaiah 53:4-6). Jesus was truly looking out, not for His own interests, but for the interests of others!

DO WE HAVE "THE MIND OF CHRIST"? We do, if we are looking out for the interests of others. We do, if we are willing to humble ourselves, even sacrifice ourselves if it be in the best interests of others. Appealing to the example of Jesus again, Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome:

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak,

and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself..." (Romans 15:1-3)

Brethren, I don't know about you, but I am growing weary of hearing of congregations having problems and many dividing as a result. It would be easier to understand if those at the root of the problems were babes in Christ, such as we read about in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). But too often the problems center around the preacher, who in many cases is simply unwilling to respect the wishes of their brethren who might desire a change in preachers. Rather than display the "mind of Christ", and work toward making the transition of preachers a smooth process that blesses the Lord's cause, some preachers are dividing congregations and setting back the Lord's church in a community for years! Is this what Jesus died for?

Clearly there is a need for the "mind of Christ", the kind of attitude of humility and service to others that preserves that precious unity we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. By reflecting upon such things as the death of our Lord and the "mind" that enabled Him to submit to it, we will more likely display that "mind" ourselves.

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