

Discover Hour
Philippians 2:5-11
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This section of the letter is directly tied to the first four verses of chapter 2 where Paul commands the believers in Philippi to be unified as a church, based on their common experience and standing in Christ. Here he turns to Christ as an illustration and example of what they must do in order for this to take place, which in a word, is to live with a selfless and sacrificial attitude rather than a selfish one. The passage is also interesting and highly important because of what it teaches about the incarnation and the person of Jesus. Thus, today we will discuss both the theological and practical implications of this section.

Theological Implications

Philippians 2:5-11 speaks to both the divinity and humanity of Jesus. The best way to understand his nature is one of the most complex aspects of Christianity. Orthodox Christians of the faiths many strands have held that Jesus is and was fully human and fully divine, while we know that others have considered him instead to have been an exemplary human, or a human being who only later became divine, or divine but not actually human. An important moment in the history of Christianity was the decades leading up to the Council of Nicea in 325 when this issue came to a point of crisis. Arius, a north African church leader, had taken the position that Jesus, though divine, was also a created being; created by the Father. The Nicene Creed was early Christianity's response to this position, emphasizing the full equality of the Son with the Father, thus affirming the full divinity of Jesus as well as the three persons of the Trinity.

Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Practical Implications

What does it mean for us to have the mind of Christ in this manner? One extreme example of its application would be the life of Francis of Assisi who took a vow of poverty and spent his life helping the sick and the poor.

In a famous step, Francis renounced his large family inheritance and lived a life of simplicity and poverty in imitation of his understanding of Christ's life. He begged for bread, kissed lepers, and responded in absolute obedience and simplicity to the call of God. In 1224, two years before his death, Francis reportedly was praying at his mountain retreat in Tuscany when he saw a mysterious vision of the crucified Christ and found himself scarred, like the Christ in his vision, with nail prints in both hands and feet and inflicted with a continuously bleeding wound in his side. His followers reported that Francis suffered with this condition until his death, and they understood this period as a prolonged identification with Christ crucified. For Francis and his followers, then, the imitation of Christ involved an attempt to reproduce as nearly as possible within their own context's Christ's life of wandering poverty and, at least, in the case of Francis, a near repetition of Christ's passion (in Thielman, *Philippians*, p. 123-124)

What do you make of Francis' decision and response to the person of Christ and to this passage in particular?

Thinking in terms of the unity of the church, can you think of practical ways that believers today can demonstrate this same "mind of Christ?"