

The Church Belongs to Jesus, not us

Do we have the Mind of Christ?

By Bob Vincent

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I'm a dumb dog who can't bark but if you fill me with the Spirit of God, if you anoint my lips, if you excite and animate my heart with love of Scripture, love for Christ, and love for your people, Lord, then we will have met with God today. We pray for such a divine meeting by the power of the Holy Spirit who would animate all of us and draw us all to lay our burdens down. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to talk to you today from this text. What is the standard of the Christian life? Can a Christian smoke? Let's get some feedback. I always like preaching in an African-American church because I know whether I'm getting my point across. "Amen, brother! Preach it!" Can a Christian smoke and the answer is, well, a Christian can smoke; the Bible really doesn't say anything directly about smoking. Now, I quit smoking years ago because I like to have more breath than I used to have. Can a Christian consume alcohol? In moderation, yeah. What is the standard of the Christian life? Quite beyond those issues is the standard of the Christian life observing the Sabbath or is it not committing adultery or not stealing? You say, "Well, of course we shouldn't commit adultery and we shouldn't steal and we shouldn't murder. We shouldn't violate the 10 Commandments. Those are certainly standards for the Christian." And I certainly agree with that, but is there a standard that is over all of those standards? Is there a mark that is a mark of a real Christian that's over against a Pharisee? Well, we can talk about what Jesus said, that there are two great commandments and he said that on these two great commandments, love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself, hinge all of the law and commandments so we can reduce the 10 Commandments to two. Now, I'm for the 10 Commandments and I think we should teach them to our children and they are a standard of the Christian life, I'll even say they are the standard of the Christian life as we sum them up under the two great commandments, but I can tell you this, there are many people who in the words of Paul if you look over here across the page on page 91, who when he spoke of the righteousness of the law, he was blameless, in Philippians 3 and he says in verse 6, "as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." You didn't catch Paul eating out at Lubby's on the Sabbath day. "Oh no, he's really gone to meddling now!"

Paul was a strict observer of the Sabbath and he says that concerning the righteousness that is of the law, he was blameless. Do you understand it's possible in an external way to

keep all of the 10 Commandments and still go to hell? Because it's possible to keep all of the 10 Commandments externally and not truly know the Lord. It's possible to observe all of the 10 Commandments and yet not have the Holy Spirit because the evidence of knowing the Lord, the evidence of having the Holy Spirit is what? It's having the mind of Christ. In other words, Christ, himself, is the standard of the Christian. It's above the 10 Commandments. It's above the two great commandments. Christ, himself, is the great portrait of the law of God exhibited in the flesh.

There is no appeal beyond the standard of Christ himself, and the standard of Christ is not simply what Jesus did but it's a mindset. So let's look at this mindset for a moment. If we look at Philippians 2, again on page 280, and we're going to look at this fairly closely, he says, verse 5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Have this mind. It's a mindset. It is a way of life that is rooted in the core values and desires of the heart.

Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus and what is that? Here it is, here is the mind of Christ. Who was Jesus? What was he like? Here is the greatest portrait of Christ if we look internally. Here it is, verse 6, "who, though he was," I would scratch through that and say, "though he is in the form of God," because he never ceased being in the form of God, "who, though he is in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." We're going to meditate on that for a moment. What does it mean to be in the form of God? That particular Greek word from which we get the word "morphology" in Greek describes something that is the very same thing as another thing. Everything that God is, Jesus is. Was God eternal? Jesus could say in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am." He always has been. He always will be. He is the eternal one. He was everywhere present as God. He was all-powerful as the Father is. He is in the form of God and yet he did something, it says here he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. The picture here is not that he was not equal with God, the picture is that he already was equal with God because he always has been, always is God but that he gave up the recognition of that by letting go of the need to be recognized.

I like to be recognized, don't you? I remember when the Boy Scouts awarded me the Silver Beaver, and if you are not familiar with the Boy Scouts you think, "That is really dumb," but I can tell you that I have seen people get so angry about not getting the Silver Beaver that they resigned from the Boy Scouts even to the detriment of their own grandchildren. Wow. That's a very big deal.

Well, I like getting awards. I liked getting that Silver Beaver. I liked becoming elected to be the President of a Boy Scout Council. That was pretty nifty. I headed up a Council of five parishes which is what Louisiana people call a state. So I like that. I like recognition. I liked how my little Boy Scout uniform, which actually was a big Boy Scout uniform, having all of those things on the uniform to let people know that I was somebody. I like to be recognized but I want you to know the mind of Christ is that though he's Almighty God, he let go of being recognized as equal with God.

Think about Adam for a moment in the garden of Eden. What was Satan's pitch as he was selling Adam and Eve on sin? "You will be as gods." And what did Adam and Eve do? They reached up and grasped fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that was the great sin. What did Jesus do? He already was God. He already was equal with God and what he did was to let go of that recognition and come down to earth.

It says here in verse 7 he "emptied himself." What does that mean? Does that mean that he ceased being God? No, it's a figurative way we should translate it, that's probably best translated in the King James version, "he made himself of no reputation," or to put it in good modern language, "he made himself of no account." What does that mean? It means when the toilets needed to be cleaned at Grace Chapel, he would have been the first to clean them and he didn't need to be recognized. It means that when the garbage needed to be taken out and the dishes washed at my house and your house, he would have been the first to do it and he didn't need an award. It means that if he saw trash on the grounds, he would pick it up and didn't need to be recognized about it. In other words, there was no task too lowly for Jesus to take on himself and do, and that without recognition.

So he emptied himself, how? "By taking the form of a servant." Think of it for a moment, Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory, the King of kings and Lord of lords, he who has been worshiped by angels ever since angels were created, left the glory of heaven to come to earth for one reason only: he loved you and he loved me. He put himself last and put you first. He put your welfare and your needs ahead of his own.

He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. Again, he didn't cease being God, he added to his divinity or his deity something he had never known before. He took on himself human nature and that of the lowliest of men, "being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." That's an amazing statement in verse 8. Verse 8 tells us that the Lord of glory, the King of angels, left the glory of heaven and came to this earth and was born as all other people are born, having been conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary, but he went through the birth process as every other baby goes through it. And he wasn't born in a palace, though he was the King of kings. He was born in a stable and laid in the feeding trough of animals.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. What does that mean? If you've ever seen that movie, "The Passion of the Christ," you have an inkling of what the suffering of Christ was about externally; not internally, externally, because the true terrors of the cross were not those things inflicted on Jesus externally, it was the terror of utter and total abandonment of God the Father. For all eternity Jesus had known unbroken fellowship with God the Father. World without end. Never. Have you ever felt abandoned? I've felt abandoned in my life. I want you to know that no matter how great the abandonment you felt in your life, it's nothing to compare with the abandonment that Jesus felt as he is moving into the garden of Gethsemane as the horrors of damnation are coming on him overwhelmingly and as he wrestles with death in the garden. He didn't want to go to the cross because he knew what awaited him and it wasn't merely the

crucifixion of his flesh, it was the agony of his soul in the darkness of utter and total abandonment.

He was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross and he dies. He really did die. His heart stopped beating, his lungs quit functioning and his brain went dead, just as dead as if you were to unplug a desktop computer, the screen and the computer itself stopped functioning. Jesus' brain went dead. He became cold and clammy and he was taken down from the cross and wrapped in linen and taken and placed in a fresh tomb, the one of Joseph of Arimathea and he was guarded. Three days later, early on Easter Sunday morning, sometime in the darkness, he rose from the dead, and from that point on, Jesus is profoundly different because from that point on Jesus entered into his glory.

So we read further, verse 9, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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." Do you want to honor God the Father? You must honor his Son. People who refuse to honor the name of Jesus are showing dishonor to God the Father and I want you to understand that something radically happens when Jesus rises from the dead, he is manifested to be the Son of God with power.

Then he says something in light of that, verse 12, all of this fine theology of Paul comes down to a very pressing practical application in verse 12, "Therefore," and when you find a "therefore" in the Bible, you need to ask yourself what it's there for, okay? "Therefore," what's the therefore there for? Well, the "therefore" takes us back to everything we've covered in many ways throughout the first part of this book, including chapter 1 where Paul speaks about, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain," and it's all that's led up to this which is Jesus is fully, truly, actually God, very God of very God, but he's also truly, actually very man of very man. He's a true human being, he is truly God in one person forever.

So what is it with all of this high theology? Here it is, verse 12, "Therefore, my beloved," and you can hear truth when you know somebody loves you. I'm going to tell you, I've come to love you. This is my eighth Sunday here and I've come to love you and I've come to like being here. I enjoy the eight hour round trips since my wife drives and I sometimes snooze, but I enjoy the trip, and I enjoy getting here, and I enjoy coming into your homes, and I enjoy worshiping with you. This is a lovely church with a beautiful worship service and I've found you to be earnest and true Christians but I want you to look at this.

He says in verse 12, "Therefore, my beloved," so I'm saying to you, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." What does he mean? Observe the Sabbath more carefully? Refrain from adultery more observantly? Quit murdering people? Is that what he's talking about? Quit cheating on your income tax? What's he saying about working out your salvation? What he's saying is takes you back to the first part of chapter 2 where he says in verse 3, "Do nothing from selfish

ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." That's not the way we're raised to think, is it? "I'm better than you are," that's how we're raised to think, isn't it? Isn't it instilled in us that we should think of Number One first and foremost rather than others first and foremost? But what he's saying here is always, in an unflinching way, always put other people ahead of yourself. Always. Not sometimes, always.

He says, "count others more significant than yourselves," and to bear witness to the truth of that in the life of Christ, where do you find anybody who exhibits that in his life more than the Lord Jesus Christ? He left heaven to come down to this wretched earth and to come down in dire poverty with no rights. He gave up all of his rights. He gave up all his prerogatives. He gave up all of his recognition to come to this earth and to be the lowly Jesus. As the hymn says, "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus." That's what he did.

So he's telling us to have that mind in ourselves in verse 5. That's what it is to work out our salvation. The working out of our salvation is not to be a better Pharisee like Paul was before the road to Damascus, the working out of our salvation is to become like the Lord Jesus. Wow, and I start looking at that and I start looking at myself and I have to say, "Lord, I'm not much of a Christian." And I wonder if anybody thinking about this can ever look in the mirror and say, "Well, I'm a great Christian." I have to say of myself I'm not the man I used to be and I'm not the man I'm going to be, but I still come very far short of what I ought to be. I do, and anyone who doesn't recognize that is simply a little bit more nuts than other people.

The story is told of a pastor who was getting ready to come into the pulpit, and I did this one time here when I went in to pray with the choir and I had the mic, the wireless mic already turned on and the music was coming out because it was turned on. This pastor looks himself in the mirror and says, "Go get 'em, tiger!" You know, the greatest thing I can do before I preach is to confess to God, "I am nothing. I don't know how to preach. I am a failure as a Christian. I am a failure as a leader in the church and I'm a failure as a preacher and a pastor." Why? Because I don't really have the mind of Christ the way that I will one day. Even though I've come a long way, I still have a long way to go.

My response to this is to work out my salvation with fear and trembling. That's part of salvation. Now, we are declared righteous by God solely by means of grace, solely through faith, solely based on the finished work of Christ, but real faith is always accompanied by a changed life, and the standard of that changed life, we are told here, is Christ himself and that means I need help. Now here's my great encouragement as I attempt to work out my salvation with fear and trembling, verse 13, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." What does that mean? It means I work but it also means that as I'm working, God's working, or we might say the reason I work is because God is working a work of grace in me and without that work of grace, I'm going to be dead as a door nail.

So where am I going to take this for Grace Chapel? Whose church is Grace Chapel? It's the Lord Jesus Christ's church. Whose home is your home? It's the Lord Jesus Christ's

home. Whose wife is your wife or husband is your husband? Whose children are your children? Whose money is your money? It all belongs to the Lord and he is free to take it from us at any point in time. I will never forget when my wife was run over by a log truck on October 10, 1988. Went into a coma and came out of that coma three days later having experienced heaven. She was a changed woman, but ever since then I've had to deal when she's late or on a trip with the idea that, "What if she doesn't come back?" And what I have to do is lay it down, "Lord, my partner is yours. You gave her to me and that's what I have to do back to you."

So what do you need to lay on the altar today? What is it that you need to lay on the altar today? Is it whether we have certain objects in the sanctuary or don't have them? Is it the number of hymns we sing or the number of stanzas we sing or the types of songs we sing? Or the kind of music accompaniment we have? Or whether we have no musical accompaniment at all as the original Presbyterians did, having no musical instruments whatsoever? Is it that we have daily communion as our Catholic friends do? Weekly communion as many churches do? Monthly communion as some modern churches do? Quarterly communion which we did in the Presbyterian church when I was a boy? Or once a year communion as our Presbyterian forebears did under the persecution and the killing times in the 17th century? What do you need to lay on the altar? What do you need to lay on the altar? Is there any grudge being held by anybody here today over this issue or that issue? You need to lay it on the altar. The call here is a call to die. When Christ calls a man, as Bonhoeffer said, he calls him to die. What do you need to die to?

And finally these sober words: if you can't die to yourself, the church will die. If you can't die to yourself, the church will die. And I'll say in your marriage, if you can't die to yourself, it's not unlikely that your marriage will die. If you can't die to your desires for your children to be a certain way and let go of the control over them at a certain point, now when they're young you need to control them, you really do but at a certain stage you've got to let go of them. If you can't do that, they may die. I don't mean physically in that case but in terms of an estrangement that will last the rest of your life. God is calling you to die that the things that are valuable to you don't have to die, and my passion and why I'm saving my sermon on Sarah, the mother, the faith to be a mother, until October 14 is because I have great concern for the welfare and future of this church. I want it to live. I want it to thrive. I want it to prosper and grow and grow because it's growing in the Holy Spirit and the individual members are growing in the Holy Spirit.

That's what I want and how will that happen? It will happen as you crucify yourselves and I crucify myself. Today holy communion is going to be focused on, "I'm willing to die. I'm willing to die. I'm willing to die to self. I'm willing to plead with God and say, 'Lord, I don't know how to do this, it's beyond my ability, but it's not beyond yours,'" because he is the one at work to cause you to will and to work according to his good pleasure. So the invitation to communion today is an invitation to lay it all down one more time and to claim the finished work of Christ.

May we pray?

Lord, we pray that you would bless your word, that as we have heard it with our ears, we may eat it with our mouths. Lord, we pray that you would bless both the bread and the wine that as we partake of them, we may truly partake of the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit who lifts us up where Jesus is and seats us in heavenly places. Lord, we ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.