

Joy and the Christian Mind

Philippians 2:1-8

December 15, 2024

We have officially entered into the holiday season, the Christmas season, and we are so eager to embrace the spirit of the season, which is a spirit of joy and gratitude in Christ our Savior, and to think about the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And we celebrate our faith in him that's given to us as a gift of his grace.

I have had the epistle of the Philippians in my mind and on my heart for some time, and as it points us to Christian joy by reflecting on the glory of God in Christ Jesus, so with you Grace Church, on my heart and with the joy of the incarnation of the Son of God on my mind, I'd like to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2, Philippians chapter 2.

The heart of Philippians 2 is really this Christian hymn called the *Carmen Christi*. *Carmen Christi* is Latin for, the Song of Christ or the Christ hymn. It's been identified by many as an early Christian hymn, probably sung in the congregations of the early church. It's fun to think about that and imagine their worship service with this kind of theology.

This hymn is profound, profound theology that instructed the church even through its singing, and that's what we still try to practice today. This is, in the "Carmen Christi," some of the highest Christology that you will find in all the Bible. It deals with some of the most profound mysteries of heaven and earth, and in particular the incarnation of the Son of God, which is what we celebrate at Christmas time.

When the hymn tells us not how the incarnation came about, that's really an incomprehensible mystery known to God and God alone, but it tells us what happened when God's Son took on human flesh. It shows us, really, what it took for the Son, being God, to become man.

Think about those two verbs, being and becoming, "being," being a continuous, unbroken state where there is no change. That is divinity. And then, becoming, indicating change, indicating mutability. That's really the state of what it is to be human. The Son of God being God, became the Son of man.

When citing this hymn, as he does in Philippians 2:6-11, Paul states the purpose for referring to the hymn and citing the hymn in verse 5. He's using the *Carmen Christi* to address what is really an ethical or a relational or a, a moral matter in the Philippian church.

And he commands the Philippians to have a Christian mindset, a Christian way of thinking, a Christian mentality. In verse 5 he says, "Have this way of thinking in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus." So it's about the mind. That's what Paul is after.

Some in the Philippian congregation, they were in danger of losing that mindset. They were caving in to worldliness, some amount of discouragement at some level, and not living as the



rejoicing-always kind of Christians that God had chosen them to be. And this is why the Philippian epistle is known as the, Epistle of Joy.

It's not because the Philippians were just so exemplary joyful. It's actually because they were in danger of losing their joy, of being discouraged and downhearted and weak in the faith and divided and disunified. And so that's why Paul commands their unity and commands their joy. And that's why it's now known as the, Joy Epistle.

Backing up a bit, just to give some background, the Philippian church was one that was especially beloved of the Apostle Paul. They had, and you know, you can look back to chapter 1, verse 7, they were faithful stalwarts and, and defenders of the Apostle Paul since even in his chains and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel.

They had been partakers of grace with him. They had partnered with him in the Gospel, as verse 4 says, from the very



first day of the inception of the church in the home of Lydia all the way until now.

But recently, which prompted the occasion for this letter, there'd been challenges in the church, opposition to the church, and that had distracted them, that had turned their eyes away from looking on Christ. And some even had succumbed to temptations to become fearful and anxious and somewhat discouraged and disheartened by what they had endured as a church.

Did the imprisonment of their founding Apostle mean a shift in God's favor for, for Paul and for them? Were they about to lose him forever to the machinations of an evil empire? Where, had Rome, Caesar, overcome God's Christ the Lord, the *kyrios*?

What about these other preachers that Paul references in Philippians 1:15 and, and also in verse 17, these preachers who were preaching maybe a modified or a softened version of Paul's Gospel, but they've been effective in drawing plenty of people to themselves. Did these guys represent, maybe, the new

generation, that maybe this is where we're supposed to head as as Christianity takes root, as it matures, as it's seasoned, as it moves forward?

By softening the offense of the cross, by downplaying demands of discipleship, giving an easier, more friendly message, these preachers were charting out a more popular, socially acceptable course.

It allowed one to attend a Christian church, but also, kind of to also stay connected in Philippian society, too, to keep one foot in one world and one foot in the other. And they preached a message that was not as heavy, but maybe it was more lighthearted and celebratory and joyful, far more fun, far more easy on the ears and easy on the life.

Paul had some strong words for some of these preachers. In chapter 3 he calls them "dogs," "evil workers." They were enemies of the cross because they preyed upon all those who were tempted to be embarrassed by the scandal of the cross. Paul said, "Their end is destruction; their God is their stomach."

They glory in their shame. Their thoughts and their minds are set on earthly things.”

Others, like maybe the ones referred to in chapter 1, verse 15, verse 17, they may have been preaching a passable Gospel, but they were driven by selfish ambition. They were envious of the Apostle Paul, and they took advantage of Paul's troubles as he's out of the picture, out of the loop, and they won some of the Philippians over while he was away, tied up in Rome.

All these voices had been whispering their way through the membership of the Philippian church, dividing some, discouraging some, distracting them from the truth of the Gospel and from living out the Gospel with humble boldness.

In one case, even, there were two women at odds with each other, in conflict, and that division had become so prominent that Paul had to call for an intervention in the letter, which is an intervention of that kind between two, let's just put it this way, warring women.

It's hard, it's messy, it's going to be difficult getting to the bottom of the offenses, calling for kindness toward one another, forgiveness, to let go of bitterness and resentment and hurt and anger. All this is going on in the church. It's affecting the joy of the church. And so when Paul hears about all this, there he is, he's imprisoned in Rome, he grabbed a pen and he started writing.

Look at Philippians 1. We're just going to get a running start into our text. Look at Philippians 1:27. Paul says this in a couple points, and here's the charge, here's the exhortation: "Only live your lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear about your circumstances, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, contending together for the faith of the Gospel, in no way alarmed by your opponents, which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that, too, from God."

Words of strength he writes, encouragement, filling their spine with steel, exhorting them and calling them back to their former faithfulness, to stay on that trajectory, that trajectory that made them such a beloved and unified and joyful church.

They were no longer to fall prey to their opponents, who had hoped to make merchandise of their people, stealing them away from the unity in the Gospel, stealing them away from joy of partnership with the Apostle Paul in the ministry of the gospel.

Instead, Paul is telling these Philippians to take hold of their thinking. Notice the emphasis, there, on the mind, because it's going to come up again. When truth sets the agenda, not error but truth, truth sets the agenda, not lies, unity and harmony in the Gospel will prevail, something that they had to protect and even contend for; or we might say they needed to fight for their unity and fight for their joy. They needed to be active opponents of anybody who tried to steal, divide them and steal their joy.



Faithful Gospel ministry will always bring opposition. And following along from that opposition, it'll be, there will be temptations to, to criticize and to blame and to complain and grumble, temptations that have to be resisted, sins that need to be raised and exposed and then mortified and repented of.

But listen, this is, as Christians, this is what we've signed up for, right? We have signed up for a Gospel that will bring opposition, and that opposition, then we'll reveal what's in our hearts, and that's not always pretty. And then we confess that and repent and mortify sin and repent and put off and put on.

That's what we signed up for when we professed faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus, didn't he, in Luke 9:23, say, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, follow me"? That is the call.

He went to the cross, quite literally. That's why this is a symbol, behind us, of our faith. It's an empty cross showing his victory over death in the grave. But his Gospel, his confession,

his profession, his preaching, his life, his exhortation, it got him killed. Should we expect any different? That's the call.

And if you look at, in Paul's words as we continue in the passage, there, verse 29, Paul says, "For," explanation, "for to you it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, having the same struggle which you saw in me and now hear to be in me."

That is to say, opposition is a part of the program. Enduring opposition, enduring this criticism, enduring these opponents, resisting and standing firm, that's all baked into the cake, here.

Now, having laid down the exhortation and snapping them back to attention, he calls them to turn their eyes away from their opponents and away from contention and striving and attempts to deceive and divide and dishearten. He calls them to look instead more carefully at Christ, look more carefully at their salvation, and find the resulting joy.

And this is why he commands them in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always," that is, even when there's opposition, even when you're dealing with difficulty, even when you're dealing with relational conflict in the church, always rejoice in the Lord. "And again, I will say rejoice."

As I said, it's not because they were already joyful, but it's because they had lost their joy, were in danger of losing it. They'd lost sight of joy, and they had to fight to win it back.

It's what Paul reminds them of, starting in verse 1 of the second chapter, first laying out, there, in Philippians 2:1 and following. He lays out in Philippians 2:1 some reasons for this strong exhortation that he gives in Philippians 1:27-28. And then Paul commands them to fulfill his joy. In the process of doing that, they're going to find their own joy restored as well.

Beloved, I know that some of you, and me included, we've experienced some hurtful, painful things lately in the last number of months, and that some of what the Philippian situation is about rings way too familiar, doesn't it? In view of what we've been through together, Paul's remedy of joy, restoration, is so timely and a much-needed balm to our souls.

And for all of us, especially as we enter into the Christmas season, not all that goes on during the holidays is jolly and bright for everybody. Some anticipate Christmas with a measure of apprehension, even some trepidation, knowing that they'll face difficult relatives, relational tension, unresolved issues.

For others of you, Christmas is a reminder that you're alone, that a loved one is no longer at the table, or that your table that was once full of joyful company is now empty or sparse. The conversation, the laughter, have gone silent. Christmas time can be, for some, a dreaded time.



For others, it's dressed up with a cultural sentimentality: angels and Santas and reindeer and Rudolph and Frosty. All this cultural dressing up is a distraction, I think. But setting sentimentality aside for a moment, we can enjoy, I think, a little seasonal sentimentality in due course and, and in some measure. It's hard for me to grant that, but a little bit.

But for now, in this hour, let's give our attention to the remedy for discouragement and loneliness and sadness. Let's anchor our joy where it truly belongs and from which it will never be uprooted and never be shaken.

Where is our joy to be found? It's found in the glory of God in Jesus Christ. And we are going to be in Philippians 2:1-11 for this Sunday and next, and we're going to focus all attention next Sunday on Christ's incarnation and the Carmen Christi, on the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ.

But for this morning, we have two points which will take us from verse 1 through verse 8. So let me give you a first point

for the sermon this morning. First, number one, how to fulfill Christian joy. How to fulfill Christian joy.

Most English translations break the first four verses, that's where this point is found, in the first four verses; and most English translations break these verses up a little bit to make them a little bit more readable for the English reader.

But in the original text, the verse, first four verses really constitute a single sentence. The translation from which I'm going to read, the *Legacy Standard Bible*, translates it that way as one continuous sentence. It's a conditional sentence, which you may remember from middle school English, or you may not, so I'll remind you.

A conditional sentence is an, if-then, sentence. It's, in this case, the if, is in verse 1. And we actually see in verse 1 that there are four, ifs, there. So a lot of ifs, a lot of conditions. If those conditions are met, then follows verses 2-4. So that's the condition, the if, in verse 1 or the ifs, in verse 1, and then the, thens, the conditions fulfilled in verses

2-4. So if the conditions are met, verse 1, which for Christians, for all Christians, they are, then verses 2-4 follow as a matter of our obedience.

Take a look at the text. "Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, fulfill my joy, that you think the same way by maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, thinking on one purpose, doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

We're going to divide these verses according to the conditions, the protasis and the apdosis. So we got the first four verses, we're going to divide them into, the if statements, in verse 1, conditions that are true of all Christians.

So if you are a Christian, these are realities that you know. I'm only telling you, and Paul's only writing here, what

is the common experience for every single Christian. So if you're here, you're a Christian, your heart is going to warm to this. It's going to rejoice in this.

I want you to relish in the truths of verse 1. This is true of all Christians. These are realities that you know. This is, these are truths you share in, that you've become familiar with, accustomed to, and they become the basis and the ground of Paul's exhortation.

Look at the first one in verse 1. First, if you're a Christian, you have experienced some measure of encouragement in Christ, have you not? Probably a better sense, here, for the word *paraklesis*, it's from the verb *parakaleo*, which usually means, to exhort or to encourage, but here, it's probably a better sense, it's consolation.

Consolation is more like, more like comfort or a sense of relief. And specifically, here, he is referring to the comfort of salvation, the forgiveness of your sins, and the assurance of God's full pardon, never to be revoked. Are you consoled by

that? Is your soul ministered to by that, the fact that you are not guilty? "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

This is the confidence of being joined to Christ, sharing in his perfect righteousness, such that you know, that you know, that you know that you have escaped God's just eternal wrath for your sins, and you are so relieved. You know that you have been reconciled to God, that you belonged to him forever, and by grace through faith, you rejoice and you keep on rejoicing. This is good news.

And if you have lost sight of that, if that's dimmed at all in your mind, Christian, use these next few weeks to remind yourself of this. This is true. This is true for you, that you've been, received consolation, comfort, relief from Christ for a guilty conscience before God.

Second, if you're a Christian, knowing the consolation of Christ, you've also known the consolation or the comfort of love, which is the love of God in Christ.

I mean, why should we, when you think about this, why should we, miserable fallen creatures that we are, defiled by our sins, dirty before God, not just nobody's perfect, but no, we are wicked to the core, why should we have any share in Christ, in his consolation?

Is there any merit in us that makes us acceptable before God, to God? No. Isaiah said, Isaiah 64:6, all, even all your righteousness, even anything that you think accrues to your benefit before God to gain or maintain his favor, it's considered as filthy rags to him. Don't, don't offer up those stinky things to me, God says.

So why should we have any share in Christ, any consolation? Because God elected, chose to set his eternal love on us. Ephesians 1:4: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we'd be holy and blameless before him in love."

Ephesians 2:4: "God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were," what, lovable, even when we're really attractive to him, even when we were really doing a good job and he just, we just need a little boost, a little help forward? No.

Even when we were what? Dead in transgressions, defiled in our sins, dirty and stained and polluted before him, God, rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, he saved us.

Third truth that you share in if you're a Christian: If you're a Christian knowing the consolation of Christ, being comforted by the love of God the Father in Jesus Christ, then you've also known the fellowship of the Spirit. In fact, you only know those things or receive that consolation in comfort because the Spirit has made you a partaker of God in Christ.

So that is, being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, born again to new life, the Spirit has baptized you into Christ. He's sealed you and sanctified you for God. He's adopted you as

children of God the Father. And so that's what Paul's saying, here. You participate in the Spirit. You're partakers of his ministry now: illumination, intercession, sanctification, abiding in Christ. This is all the Spirit's doing in you. The Spirit, the Spirit's fruit grows in your life.

You say, Well, you know, I'm really not that patient of a person. Oh, guess what? That's a fruit of the Spirit, patience. You say, You know, I just don't, I'm really selfish, and I kind of just like, me time, and I have a hard time loving others.

Well, guess what, it's not in you. It's the fruit of the Spirit. And if he's in you, you will grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Anybody who doesn't have those qualities is not fellowshiping in the Spirit.

Just reflecting on these first three, if you're a Christian, you know and have experienced Christ's consolation, the Father's love, the Spirit's fellowship. In other words, you have become partakers in the divine nature. Do you see the

Trinitarian pattern there? This is the reality of Trinitarian fellowship in communion with Father, Son, and Spirit.

This is true of you as a Christian. This is why we're baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, because this is our immersion into God, to know him, to commune with him, to be identified in Christ, with him.

And then we notice the result of this trinitarian work in loving and saving you a fourth reality in verse 1: that you've come to know that if you're a Christian, then you know something of God's affection and God's compassion, don't you? Translated more fully, those two terms, loving affection, tender compassion.

Christian, you need to reflect on this. You are dearly loved. You are objects of God's saving mercies, Romans 12:1, saving mercies that are expounded in eleven chapters of doctrinal content in Romans 1 through 11, same as Paul's expression of praise in 2 Corinthians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Who is this God and

Father? He is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, and he comforts us in all our affliction."

If he did the greater work, saving us from eternal Hell, condemning us rightly because of our own sin, will he not do the lesser work of comforting us in every single affliction we go through as well? Yes, he will. He's near to the broken-hearted. He's near to the suffering.

God, God does not change. He doesn't have passions like we do. He doesn't react. But these words of loving affection and tender compassion have this kind of human element. They're anthropomorphizing God, here, and speaking of him as, the one word is *splagchnon*. It has to do with the, the innards.

You know how when you, when you feel something, and there's been some kind of a relational tension, and you just can't get that nagging sense of something's wrong, can't get it out of your guts? That's this, this idea, here.

You know, on the other side, the positive side, how when you just have such a, a degree of love and affection and warmth in your heart for others, for a spouse, for a child, for a baby, for a, a grandparent, you know that feeling? It's applied, here, to God.

He has loving affection for you, Christian. Oh, you are, you are so blessed and privileged. He loves you. He has compassion for you. He is with you and sees you and walks with you through every struggle and trial, every health issue, every financial issue, every relational problem, everything you go through, he's with you. You've been a partaker of this because God cares for you.

So if these things are true for you, and in true Christians they truly are, the condition's fulfilled, condition's fulfilled. You may now move ahead to verse 2 and this command. Paul says, "Fulfill my joy." Literally, Hey, it's your job to fill up my joy, and do it completely to the top. I want a full measure of joy. "Cause my joy," says Paul, "to abound to the utter maximum."

So remarkable, isn't it? Paul is binding the Christian conscience, here, as their Apostle, making of the responsibility of the Philippian church to fulfill his joy. You see that?

You say, How self-centered of him! He's thinking about his own joy, his own personal happiness. Is that true? That's partly true. It's written there. Paul intends to rejoice. He wants his joy in them to be filled up to full measure.

I can tell you, as one of the elders here, we want that with you. We want you to fulfill our joy in full measure, too. We're just, we're just trying to be biblical, here, following them, the Apostle Paul.

But listen, honesty compels us, here, to recognize and acknowledge the rest of the truth of that. How is this true? How is this just not self-centeredness on his part? Because it's not. Because what fulfilling Paul's joy means for the Philippian

church is going to result in their joy, too. He's commanding what accrues to their good, what accrues to their joy.

So it turns out that how to fulfill the Apostles' joy, that's how to fulfill Christian joy as well. Has to do with our mentality again, our thinking, our mindset. Again, verse 2, look at it: "Fulfill my joy," namely, that you think the same way, the verb *phroneo*, to think, referring to a mindset.

Another way to translate this: "Complete my joy and be of the same mind." Is that to say we're all supposed to download the same program in our head, and we're all kind of little robots, kind of machines all functioning in lockstep like robots, big robots, cyborg army of Christians in a church?

No, that's not what he's saying. We each have our individual differences and distinctions and gifts and personalities, and God made that diversity, but he also made it to dwell in unity and in harmony in the local church.

And that's why the church is such a marvel and a testament to God's saving work, his power to transform, to bring such disparate people together and join them together in one body under Christ by the Spirit, serving one another and loving one another and building one another up.

We're to be of the same mind. How do we do that? Several participles unpack the means, here. First, heart motivation. If you want to write these down, first, heart motivation. Maintain the same love or literally the verb *echo*, having the same love, *agape*.

Agape is a love that comes from God, that is defined by God. We don't have the right to define terms and make them our own and just kind of change the meaning. No, we can't take a worldly sense of love that I have, and I've always grown up with it, that I've always known and always felt, and say that this is the love I have.

No, it's defined by God; it comes from Scripture. It's clear from Scripture what this love is that comes from God. It's

defined by him. It's a fruit of the Spirit, as we've said, and it has been exemplified in Jesus Christ, as we're going to see.

Second, how do we do this? Another participle, united devotion, united devotion. "Being united in spirit" is the term, here, and that's actually one word in the Greek: *sympsychos*, *sympsychos*, literally fellow-souled, full, total agreement of soul, full, total agreement in thought and attitude that creates a deep union with one another, a loving harmony with each other.

Third, how do we be of the same mind? It's, thirdly, in united intention. First, a heart motivation, united in devotion, and then united intention. Thinking on one purpose is the language there, thinking on one purpose. Again, notice the word, the emphasis on the thought life. And he uses the cardinal number one to say there's, it's an integer. It can't be divided. Paul strongly emphasizes unity, here.

So how to fulfill Christian joy? How do we be of the same mind? By being of the same heart motivation, which is love;



being of the united in devotion, that is united in spirit; being united in our intention, thinking on one purpose.

Fourth, in verse 3, we see a humble disposition. We're to have a humble disposition. If we are humble toward one another, you know what's going to happen? Unity, harmony, joy. "Doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another more important than yourselves." "Doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory."

The word, doing, in the LSB, which I just read to you, that's added for clarity. It's actually not in the original. In fact, there is no verb here, and so that's why the translators insert inserted the word, doing, to help us to understand there's a verbal idea here.

But we need to supply that from the context, and I think the closest verbal reference is the verb *phroneo* from verse 2: to think. It goes deeper than just our doing, our behavior, our action. It goes to the heart level of our thinking, what our minds are occupied with, the mindset that we have.

And we find out, here, that humility is very negatively disposed towards selfish ambition, selfish interest, selfishness. Humility fights that impulse and does not feed it. A negative disposition also toward vain glory. It's *kenodoxia*, which is *kenos*, the word, empty or vain, and then *doxa*, which is the word glory. So empty glory, vain glory. No reason at all for boasting, no reason whatsoever for taking pride in oneself and pride in one's thoughts or one's actions or words or anything.

Make a note of *kenos*, by the way, as a point of contrast with Christ, who has every reason for boasting. But he did not. He chose instead to empty himself. And that's from the related verb to *kenos*, which means, empty, the related verb *kenoo*, which means to empty.

Instead of thinking selfishly, instead of entertaining vain, false notions and empty boasts in our hearts, elevating ourselves, our own opinions, being in love with our own voice, we're to foster a positive disposition. Look at it there: "with

humility of mind, regarding one another as more important than yourselves."

And once again, we see at the heart of the compound word translated humility, there's a little word *phren*, *phren*. If you want to write it down in your notes. It's P-H-R-E-N, *phren*, from which we get phrenology, frenetic, frenzy. *Phren* means, mind.

So again, what is this, a fourth time in the text, short few verses here, Paul wants to repeat and reiterate this emphasis on the mind, on thinking, on a mindset, a mentality. As Christians, we think differently, and we're to continue thinking differently.

In fact, we're to think so differently that we emerge from the world to become very clear that we are in contrast to the world, which means the world's not going to like us all the time.

It's going to get their attention and eventually could eventuate in our, well, frankly, martyrdom. But at the very least, being ostracized, marginalized, spoken about, criticized, called legalistic, called unfriendly, mischaracterized completely because all of our definitions come from Scripture.

All that comes from an emphasis on thinking. How does a humble person think? Doesn't think primarily or even mostly about himself, doesn't think about his desires; doesn't think about, she doesn't think about herself, her preferences, her needs being met. Humble Christians are pretty self-effacing.

What they look out for, instead, humble Christians look out for, end of verse 3, not merely their own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. In fact, you know why humble Christians take care of themselves, keep a good schedule, try to keep going, good diet, exercise and all that kind of thing?

It's not for the, for serving the body beautiful and elevating themselves. It's so that their temple is useful to

other people, so that they can keep up their responsibilities and earn a good living, and take care of their families, and have extra so they can give to others and be generous and be kind. Has nothing to do with self-vain glory. Doesn't have to do with self-promotion. It has to do with other people.

Now, I hope you're seeing this, and you're anticipating what's ahead because Paul is all the, all the while, here, very skillfully driving us to Jesus Christ to see how he thinks. And we're going to get there.

But pause for just a moment. Consider how a Christian who thinks like this, who makes it his aim to fulfill the joy of others, ends up living a joyful life. Can you see that?

If our primary aim is to be obedient to Scripture, then this, this right here, what Paul is saying, is to register in our minds, in our hearts as a summary call to deny ourselves and to take up our cross daily and to follow Christ because he is the example. He's the one who did this. This is nothing more, nothing less than the Christian life.

So driven by the same heart motivation, united in devotion, united with one intention, and thinking from a humble disposition, counting others as more important than ourselves, do you see how this produces an abundance of joy and unity and harmony, sweetness in the fellowship? Because no one's asserting his own ambition. Everyone's looking out for everybody else. And you think, Well, how am I going to be served? Well, other people are going to take care of that.

So to fulfill Christian joy, it's all about our thinking. It's all about a Christian mindset, called Christian because that's a descriptor that points back to Christ. They were first called Christians at Antioch, right, that church in Antioch.

What does Christian mean? Little Christ. And back then it was a pejorative term. It was kind of an insult. We take it as and wear that badge with pride, not pride in ourselves, pride in our Savior. We boast in him.

So to have this Christian mindset, we have the record of one who lived that way perfectly, don't we? The testimony of Scripture in the life of Jesus Christ. It's our joy and pleasure to study that week after week going through the Gospel of Luke.

Every faithful church that does expositional preaching and focuses on Scripture and makes, let's, let God's, God's argument be the argument in the church, every faithful church that does that is focusing ultimately on Jesus Christ. He's the point.

So a second point for our outline this morning: how to think Christian thoughts. How to think Christian thoughts. In verse 5, as Paul sets up the Carmen Christi, the hymn, putting all attention on Christ in his incarnation glory, he makes a call back to verse 2.

And in the call back to verse 2, the verb that he calls back to, you guessed it, it's *phroneo*. It's to think. So verse 2 is "fulfill my joy," namely, that you think the same way; and then verse 5, instead of, have this attitude, which is good, but more to the point is think this way. Thinking this way, having



the same mentality as Christ, is what we pursue in company with other Christians.

This is why Paul says, "Have this mind among yourselves," as the ESV puts it, emphasizing a corporate aspect of our thinking. We're to be thinking like this together in community with one another in the local church. Even as we emphasize the corporate aspect, it should be think this way in yourselves.

Again, it's a focus on the mind and the mindset, the thought life. I hope you're seeing this, that the whole section is about taking charge of our thoughts. It's about reigning in the mind and ruling over and harnessing and controlling what we think.

As true Christians, we are not subject to our feelings. We're not driven by our emotions. We're not enslaved by our feelings. We don't drift and stray with our thoughts, our imaginations, our impulses by God's grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit. By the way, one of the fruits of the Holy

Spirit is what? Self-control. We have the ability to command ourselves what not to think and what to think.

This is the principle really at the heart of Philippians 4:8, which I believe many of you have memorized, and it is a powerful help for sanctification in the mind. Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is dignified, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if anything worthy of praise, consider, think on these things."

The life of the Christian is the life of the mind because everything in the mind flows out through the heart, the emotions, the affections, the will. It drives the entire life. If you're living a mediocre Christian life, it's because you have a mediocre Christian mind. I'm not saying that as an insult; I'm just calling the shot.

One example that Paul wants to call to our attention, here, the supreme example, the quintessence of a pious life who manifests the fertile thinking of a holy mind, is what? "Have

this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."

That is to say, think like him.

Look at verse 6, Philippians 2. Think like him, "who, although existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men.

"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So good.

Most biblical scholars identify the hymnic poetic style, the rhythmic cadence when this is read aloud in the Greek. But even in the English we can hear it, can't we? It just, it just rings like a like a poem, like a hymn.

The arrangement of the stanzas into couplets, poetic meter, features unique to songs and hymns. There's quite a bit of ink spilled on the source of the song, its authorship, other details that don't concern us at this moment.

What is important for us now is how Paul uses this hymn to make his point, to show us as an example the kind of thinking that we need to fulfill Christian joy, to live our lives, Philippians 1:27, to "live our lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel."

The hymn, here, takes us from Christ's preincarnate glory to the incarnation of his first advent, to his crucifixion as the ultimate humiliation of his life, and then to his ascension and exaltation, to be acknowledged by all rational creatures, no matter where they are, no matter what they are, angelic or human, at the final consummation in the fullness of his glory.

Now that's a mouthful. I don't expect you to write all that down. But breaking it down to its simplest, simplest forms, here, we see two things, here. We see the humiliation of Christ in verses 6-8, and then we see the exaltation of Christ in verses 9-11.

So really it breaks down into two simple points, two simple divisions: humiliation and exaltation. And for now, for today, I want us to focus in on just one concept, just one main idea in the humiliation of Christ, the first part, because this is what provides us with the illustration that we need to help us understand how to think Christian thoughts and thus how to fulfill Christian joy.

And I'll just put your mind at ease that what we don't cover today, we'll tackle next Sunday. So don't you worry. I got you, I'll help you. And it's, I'm telling you, it's, this is so good. I mean, it is so good. It is like, it's humbling because I can't possibly get to it all. I can't, I can't really even comprehend it all.

But what we're going to do next Sunday is so good. It's so joyful. This is just like a, this is like a hors d'oeuvres right here. This is hors d'oeuvres. The filet mignon's coming next week, okay?

What we need to see, the point, the main point in the humiliation of Christ, it's not about what sinful men did to him, to degrade him, to shame him, to treat him spitefully, treat him with such deadly malice, scandalous slander. That's what happened, yes.

But what we need to see in Christ's humiliation is the voluntary humility of the Son of God because this gets to the heart of his thinking, his voluntary humility. Remember, I told you earlier to make a note of that word in verse 3, translated as conceit or empty conceit or vain glory. It's *kenos* and *doxa*, *kenadoxia*.

There were sinful people in the Philippian church, other churches as well, where Paul served as an Apostle. But there were sinful people in the Philippian church who had infiltrated

into the congregation. They came in, influenced others, polluted the, the, the unity and the harmony.

They caused division because of their thinking and the way they spoke and acted, complained, criticized. These were people who were full of selfish ambition in this kind of vain glory, this empty conceit. Thinking they were something, they were really nothing of themselves. They had nothing of themselves, and they could therefore boast in nothing, and yet they boasted anyway. They asserted themselves anyway. They thought highly of themselves anyway. Their narrative is all that mattered to them.

Paul asked the Corinthians, which is kind of parallel to this, "What do you have that you didn't receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?" He asked those questions. What's the answer? Pride. Pride, that original sin of all original sins.

So Paul pointed the Philippians to Christ, and his claim to glory was not in vain. His claim to glory was not from empty

conceit, but was the most legitimate, the most fitting, the most perfectly appropriate claim of all.

He's the only being in the entire universe for whom boasting is appropriate because he can back it up. He's got the creds, he's got the being, he's got the essence, he's got the power, he's got the glory.

His being, the verb *hyparchon*, *hyparcho* is the verb, the participle here is *hyparchon*, but it's, it's, it's a present tense, active voice participle, which means this "being" for Jesus Christ is a continuous, unbroken state of being. His being was, is, and is to continue to be and will forever be in the form in the *morphe* of God. Christ is God, full stop. He does not change. He's not mutable, he's impassable.

This is what's so astounding though, and sets up the point that Paul wants us to see, that although being in the form of God, it says "he did not regard equality with God," which, which he possesses, as an undivided, divine, continuing essence, "and

yet he didn't regard his equality with God a thing to be grasped."

The verb there is, to be clutched, to be held on to, to be clung to with all of his might, like some people hold on to their, their opinions.

Although being God and possessing an equality with God, verse 7 says "he emptied himself." What is that but another way of saying he was denying himself and taking the form of a slave, a slave "who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"?

We saw this a few weeks ago, didn't we, looking at the upper room in Luke 22. We were kind of looking at other texts in the Gospels as well, where, where in John 13 Jesus arose from the Passover meal, in John 13:4, and "he laid aside his garments," it says there.

It's a most fitting picture, don't you think, of what he did in the incarnation? What'd he do? The Son of God laid aside his garments, his pre-incarnate glory, garments of glory that remained his, which he never forsook.

But then he took a towel, and he girded himself about as a slave, and he performed the duties of a slave by washing his disciples' dirty feet. It's the very picture of his incarnation, isn't it?

And thus he loved them by emptying himself. Thus he loved them by denying himself. Jesus loved them to the end, that is, to the uttermost, and as it says in verse 8, "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

According to some commentators, the humility that Paul calls for, the humility he esteems in Christ, the humility which he calls us to esteem as well, this humility was repugnant to the social scene in Philippi.

Roman culture was prevalent in Philippi, where, as were Roman values because it was a Roman colony, and Roman citizenship was highly prized, and so careful attention was paid to social rank, signs of status, signs of wealth, signs of success.

Not very different from our culture, is it? Slaves not regarded, not esteemed, not valued. Slaves were nothing more than living tools to be used up and discarded when they're done.

And worse, what really irritated and offended Philippian sensibilities was the punishment, this punishment of crucifixion, all this focus in the religion on, of, of death, on a cross, which is abhorrent.

They found this, in Roman culture and Greek culture and Philippian culture, they found this message completely appalling. Crucifixion is fitting only for the worst of the worst. It's never to be spoken of in polite company. It's bad

manners. This is what brought Paul's Gospel and all true preaching and this church's witness into disrepute in the culture.

And there was a more popular form of preaching that was arising, and it was doing ministry by, by softening the sharper edges of the cross, and making the Gospel message more palatable, and making Christians seem more agreeable and more cultured and refined. And thus they were valued and esteemed in society. They got ahead. They made the right connections.

The cross of Christ, though, as Paul shows here, was the aim. It was the one purpose. It was the goal of his first advent. That babe in a manger on that most holy night, that babe came to die for our sins, and as he grew from a baby to childhood to young adult into manhood, he never forgot that. He always maintained a mindset of humility.

Now is it abundantly clear for us? Did Christ operate ever and always with a right heart motivation, verse 2? Did he maintain the same love, the love that compels him and compels

all of his action in his speaking and his ministry, a love that comes from God, which is the fruit of the Spirit as defined by God, exemplified in him? Yes, Christ is the love of God incarnate.

Is Christ united in devotion, *sympsychos* with his people, with us, fellow-souled with us? Does he bring us into full and total agreement of soul with him in thought and attitude, in union, perfect harmony with one another? That's what he intends to do.

Does Christ drive with one aim in his thinking, which is united, which is one, that integer, one, thinking on one purpose, doing the Father's will and calling us all to do the same? Is the one goal, the one purpose of Christ, to please the Father, do his will in order to glorify him through his humiliation and his exaltation? Yes.

Does Christ display the humble disposition we saw in verse 3, doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory? But did

he, with humility of mind regard others as more important than himself? You bet he did.

Paul told the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 8:9, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, though being rich," again, another verb of being, present tense participle there, continuous, unbroken state of being, "though he being rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich."

When Jesus issued the call to discipleship in Luke 9:23, he was not leading anyone anywhere that he himself was unwilling to go. He wasn't calling anybody to do anything that he himself was unwilling to do.

In fact, he'd already done it. He said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." And he said that from his own personal experience.

According to Paul, as shown here in the *Carmen Christi*, that's precisely what he did. He denied, or in Paul's language, he "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave," taking his own cross and dying on it for sinners like you and sinners like me.

He did this, the writer to the Hebrews tells us, "for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." And therefore, as Paul says here, "God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Beloved, these are the truths that occupy the mind of a Christian. These are the truths that, when we occupy our minds with them, they promote Christian joy, they sanctify us, leading us to great rejoicing and gratitude, especially in this season.

We're celebrating, are we not? So go put up your Santa Claus and you're blowing up frosty snowmans in your yard.



Whatever you want to do, don't forget this. Do not forget this. Make this the subject of your conversation this Christmas evening, will you? Let's do that. Let's, let's pray and ask the Lord's help in that.

Our Father, we're so grateful for the great wisdom that you have given to the Apostle Paul, and we thank you for the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, who allowed these words to be written for our joy.

We pray that you would help us, weak as we are, still struggling, as we do every single day with a sin nature, prone to dullness of mind and distraction, we pray that you would help us to overcome that and to fight against it, and to give ourselves wholly and fully to thinking Christian thoughts.

That from the heart, from the inside out, you would renew our minds and sanctify us through and through, so that we would work out our salvation, that is, to take from what's inside and work it out to the outside so that our lives are completely transformed, and that we would be your witnesses here in our own



Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth.

We pray this same prayer, not only for ourselves individually, but as our church corporately. But we also pray for every faithful church on this planet in our time, that you would cause us all to look to Christ, not to be distracted, never to be disheartened or discouraged because we have victory in him. Let that be our meditation this Christmas season, we pray. Amen.