

“Are you in the right mind?” Philippians 2:5-11

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, 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.

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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Are you in the right mind? This is not a silly question. This is actually a very profound question that we as Christians need to be able to answer. Are you in the right mind? More, we need to be able to explain what this right mind of ours is.

The famous section from Paul’s letter to our brothers and sisters in Philippi provides the answer to this question. And this is what we are going to do today – we will reflect on what the wrong mind is, we can call it – a religious mind, and what the right mind is – a truly Christian mind.

This is what Paul wrote: **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself...**

... by taking the form of a servant, 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.”

These inspired words will help us to get to the very heart of our question about the right mind for us Christians. But first, let’s reflect how religious people usually think about God. Or we could say how people naturally think about God.

Naturally we begin with something that we already know and understand and then we try to use it, to apply it so that we can understand what we do not yet know or understand. How would it work in the case with God?

The natural way of thinking could begin with someone who has great power and authority. Let’s say – some mighty ruler, or a kingly-figure. They are much more powerful than we are, and what they care about is – maintaining their power and influence and receiving praise and glory and obedience that is due to them.

So far, so good. If we then continue this line of thought, then God would be much like such a mighty and powerful king, just on a universal scale. Benevolent and caring for His subjects, expecting to receive what is due to Him, our praise and

thanks and our lives of obedience. Makes sense, doesn't it? If this is the picture of God, then it gives us also a certain understanding of our Christian life.

That then explains our worship. Then we worship God, for He deserves to be worshipped, and we try to obey His commands and instructions, for we really want to be on good terms with this Almighty Sovereign. And that's why religious people worship and try to be moral.

Then this understanding of God will shape their understanding of themselves. Then such religious people too may try to be rather benevolent, but also keen to receive what is due to them for the efforts they put in, to receive proper respect, to be granted success in life, and so on.

Lives of such religious people would then mirror how they understand what the mind of their God is. Makes sense. But ... All that I said so far is wrong. It may sound and be right in this world, and for religious people, but it is wrong when it comes to the Triune God, and to us as His disciples and imitators of Jesus.

What I just described is a picture that religious people make, as they create their gods in their own image and likeness. What I just described was a god who is mainly concerned about *getting*. About *getting* what is due to Him.

Also, the followers of such a god would be mainly concerned about getting what is rightfully theirs, what is due to them because of their obedience to their god and because of their benevolent actions. The focus is on getting. On *getting*!

I hope and pray that none of us has this mind. For that is a wrong mind! This is where we can see how different Christian faith and life is from any other religious endeavour. For our God is not made in our image and likeness.

He is so unlike what we would naturally expect. Paul helps us to see this. What was the mind of Christ? **“He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, 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.”**

There is one word that summarizes the difference between human made gods and the Triune God. The organizing principle for the former was about – getting. For the true God, for our God it is about – *giving*.

About giving of Himself to His creation, to His creatures. What the Eternal Son did is hard to comprehend. He was [and, of course, is] true God. Which means, He is eternal, all powerful, all knowing, and so on. And what did He do?

He emptied Himself to become something else. Something infinitely less than God. He became a creature, being born in the likeness of men. The following illustration may sound a bit awkward, but it can help us to see a different angle of what Jesus, the Eternal Word did for us. We are human beings, the crown of creation.

Intellectually infinitely more sophisticated than any other creature on planet Earth. Created to exercise loving and caring dominion over creation. Now, you may have your favourite pet, as I have Rocky, whom you love sincerely and for whom you care. But what love, how intense and overwhelming would it be, if you were ready to “not count equality with your human nature as a thing to be grasped, but would empty yourself, being born in the likeness of ... some other lower creature.”

Reflect on it for a while... as I said this analogy does not fully illustrate what the Second Person of the Trinity did, but, yes, He emptied Himself by leaving His divine glory and majesty and by being born in the likeness of men.

It is mind blowing, that there exists such love and commitment so boundless, that is ready to give everything for the other. Not that we can fully comprehend it, but this is what our God has done for us. What your God has done for you!

This is the intensity and determination of His love and affection to you. But that is not all yet. Jesus went much further. **“He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

He went from the highest highs to the lowest lows. From sharing the eternal divine glory with the Father, to hanging naked on the cross, with two criminals next to Him, left for degenerates of that day to mock Him and laugh at Him.

Do you ever wonder how much your God loves you? How fervent, how genuine His love towards you is? Here is your answer. Look at Jesus! The Son of God, the Eternal Word, who emptied Himself.

Who became like us, who sacrificed His life for us, for you, too, for each one of you, too, so that only His love would penetrate our hearts of stone and would bring us back to where we truly belong – in the loving embrace of our Father.

This is what your God is like. Giving God. Self-sacrificial in His love to you. It is this God, Jesus, who with His attitudes and actions reveals and teaches us – what kind of mind we need to have among ourselves as His disciples.

“Have this mind among yourselves [the right mind] which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Our God models who we are to be, how we are to live. The way we understand our God will determine how we understand everything else in our Christian life. How we understand our worship, and our new obedience.

With this God our worship is not about doing something for God, as if He needed anything from us. The very opposite is true. Our giving God, He invites us, His redeemed children, chosen heirs of His Kingdom, into His presence.

He Himself has provided for us safe access into His presence; this is where we are now. In His presence... He Himself gathers us, for He desires to be among us so that He can give and give and give... and that we would be able to receive and receive from His bountiful goodness all that we truly need.

He comes to us to assure us of His forgiveness and favour, He comes to us to speak to us His wisdom and grace, He comes to us and encourages us to bring all our concerns and worries to Him. “Come and I will give you rest!”

He comes to us to serve us the Divine Feast, the Lord’s Supper and to feed us with true life, with eternal life, with His holiness. He brings us here to fill us up with His Holy Spirit, with His Spirit of joy and peace.

This is what our worship life is about. About our giving and abundantly generous God pouring His divine blessing over us. And us – o, what a hard and daunting task is put on us – to gladly and freely receive His gifts! This is what true Christian worship life is about.

Our understanding of our God also shapes our new lives of Christian obedience. We are not trying to appease our God; we are not listening to Him because we want to get something from Him. Our new Christian lives of obedience are our response to what our God has done and does for us.

The Holy Spirit shapes and moulds our minds and our lives to be more Christ-like. Which means – being more giving in every way. Being more concerned about others, considering others as more significant than ourselves.

We obey our God not so that ... we would gain something for ourselves, but because ... He already has given us the greatest of gifts that there are. He has become our God, He has revealed to us His love, He has adopted us in His family, He has promised that everything that is His... He will share with us.

This hope, these unbreakable promises now fill us with joy and peace and firm assurance about our future. The abundance of His undeserved generosity and grace is what motivates us to live as His holy people.

So that people would see the glory of our Father in our lives, the love of Jesus in our actions, the self-sacrificial nature of our Triune God in how we relate to others, in how we take the form of servants and empty ourselves for others.

Now we are free to live that way, for we don’t need to earn God’s favour, Jesus calls us His own, we are free to be children of our prodigal God. These words of Jesus have come true: **“Whoever believes in me [whoever has the right Christian mind] as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”**” (John 7:37-38) He said it about you... about your heart.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the right mind for us to be in. I pray that the Spirit of our Father would keep changing and shaping, renewing and restoring us more and more in the likeness of Jesus.

Now He has been highly exalted [...] and eventually every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And, by God’s grace, when it happens, we will be there to reign with our Brother Jesus forever. Amen.