

Models of the Mind of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Our regular diet as a church family is that we take books of the Bible and we work through them, passage by passage, chapter by chapter. And by doing that, we're avoiding kind of agenda preaching and me just coming telling you what the bees are in my bonnet.

But rather, we're letting God set the agenda and we're listening to him as he, step by step, gives us his counsel about who he is and about life in his world today.

So if you could keep your Bibles open at Philippians chapter 2, page 1179, that would be a great help to me so that we can see if everything that I'm seeing is coming from the word of God itself.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful to follow along as we look at this together. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you that you've not left us in the dark about who you are, that in Jesus we see clearly who you are, and thanks to his rescue mission, we see your love for us even as he reveals you to us.

[1 : 0 7] Father, we pray that you give us heads to understand your word this evening and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, I wonder what your picture is in your life of the Christian life and of being church, what your primary picture would be. Even for those of us who perhaps would say, well, we're convinced that the Bible is our authority.

We're evangelicals, that kind of language of looking to the Bible as our authority and how God speaks. Often our ideas about church come from our own experience, what we've experienced of church.

And they might come from tradition, traditions of how churches do things and how that's developed over many generations, maybe over centuries. So when we think of church, we might think of old, cold buildings.

We might think of services that maybe we found long and dull. Maybe we think of music led by an organ. We've got an organ up there. We don't use it, but there is one there. Maybe we think of a small number of elderly people gathering together in the cold.

[2 : 1 5] Or we might think of people dressed up. We might think of people in robes, the priest in his robes, the monks, the nuns, that kind of stuff. Or we might have a completely different view of church that our experience of church might have been more like a big stage performance, the Hillsong type approach or Soul Survivor, that kind of coming together with a big crowd and having a great experience of singing, almost like a rock concert.

What images do the words Christian and church conjure up in our minds? Well, whether it's experience that informs that or it's tradition, one of the things that I think is really exciting about looking at Philippians together is that the Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter, really confronts and challenges and seeks to reform our understandings of what church is and should be.

What does it really mean to be part of the church today? Paul is writing this letter, Philippians, from prison, probably in Rome, and he's writing to a church that he started in Philippi, which was a Roman colony in what's now kind of northern Greece, at the time was in this region Macedonia.

And so he's writing this letter to a church that he founded, and the real heart of the whole letter comes in a headline that he made in verse 27 of chapter 1.

If you just have a look down, chapter 1 verses 27 to 30 are the kind of headline for the main body of the letter. And he says this in verse 27, whatever happens, that is whether he can come and see them or whether he's executed in prison, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[3 : 58] So we become a Christian when we believe the gospel, we're saved by the gospel. Now he's saying live in a way that fits with that gospel, that matches the gospel.

And then he spells out what that would look like in a church. So he says that he wants to know, they are striving together, verse 27, striving together for the advance of the gospel.

Stand firm in the one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. So I don't speak German, but I've noticed this thing about, and some of you will speak German, I've noticed this thing about the German language, which is that sometimes they do this great thing where they just combine words together to make a new word.

Very clever idea, simple but helpful. And in football, we've got this at the moment, if you like football, because Jurgen Klopp, the German manager, is over in England doing tremendous things.

And he has this, so everyone's talking about geggenpressing, not just pressing, but geggenpressing, which is a Jurgen Klopp word for this idea of pressing high up the pitch. He's just joined two words together.

[5 : 03] Now, Paul here, we could combine two words together from chapter 1, verse 27, and talk about together striving, as though that's a new verb for the church today.

We are together strivers, and together we do together striving. And the gospel is under pressure in any generation. It's under pressure in our world today.

It's under pressure in Philippi, because the Roman authorities are turning up the heat on the church in Philippi, just as they have been persecuting Paul and put him in prison. So to do this together striving for the gospel, when the heat is being turned up, you basically need to do two things.

You need to be united together as Christians, and you need to stand firm in what you believe. So here's our picture of church. It's not kind of drinking weak tea in the candlelit room, and it's not stern legalism and self-righteous judgmentalism.

No, the picture of church that emerges from Philippians is the interlocking shield wall. If you've seen the movie Gladiator, you might be familiar with that picture, or you might just remember it from school when you did about the Romans, and they had their kind of tortoise-like interlocking shield wall to move forwards.

[6 : 18] But in Gladiator, there's this great picture of that. Maximus, the hero of the movie, he's been the commander of the emperor's army through a set of unfortunate circumstances. He ends up a slave, and he's been made into a gladiator, and the emperor wants him dead.

So he puts him out into the arena in Rome, in the Colosseum, and he puts him there with some other gladiators who are isolated, and these chariots are going to emerge through the gate to take down these, to pick off these individual gladiators, because they want him dead.

They want Maximus dead. And so Maximus draws together the other gladiators. It's really epic, right? He draws them together, and he says, whatever comes out of those gates, if we stay together, we'll survive.

And so he gets them to crouch side by side together, and they lock their shields. And the chariots come out, the horses and chariots, and even though they're mighty and fast, because they stay together, they can't be picked off.

And gradually, the chariots get defeated one by one. That's the picture Paul gives us in Philippians of what it means to be part of the church today. There's the theme of unity, and the theme of standing firm, not budging on the gospel that we believe in, that we've taken our stand on.

[7 : 35] So the theme of unity, of locking together, is the theme that governs chapter 2 of Philippians. And the right at the heart of that unity is the new mindset that we each have to adopt.

It came in verse 5, chapter 2, verse 5. Paul says this, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. And then he spelt out for us this breathtaking mindset of Jesus, verses 6 to 11.

We looked at it two weeks ago, and we called it, I called it the J-curve. It wasn't my idea. It's from a book, the J-curve. And it's confused lots of people. Turns out, not just Robbie.

I said last week it was Robbie who couldn't draw a J. Then everyone said to me, we all agree with Robbie. So instead, we're going to think about the Nike swoosh, okay, or a tick. That's the shape of Christ's life.

He adopted the mindset that he was willing, even though he was God in very nature, he wouldn't grasp onto that. But instead, he made himself nothing, and started this humiliating descent that he became a man.

[8 : 40] It's extraordinary. God became a man. And then, not just a man, he emptied himself even of that status, and humbled himself to serve others to death on a cross.

And therefore, chapter 2, verse 8, to verse 9, God has exalted him to the highest place, and he's given him the name Lord, that at his name, one day, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess he is the Lord.

He's got the name above every name. Have this mind among yourselves, that's what chapter 2, verse 5 is saying, the mindset that Christ Jesus had, that we would be willing to see humble service and sacrifice as the pattern of our lives now, knowing that vindication and being lifted up will come on the day of Christ when he comes in glory.

So the question then is, as we want to lock shields and live like that, what is that really going to look like for me, for you? And I think one of the dangers when we just look at Christ, that we do need to always look at him, is he is so far beyond us, it's hard to ground it in our own lives.

What does that life look like for an ordinary person like you and me? How do we imitate the mind of Christ? How did the church in Philippi do it? How do we do it in 21st century Glasgow?

[10 : 04] Conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, having this mind among ourselves. So what Paul does now in tonight's passage is he gives us two ordinary men who model for us that mindset, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

I've picked out three themes from what Paul tells us about them, these men, and about himself. And they're themes that actually you can kind of see in each one of them, in Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul.

But we're just going to focus on one of them for each man. So you'll see them overlapping as we go. And the first one is this. The mind of Christ is shown to us in Timothy's priority.

So look at what Paul says about Timothy in verse 19. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

Then verse 20. I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare. So why is he like that? Verse 21.

[11 : 12] For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. That's a pretty negative statement about the whole rest of humanity, isn't it?

Ultimately, most concerned with ourselves, Timothy's heart has been transformed. he looks out for the interests of Jesus more than his own interests.

And what are those interests? First and foremost, verse 22, he says, Timothy has proved himself because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

So the gospel is the heart of the Christian faith. It's the saving news of who Jesus is, that he's God's promised rescuing king, and what he has done, that he died for sins and rose to rule, so that by repentance and faith in his name, we get saved.

That's the gospel. And it's the spread of the gospel that is Christ's chief interest in the world today, between his resurrection and his return. That's what Christ is most interested in, that the gospel will be spread as more people accept it and are saved.

[12 : 23] It's the chief reason Jesus has not come back yet, 2,000 years on. This is why Philippians is such a wake-up call to the church today, because of the priority that's modeled in Timothy.

If you look at chapter 1, verse 5, Paul rejoicing in prison, he says, I always pray with joy about you, the church in Philippi, because of your partnership in the gospel.

Then look at verse 12, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me, imprisonment, has actually served to advance the gospel. That's his priority. And how does the gospel advance?

Well, verse 18, he says, the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice.

That's how the gospel advances. The message gets proclaimed, the message about Christ, who he is, what he's done. And as it's proclaimed, people put their trust in Jesus, and the gospel advances.

[13 : 31] And what makes Timothy a great model for us is just that he knew that. That was his priority. In fact, Timothy was a remarkable man when you read the New Testament. He's not one of the twelve apostles, but we first meet him in Acts chapter 16.

Paul and Silas are visiting a church they'd established, and they meet Timothy, and I think, this guy has got potential. He's got a Jewish mum and a Greek dad, and Paul thinks he's going to be useful to us.

So they take him with them on their missionary journey, and that missionary journey involves them hitting Europe for the first time, and very shortly after they land on the shores of Europe, they go to Philippi, where this church was established.

So Timothy was with Paul and Silas and Luke when they went to Philippi. And we can tell Timothy had remarkable gifts, because he became such a valued and trusted companion for Paul.

He was the joint author of quite a number of Paul's letters in the New Testament. They start not just from Paul, but from Timothy as well. Two of the books in our New Testament are written to Timothy, from Paul.

[14 : 37] He's pretty important. When the church in Corinth is having terrible difficulties, who does Paul send to sort it out? He sends Timothy. When Paul establishes the hugely significant church in Ephesus, it's Timothy he sends to be the pastor of that church.

So what did it look like for that man, Timothy, to make the gospel a priority in his life? We know that it at least involved being willing to move to a new place every few years, very disruptive during his life, because he knew that's what was best for planting and strengthening the church at that time.

I wonder, could we be people who, if we started to feel that that's what would advance the gospel, maybe that we'd feel that there's an area, an area in our city or an area in another part of the world that really needs the gospel and what it really needs is people to move there and live there.

Would we be willing to uproot and not just prioritize our own career or perhaps friendships, but do things for the sake of the gospel in where we live?

And for Timothy, prioritizing the gospel involved a change of career. It wouldn't for all of us, but he was a bright guy. Maybe we can imagine his options staying in Lystra where Paul found him.

[15 : 57] Maybe he could have had a respectable, successful career in all kinds of ways. But Paul identifies Timothy has got gifts for pastoral ministry and Timothy is willing to do that, to leave his nets as it were and become a church planting missionary.

Why would he do that? Not because it was more exciting, though it probably was exciting. He did it because the interests of Christ mattered more to him than his own interests. It's inspiring.

It's inspiring to hear about that model. Maybe let me ask you, what would it look like for you to have the mind of Christ so that the advance of the gospel is the governing priority for your life?

So that's the great priority. Does that mean it's all just about getting the job done, being ruthless, being cold-hearted? Well, now, look at our second point.

The mind of Christ is shown to us in Paul's affections. It runs right through this section, right through the letter, actually, but we see it here. Paul's sending Timothy to them in verse 19.

[17 : 13] He says, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. He longs for them. He wants to be cheered by hearing how they're doing. In verse 22, he describes his relationship with Timothy because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

They're not just members of a staff team. They're like father and son together. And then he goes on from Timothy to Epaphroditus. And look at how he describes him in verse 25.

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier who is also your messenger.

So Epaphroditus was sent by the church in Philippi to Paul to bring this gift to them. We read about that in chapter 4. Paul has been helped by Epaphroditus. He loves Epaphroditus.

But he's sending him back and he says, he's my brother. And then he describes how Epaphroditus was very ill, but he's got better. Look at the end of verse 27 how he describes Epaphroditus getting better.

[18 : 18] He says, he almost died. And then he says, end of verse 27, but God had mercy on him and not on him only, but also on me to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. He'd have been devastated if Epaphroditus had died.

The passage is dripping with emotion, with affection towards one another. Verse 28, therefore I'm all the more eager to send him so that when you see him you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

So then welcome him in the Lord with great joy. There's a lot of emotion going on, isn't there? If you know anything about the Apostle Paul, this doesn't tend to be a side of him we talk about, does it?

He gets a bit of a bad press, Paul. Clearly he's a man who overflows with emotion and love for other people. And folks, that's what the Gospel does. It brings us into a new family.

It's a wonderful thing. I think of a friend who was an assistant minister in a church and then he went to be the senior pastor of a church in Geneva in Switzerland and they were moving hundreds of miles from family and friends and they were going to a place where the church, the Gospel work there was going to be difficult and I got sent his prayer update and he said this, he said, the only really difficult thing for us so far has been leaving our old church behind.

[19 : 39] It feels like a bereavement. There was just something really good about hearing that. I mean, it's sad of course that they were missing their church family that they'd left behind so much but that's a good model, isn't it, of what it's like to feel sent for the sake of the Gospel but pained by the sense of loss of family as we move on from a church and that's kind of what we're called to be for one another.

It's what we are for one another. We are family and it's a challenge and maybe in a gathered church like ours where some of you are only here in term time and you go back to other places in the holidays.

Others of you travel 20 minutes, 25 minutes to get to church by car and it's a challenge to be family to one another but maybe a calling on us to spend enough time together that bonds of affection grow as we serve together.

That's the model. Our model of church is not night school. We're not trying to be a church where our weekly meeting is good for head knowledge and you can come along and people come for the preaching or the teaching and then everyone goes their separate ways.

We're not a night school and our model of church is not concert venue. You know, we're not aiming to be a Sunday gathering where each of us comes for our own immersive worship experience.

[21 : 02] We get our fill of God and then we, after that emotional high, we head out to be lone rangers and get on with our lives during the week. No, rather the model of church is family.

And that can happen on Sundays as we continue as well as the formal service. You know, we continue to meet, we have fellowship, we have coffee but actually, it's much easier to do that in small group fellowship, in roots, in growth groups.

When we moved up here four years ago from our church in Preston, it was our growth group down in Preston that actually were most clearly and obviously in touch with us, praying for us because of course they knew us better.

And it's wonderful, isn't it? Speaking for me personally, apart from being forgiven and having the hope of heaven and knowing God, which are quite big things, I guess that this is one of the best things about being a Christian, isn't it?

That through knowing Jesus, I can certainly say for me that God has given me friends that I never deserved. And when we meet up together, we can laugh and we can laugh and we can pray together and we can spur each other on and we share that depth of concern for each other and joy in knowing each other.

[22 : 19] It's wonderful. That was the mind of Christ. He calls His disciples, His friends. He redefined family. His family are outside in Mark 4, Mark 3.

His family are outside and He is in with people listening to His words and they come in and they say, your mother and your brothers are looking for you and He looks around at those listening to Him and He says, here is my mother and my sister and my brothers, whoever does God's will.

And Paul and Epaphroditus and Timothy, they're modeling that affection for us. So having that new priority, the gospel, and that brotherly and sisterly affection together mean that we can gladly give ourselves for the cause of the gospel.

And that's our third point. The mind of Christ is shown to us in Epaphroditus' sacrifice. Paul is really shrewd here, right? Because he picks Timothy first as a model and Timothy was one of his team when he went to Philippi.

They know Timothy but he was on Paul's team. And now he picks Epaphroditus because he's on their team. They know him. He was the man who delivered the gift. Now he's sending him back.

[23 : 32] And verse 26 is class, isn't it? Verse 26, have a look. He says of Epaphroditus, he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

Indeed, he was ill and almost died. But God had mercy on him and not only on him only but also on me to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore, I'm all the more eager to send him so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

Well, I don't know what you think of that but when I'm ill, if there's one thing I don't really get distressed about, it's other people knowing that I'm ill. I see that as a positive. Epaphroditus got so ill he almost died but the point where he actually got really distressed was when he realized his home church knew about it.

So why did he get so unwell? Well, Paul tells us in verse 30, we don't know the details but he says verse 30, he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

So what do we make of somebody sacrificing like that to serve Jesus? Risking his life to do a job for a church just to deliver aid to help a gospel worker in prison.

[24 : 57] Well, verse 29, Paul tells us what to make of that. Verse 29, so then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy but don't take too many risks for Jesus like he did.

No, he doesn't say that. Verse 29, welcome him in the Lord with great joy but don't take Christianity too far like he did. No, he says, welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor people like him because he almost died for the work of Christ.

Honor people like him. So lots of us can't be a Timothy. Timothy was clearly a pretty gifted guy but we can all be in Epaphroditus.

Someone described him as a gospel gopher. He's just the guy who went to and fro between his church and a gospel worker. He did what he could. But the impact of an ordinary person like you and me, Epaphroditus, doing what we can to promote the gospel can be huge.

There are ways that we can promote the gospel simply by ourselves caring for it and caring for God's people and being willing to be sacrificial. To help us ground that, I've just got a quote here from a book.

[26 : 18] It's quite a long quote. I wouldn't normally read something this long but it's just a story that like Epaphroditus, it just tells us about somebody who wasn't a Paul, who wasn't a Timothy, but who in their own way showed gospel priority, gospel affection and gospel sacrifice.

It's from a book by an Australian writer called John Dixon. If you've not come across him, he's just a Christian writer in Australia and he writes this about how he became a Christian as a teenager.

I'm just going to read it for us. One of the relics of Australia's Christian heritage is the once a week scripture lesson offered in many high schools around the country. Usually the person running the lesson was an elderly volunteer from the local church.

I took my chances with these harmless old ladies because the alternative involved actually doing your homework under the supervision of a real teacher. One of these scripture teachers had the courage one day to invite the entire class to her home for discussions about God.

The invitation would have gone unnoticed except that she added if anyone gets hungry I'll make hamburgers, milkshakes and scones. One Friday afternoon, several weeks later, I was sitting on a comfy lounge in this woman's home with half a dozen classmates feasting on hamburgers and bracing myself for the God bit.

[27 : 36] I'd never been to church or even had a religious conversation of any length so this was an entirely new experience. I remember thinking at the time there was nowhere to run. I'd eaten so much of her food I couldn't have got off the couch if I'd tried.

As I looked around the room at my friends, all skeptics like me, I was amazed that this woman would open her home and kitchen to us. Some of the lads there were among the worst in our school.

One was a drug user and seller, one was the class clown and bully and one was a petty thief. We went back the next Friday with more of our friends and the next and the next.

In fact, we turned up on this woman's doorstep most Friday afternoons for months. I could not figure her out. She was wealthy and intelligent. She had an exciting social life married to a leading businessman.

What was she thinking inviting us for a meal and discussion? At no point was she pushy or preachy. Her style was relaxed and generous. When her VCR, folks, a VCR is something that we used to use to watch movies.

[28 : 41] It was like with tape. It's quite old school. Right, okay. When her VCR went missing one day, she made almost nothing of it, even though she suspected correctly it was one of our group.

For me, her open, flexible, and generous attitude towards us sinners sinners was the doorway into a life of faith. It was no mere missionary ploy on her part. She truly cared for us and treated us like friends, even, perhaps more accurately, like sons.

As a result, over the course of the next year, she introduced several of us from the class to the ultimate friend of sinners, Jesus. Three of those students are today in full-time Christian ministry.

It's just an example. What would it look like in your life to have the mind of Christ? The priority, the affection, the sacrifice.

That's Paul's model of church, that if we all have that mindset, we lock shields, we together strive for the gospel. Why would we do it?

[29 : 49] Because it was the mind of Christ. It was Timothy's priority because it was Christ's priority that he was willing to be abandoned by his friends, to have his soul overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, to be strung up on a cross so that he could establish the gospel as good news and cry, it is finished.

If for one moment he had valued his interest above ours, the whole of our salvation would have been ruined. Paul had the affections of Christ, that great affection for his gospel partners, his fellow Christians.

Maybe he just had his eyes on Christ's affection for you and me, that Jesus would call us his brothers. There's that great moment in Mark's gospel where Jesus travels on a boat across the Sea of Galilee.

he finds a man possessed by a legion of demons who he must have known would be there. He delivers the demons from the man. He gets back in the boat and goes back across the lake.

He let the children come to him. Our names are written on his hand. And when Paul himself, before he's converted, he's persecuting the church and Jesus appears to him, he says, why are you persecuting me?

[31 : 14] And we thought about the sacrifice that Epaphroditus is willing to make for the gospel. Well, maybe he had his eyes on Christ's sacrifice for the gospel. But Jesus walked his talk when he said, greater love has no one than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for the gospel that saves us, that draws us into this family and gives us this life-changing purpose, a new endeavor.

We pray that whatever happens, you would give us the mind shift, that we would have the same mindset as Christ Jesus and strive together for the advance of the gospel.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.