

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

THE  
BELIEVERS'  
SUPPORT  
TO THE  
APOSTLE

WITNESS LEE

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***Living Stream Ministry***

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## THE BELIEVERS' SUPPORT TO THE APOSTLE

The first four verses of [Philippians 2](#) are one long sentence. [Verses 1 and 2](#) say, “If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any tenderheartedness and compassions, make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing.” In [verses 1 and 2](#) the apostle appealed to the Philippians for their encouragement and consolation. He begged them to make his joy full, if they had any encouragement in Christ, any consolation of love, any fellowship of spirit, and any tenderheartedness and compassions toward him.

The predicate in [Philippians 2:1-4](#) is “make my joy full.” Since this book is concerned with the experience and enjoyment of Christ, which issue in joy, it is also a book filled with joy and rejoicing ([Phil. 1:4, 25, 18; 2:17-18, 28-29; 3:1; 4:1, 4](#)). Among the Philippians there was dissension in their thinking ([4:2](#)), dissension which troubled the apostle. Hence, he asked them to

think the same thing, even the same one thing, that they might make his joy full.

In [Philippians 2:1-4](#) we see the fellowship between the believers and the apostle. The traffic in [Philippians 1](#) is one-way traffic from the apostle to the believers. Now in [chapter two](#) we see the traffic from the believers to the apostle. Fellowship requires such two-way traffic. This two-way traffic is for the experience of Christ. Because Paul was rich in the experience of Christ, he could present an account of his experience to the believers in [chapter one](#). This was his fellowship to them. Now in [chapter two](#) he asks the believers in Philippi to return the fellowship to him.

Paul appealed to the Philippians that if there was any encouragement in Christ, any consolation of love, any fellowship of spirit, any tenderheartedness and compassions toward him, they would make his joy full. Paul could rejoice over the Philippians, but something about them kept him from rejoicing in a full way. Paul could say, “Philippians, I have joy concerning you, but my joy is not full. There is something among you which hinders me from rejoicing in a full way. I beg you to make my joy full.”

[Philippians 2:1-4](#) was obviously written by an experienced person, full of maturity. The tone of

Paul's words is tender and soft. Because of the way Paul wrote these verses, most readers of Philippians do not understand them adequately. This is especially true of [verse 1](#). What is Paul talking about in this verse? Why does he inquire if there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation of love, any fellowship of spirit, or any tenderheartedness and compassions? Paul was saying that if the Philippians had such things for him, they would make his joy full. If they had any encouragement, consolation, fellowship, tenderheartedness and compassions, they would be eager to cause the Apostle Paul to rejoice in full.

These words could not have been uttered by a young man. A young person would have spoken in a strong, direct way, saying, "Philippians, do you love me? If you love me, you must encourage me." The tone would have been harsh instead of soft. Paul's tone and expression testify of his maturity. He appealed to them and begged them to respond to his fellowship. He had given them such positive fellowship in the preceding chapter. Now he wanted them to return this fellowship. Such a return of fellowship would be the believers' support to the apostle. Their encouragement, consolation, and tenderheartedness would support Paul in his imprisonment.

Although Paul was a prisoner, his concern was not for his imprisonment. Instead, he was concerned about the attitude of the believers and for the kind of spirit they had toward him. Nothing hurt the apostle as much as a negative attitude of the believers toward him. In other words, Paul was not troubled by his imprisonment, but he was troubled by the situation among the believers in Philippi. He was very concerned about their spiritual condition. Therefore, Paul appealed to the Philippians to make him happy to the uttermost. Paul needed their encouragement, consolation, and fellowship to be a support to him. If the Philippians would render him such support, they would make his joy full.

## **THINKING THE ONE THING**

The way the Philippians could make Paul's joy full was to think the same thing, even the one thing (2:2). According to the context of the entire book, the one thing must refer to the subjective knowledge of Christ and experience of Christ (1:20-21; 2:5; 3:7-9; 4:13). Christ, and Christ alone, should be the centrality and universality of our entire being. Our thinking should be focused on the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and the experience of Christ. Anything

else causes us to think differently and thus creates dissensions among us.

What troubled Paul in his imprisonment was the dissension among the Philippians. The saints in Philippi were good, and the church in that city had been well established. However, there was dissension among them. Although they were one in spirit, they were not striving together with one soul. Although they all loved the Lord, they were not thinking the same thing. This caused Paul's heart to be heavy. Out of heaviness of heart, he appealed to the Philippians to make his joy full by being joined in soul and by thinking the same thing.

## HAVING THE SAME LOVE

Thinking the same thing is related to having the same love. Paul's word in [Philippians 2:2](#) about "having the same love" indicates that, because of their dissenting thinking, the Philippian believers had different levels of love. They did not have the same love toward all the saints for the keeping of oneness.

It is possible that we in the church life today may not have the same love for all the saints. Instead, our love may be on different levels. We may love a certain brother much more than we

love another brother. Because we may love a particular brother only to a small degree, we may not be inclined to render much service to him. But because we love another brother to a very high degree, we may serve him too much and even spoil him by our love. It is possible in the church life to have different levels of love for different saints. If this is our situation, our love is not the love with one soul. We have one kind of soul when we love one brother, but a different kind of soul when we love another brother. As a result, instead of practical oneness, there will be dissension.

In [Philippians 2:2](#) Paul also speaks of being joined in soul. This indicates that the dissension among the Philippians was due to their not being joined in soul, not thinking the one thing in their mind, the leading part of the soul. Their problem was not with their spirit, but with their soul, especially with their mind. They had Christ in their spirit through regeneration, but they did not have Christ fully in their soul through transformation. Only by having Christ saturate and occupy their entire soul could they be made one in soul.

The Philippians had been joined in spirit, but they had not been fully joined in soul. To have



different levels of love is a sign that we have not been joined in soul. If we have been joined in soul, we shall have the same love for all the saints.

## RIVALRY AND VAINGLORY

In [Philippians 2:3 and 4](#) Paul goes on to say, “Doing nothing by way of rivalry nor by way of vainglory, but in lowliness of mind counting one another more excellent than yourselves, not regarding each his own things, but each the things of others also.” Paul’s word about rivalry and vainglory may indicate that the dissenting Philippians were doing things out of rivalry or vainglory, both of which cause dissension among believers. Rivalry and vainglory may lie hidden among us. Even when we testify in the church meetings, there may be rivalry. Perhaps when you share, not many saints say amen. But when someone else shares, the saints are very responsive, and there are many amens. Disappointed by the situation, you may decide never to share again in the meetings. Thus, in giving testimonies there may be rivalry. Even when we share our experiences of Christ, a feeling of rivalry may be hidden within us.

Rivalry and vainglory are often found together. Where there is rivalry, there is usually

vainglory. Why are you unhappy when the saints do not say amen to your testimony? It is because of vainglory.

In [Philippians 4:2](#) Paul says, “I beseech Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche, to think the same thing in the Lord.” I believe that there was rivalry between these two sisters, perhaps competition over who would be the leading one. As a result, they were doing things in the way of rivalry and vainglory.

If there had not been rivalry and vainglory among the Philippian believers, Paul would not have mentioned these things in [Philippians 2:3](#). Here Paul seems to be saying, “I ask you not to do anything by way of rivalry or vainglory. This will help to make my joy full. Brothers, I am troubled by the fact that some among you are doing things in the way of rivalry. I am happy that you love the Lord and that you are standing there in Philippi for the Lord’s testimony. I rejoice, but my rejoicing is not yet full. It cannot be full as long as rivalry exists among you. Furthermore, some of you are seeking vainglory. If you have any consolation of love toward me, please make my joy full by not doing anything by way of rivalry or vainglory. Instead, in lowliness of mind, count others more excellent than yourselves.”

It is not easy to get rid of rivalry and vain-glory, for we have a natural tendency to compete with others. In certain countries children are encouraged strongly to compete. In society competitiveness is found everywhere. However, we should not compete in the church life. Instead of competing with one another, we should count others more excellent than ourselves.

## LOWLINESS OF MIND

In [Philippians 2:3](#) Paul speaks of lowliness of mind. Lowliness is versus both rivalry and vain-glory. The kind of lowliness Paul speaks of is not our natural lowliness; it is the lowliness of Christ, as illustrated in [verses 7 and 8](#).

Notice that Paul refers to “lowliness of mind.” Paul’s use of the word mind here is another indication that the problem of dissension among the Philippians was a matter of their untransformed mind. They needed to have the mind which was in Christ ([2:5](#)).

In [2:4](#) Paul says, “Not regarding each his own things, but each the things of others also.” The things here refer to virtues and qualities. We should not regard only our virtues and qualities, but also the virtues and qualities of others.

## THE NORMAL EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

Philippians is concerned with the experience of Christ. According to this book, the experience of Christ is a matter of mutuality between the apostle and the believers. As we read this Epistle, we see that Paul carried on fellowship with the saints in a proper way. In every aspect and from every angle, his fellowship with them was right. The Philippians, by contrast, were not proper in all respects in their fellowship with the apostle. Therefore, on the apostle's side, the experience of Christ was normal. But on the side of the Philippian saints, the experience of Christ was not altogether normal. To some extent at least, it was abnormal.

If we consider the book of Philippians as a whole, we shall realize that the experience of Christ involves mutuality. It is definitely not a one-sided matter. It is a fact that we cannot have a normal experience of Christ if we are individualistic. The experience of Christ is a Body matter. Whatever is in the Body and of the Body involves mutual fellowship. The experience of Christ thus requires mutuality. If the apostle did not have proper fellowship with the saints, his experience of Christ would not have been normal.

Likewise, if the believers were not in fellowship with the apostle, their experience of Christ would not be normal. This indicates that whether or not our experience of Christ is normal depends on our attitude toward the apostle. Concerning this, we shall be tested. If our attitude toward the apostle is not proper, our experience of Christ will be abnormal. In the same principle, if the apostle is out of line concerning his attitude toward the believers, his experience of Christ will be abnormal.

In the book of Philippians we have a picture of the proper fellowship between the believers and the apostle for the normal experience of Christ. Although the Philippian believers loved the Lord and were in the church, their experience of Christ was abnormal. One reason for this abnormality was that there was dissension among themselves. Another reason was that their attitude toward the apostle might not have been absolute. If their attitude toward Paul was absolute, they would receive his word to think the same thing, to have the same love, to be joined in soul, to think the one thing, not to do anything by way of rivalry or vainglory, to count others more excellent than themselves, and to regard the virtues and qualities of others. If the

believers took Paul's word and acted on it, they would become balanced and normal in experiencing Christ.

We have pointed out that in Philippians we see Paul's attitude and spirit toward the believers. Paul's appeal was that the believers would show a proper attitude and spirit toward him so that the fellowship between them would be normal. The proper fellowship between the believers and the apostle is a safeguard to the normal experience of Christ. If our attitude toward the apostle is proper and our fellowship with him is right, we shall know that we are experiencing Christ in a normal way.

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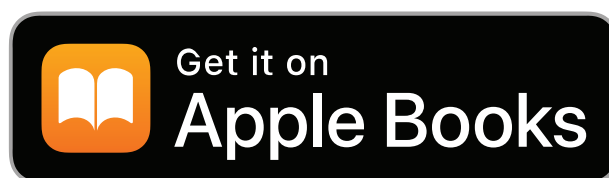
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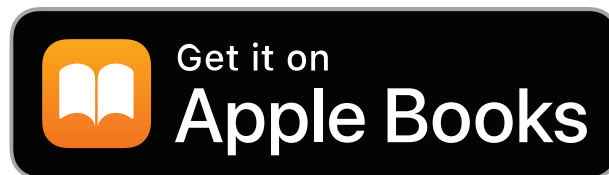
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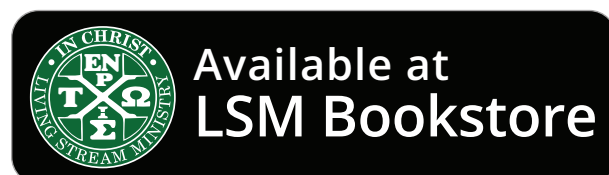


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